

Submission on Schools Plus

Parents Centres NZ Inc applauds the Government's proactive stand to lift involvement, participation and overarching success in education particularly in addressing the need to prevent youth leaving school with minimal or no qualifications while disenfranchised and disengaged with learning and education.

However, Parents Centres believe the programme has a micro focus and is a missed opportunity too late in the process of formative education.

Schools Plus is deficit based using intervention too late for those who are already, or who have fallen through the education net due to lack of support and adequate teaching styles and methods.

School plus therefore is not offering benefit to those children who daily manage the spectrum of Dyslexia under the special learning banner. It also does no justice to all those (Between 10 and 35%) children who are currently under performing in the education system due to their way of thinking i.e. Dyslexia. School Plus does not offer support or intervention initiatives for parents of children who have or who may present with Dyslexia related learning issues in the education system.

Schools Plus focuses on only 14,000 young people who leave school each year without a Level 1 qualification. Students affected by learning disabilities as a target group are clearly absent from the Schools Plus proposal yet this group is almost certainly the most over represented in early school leavers. This spills over into the youth justice system and then into our corrections institutions where the statistics are magnified.

It is estimated that 50 per cent of youth who find themselves in court are dyslexic or have an identifiable learning disability of some kind.

If their educational needs were correctly addressed at an earlier stage many wouldn't be in this situation. If you get the learning environment right for dyslexic students early on, it will work for and to the benefit of others.

Currently there is no support available at an early age for parents to either identify, help or support learning difficulties in children and when they do the process is woeful.

The process starts at primary school and requires learning difficulties to be identified early and addressed through appropriate classroom strategies and specific interventions that are implemented across the whole school. These strategies not only benefit the Dyslexic learner but all other pupils and transcend any type of disability or difficulty in learning. Acknowledging that children learn in different ways is one of the biggest factors impacting students' participation, engagement and achievement at school.

The Government has implemented the Literacy Professional Development Project. This programme focuses on improving teacher knowledge, targeting the bottom 20 per cent of students to improve learning and achievement in literacy. It's simply not enough. Just like Schools Plus, the Literacy Professional Development Project excludes dyslexia and misses the opportunity to address the wider issue. With subtle change such as dyslexia-specific professional development for all teachers and dyslexia modules in teacher training courses, we will see a much needed shift in understanding and attitude that will result in changes in the classroom and improvements in levels of student engagement. Add to this dyslexia assessment tools and targeted interventions, and we will start to see real progress that not only supports the Schools Plus agenda but other education objectives as well.

Again, focusing attention on dyslexia would create immediate impact and provide positive benefits. We applaud the Ministry of Education and Steve Maharay who made change when dyslexia was formally recognised. **But for the 10% to 35% of parents who struggle daily with children who learn differently and those children who experience the gift of Dyslexia we do now need action.**

We propose that Schools Plus funding should be used to address differences in learning and specifically dyslexia. Early identification of the issues and awareness for parents are key; early intervention is critical; trained teachers and processes aligned to learning differently through Dyslexia is imperative.

We look forward to your initiative progressing and are happy to speak to our submission if required.