

Media release

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EQUITY GAP BETWEEN LOW AND HIGH DECILE SCHOOLS PERSISTS; GOVERNMENT RESPONSE FAILS TO ADDRESS

Low decile New Zealand secondary schools continue to lag significantly behind high decile counterparts in catering for students with learning differences, and more than half of decile 1 schools have no students receiving assistance at NCEA exam time, according to latest NZQA figures.

The figures, released to Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand, show that only 2.5% of students at decile 1 schools received special assessment conditions (SACs) in 2016, compared with 8.4% of decile 10 students. SACs allow for reader or writer assistance, computer use, or extra time, and are critical to NCEA success for students with learning differences such as dyslexia.

Of New Zealand's 52 decile 1 schools, 27 failed to make a single application for special assessment conditions (SACs) for their students at exam time, and a further 10 had low levels of SAC applications at four or less per school.

Guy Pope-Mayell, DFNZ Chair of Trustees, says the NZQA figures are a clear proof point for why the Government's response to the Parliamentary Select Committee Inquiry into learning difference is totally inadequate.

"Let's be clear, overall the NZQA figures do show increasing numbers of SACs applications, and some increases in applications from low decile schools. But, until all schools are made accountable to cater for these students, and funding is tagged for this, then principals and school boards will continue to be able to direct money into other areas."

The Government response, released last week, accepted 45 of the 46 Select Committee recommendations but failed to take into account Minority Report recommendations that would have given teeth to the report. In addition, the report recommendation rejected by the Government (recommendation 33) was the only one that tasked the Ministry of Education to look into funding specific resource to help students with learning difference.

"The Government response is a Clayton's response to a Select Committee Inquiry that uncovered hard data and heart-rending accounts of injustice in the current system for students with learning differences from dyslexia to autism and dyspraxia.

"The social costs range from depression to suicide and prison incarceration for students who are not supported to succeed in the learning environment so disengage or act out in other ways. Yet the Government still seems to be failing to connect the dots and address the root of these issues in the education system.

"The Inquiry recommendations accepted by the Government are all common sense and well meaning, but at the end of the day they are just platitudes – marked in their failure to specify direct action and funding, and to make schools accountable for progress".

"In contrast, the one recommendation that was rejected dared to suggest the Ministry of Education investigate the feasibility of funding full-time, trained Special Education Needs Coordinators for schools with more than 200 students.

"That's hardly hard-hitting stuff, but even the whiff of a suggestion that specific funding be earmarked for this was clearly a step too far for a Government that seems loathe to take direct action and commit funding," Pope-Mayell says.

In addition, the Government did not pick up any of the 26 Minority Report recommendations, put forward by Select Committee Labour, Greens and NZ First party members, which set out action

to address issues of children's rights, funding and accountability to ensure that inclusive education is developed in all schools.

"Thousands of hours were invested into the Select Committee Inquiry, with numerous submissions outlining the emotional costs of alienation and failure within the school system and the consequences of not having equitable access to learning.

"Sadly, despite all this, the Government response just supports the inequity of the status quo – a self-managing schools' environment where schools with great leadership and a commitment to inclusion see great results, and the others are left to their own devices," Pope-Mayell says.

Overall the NZQA figures show a 18.4% increase in total SAC applications for 2016, to 8,395, from 7,088 in 2015. This compares with a 27.8% lift between 2014 and 2015. Total SAC student applications as a percentage of total students rose to 5.1%, compared with 4.2% in 2015.

In terms of equity gap, this remains largely unchanged, with the gap between decile 1 and 10 schools sitting at 5.9% (2.5% of decile 1 students receiving SACs compared with 8.4% of decile 10 students. In 2015 the gap was 6% (1.9% of decile 1 students receiving SACs, compared with 7.9% of decile 10 students). Growth in lower decile schools was driven by increased use of school based evidence to support applications. In higher decile schools, educational psychologist reports (paid for by parents or caregivers) remained the norm to support applications.

The equity gap is also reflected in data on zero to low SAC applications for 2016. Of New Zealand's 455 secondary schools, some 75 schools made zero applications, and 78 had low applications (four or less per school), totaling 153 or 34% for zero to low applications across all the deciles.

In deciles 1-3, 62% (92 schools) had zero to low applications, compared with 13% (16 schools) in deciles 8-10. Splitting this out, some 36% (54 schools) of deciles 1-3 schools had zero applications, compared with 6.5% (8 schools) of deciles 8-10 schools. And 26% (38 schools) of deciles 1-3 schools had four or less applications approved, compared with 6.5% (8 schools) of deciles 8-10 schools.

The figures also show that in previous years that have had a large percentage of students with SAC (15-20%) continued to obtain SAC at these rates for 2016. And some schools have made considerable progress in recent years. In particular, Otahuhu College in decile 1 which had zero applications a few years ago made 25 SAC applications last year, representing 3.9% of its student population. This rate is now higher than some high decile schools considered to be top performing in terms of SACs, for example decile 9 schools Epsom Girls Grammar (3.7%); Macleans College (3.6%); and Westlake Girls' High School (2.9%).

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

The Government response to the Select Committee Report is available at this link:

https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/papers-presented/current-papers/document/PAP_72401/government-response-to-the-report-of-the-education-and/

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 remain fully engaged with the education agenda. In parallel, it has activated a second agenda of youth justice.