

**Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand**

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## **Australian moves to label dyslexia a disability miss's point**

The Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand says moves across the Tasman to label dyslexia a disability within their education system signal progress but miss the opportunity that New Zealand is on the verge of grasping.

The New South Wales Legislative Council is debating an Educational Support for Dyslexic Children Bill in Australian Parliament this week, the result of campaigners attempts to achieve greater access to funds to support dyslexic students learning needs.

The purpose of this Bill is to amend Section 20 of the NSW Education Act 1990 to have dyslexia included within the disability criteria of the NSW Department of Education and Training in respect of the Special Education Initiative for students with disabilities.

Chair of the Trustees of the Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand Guy Pope-Mayell says that although such a move would be helpful it could shut the door on the vastly greater benefits of following the lead of the Ministry of Education here in New Zealand.

"We believe that framing dyslexia up as a disability in the context of education is the path of last resort," he said.

"Dyslexia is widely understood to be an alternative way of thinking, which comes with both strengths and difficulties."

Pope-Mayell stressed it only becomes a disability when appropriate support and learning opportunities within the classroom are not available or when the student begins to believe that they are 'less than' others.

"Self-esteem related issues are the most significant learning barriers for the dyslexic student."

“We faced the same challenges they are looking at in New South Wales – thousands of Children struggling with dyslexia without adequate resources and support to enable them to reach their full potential.”

“By taking the disability approach, dyslexic students risk becoming marginalised and teachers can avoid taking ownership of the problem. The approach that our Ministry is taking builds trust and responsibility into the learning partnership. Parents, students, and teachers must all work together with common understanding and goals in mind.”

He said that the feedback the foundation hears from many teachers, especially those in Primary schools, is that the professional growth and change that arises when teachers embrace the challenge of understanding dyslexia and providing appropriate learning opportunities for their dyslexic students benefit all students in their class.

The Ministry of Education has been working collaboratively with the Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand and others to better understand and address dyslexia in schools after announcing in April it recognised dyslexia and has committed to implementing a whole range of initiatives to increase the level and quality of assistance given to students with persistent reading and writing difficulties.

Pope-Mayell says there has been good progress made by the Ministry of Education to address dyslexia in schools, but stresses additional and specific funding is required.

“It would be a sad day if dyslexia had to be categorised as a disability in the New Zealand education system to ensure resources became available. The Government now needs to back the Ministry and provide the necessary funds.”

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**For more information visit:**

[www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz](http://www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz) and [www.minedu.govt.nz](http://www.minedu.govt.nz)

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