



Dear Ms Jan Tinetti

My name is Sharon Scurr and I am the founder of the Dyslexia Evidence-Based (DEB) community. I support and educate parents and teachers and help them advocate for their children in school. I believe every child has the right to learn to read and barriers must be removed. The Dyslexia Evidence-Based has its own website as well as a Facebook group with 8.9k members.

I am looking into how to get Dyslexia officially recognised as a disability. To date, there is no funding or support for individual children in school with Dyslexia. Many countries around the world have acknowledged this is a lifelong disability. In New Zealand, we ignore the reality of the significant difficulties and barriers Dyslexia causes - instead we present Dyslexia as a gift or a difference.

Learning resource teachers, LSCs, and RTLBs are not trained to teach dyslexic children. Instead, they are given a handbook to read and then offer a classroom teacher suggestions. The waitlists even for this level of support are up to 12 months long and often are only for a few sessions.

Reading, writing, understanding language and oral language are basic skills every person needs to have to be part of, and contribute to, a community. Our literacy rates are declining and blue-collar jobs are no longer available like they were 20 years ago. It is expected that every child who leaves school can read a job application form and can fill it out. This is not the case.

Teachers were not and are still not being trained in what Dyslexia is and how to teach a dyslexic child. There is no funding for teachers to learn how to teach dyslexic children using evidence-based approaches.

We can screen for dyslexia traits as young as 4 – if did this we would have the ability to put in early intervention at school. Instead, the Ministry uses a wait-to-fail approach which waits to see what a child can do at age 7. This is not working. Children never catch up on those foundational years of learning to read, write and spell. The reason for this is, once you go into year four teachers no longer teach those basic foundational skills. Instead, they provide accommodations like computers/devices. Accommodations should always be on top of teaching not instead of teaching. The ministry of education's only funded intervention is Reading Recovery in the younger years. This programme is not evidence-based and goes against the ministry's own recommendations of structured literacy for dyslexic children.

There is no publicly funded intervention available for years 3 and up. We also know it costs at least 5 times more for intervention past year 2. This is the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. These children need more than a 12-week non-evidence-based acceleration programme provided by Reading Recovery. They need ongoing support that is evidence-based and funded.

In New Zealand, you can only get an official diagnosis of dyslexia at 7 years of age. The ministry says you do not need a diagnosis to access funding and resources. There are two problems here. 1. There is no funding for teachers to access and learn how to teach dyslexic children and 2. Schools do ask for an official assessment before they will consider if they have the funding to support struggling students. Any support the school can provide is not the right support as teachers have no training which sets children back even longer. Dyslexic children are at a disadvantage from day one of school with how our schooling system operates and no one takes responsibility for failing them.

I would also like to address the fact that there is no funding for cognitive assessments needed to diagnose dyslexia. These assessments can cost anywhere from \$700-\$1500 in New Zealand. Families are unable to access a diagnosis due to this cost. There is also no funding available to support families with the ongoing costs of supporting a dyslexic child with their learning (for example extra tutoring). I would like to rectify this and find out how we can get Dyslexia recognised as a disability for support in school and at home.

To date, the Ministry of Education does not provide any funding for dyslexic students or provide training for teachers on evidence-based approaches to teach Structured Literacy, which they recommend. This needs to be made mandatory.

This is taken from the Ministry of Education Tiki Website.

A Structured Literacy Approach provides:

- explicit, systematic, and sequential teaching of literacy at multiple levels – phonemes, letter-sound relationships, syllable patterns, morphemes, vocabulary, sentence structure, paragraph structure, and text structure
- cumulative practice and ongoing review
- a high level of student-teacher interaction
- the use of carefully chosen examples and non-examples
- decodable texts
- prompt, corrective feedback
- A Structured Literacy approach explicitly teaches systematic word identification and decoding strategies, which benefit most students but are essential for those with dyslexia.

This information is welcomed but the information means nothing if it is not mandated across schools and universities in New Zealand. Teachers need to be educated on a Structured Literacy approach and they need training and resources that are funded.

We also have no official numbers of dyslexic people in New Zealand, as yet again they are ignored. I believe the Ministry chose not to find out as the number will be much higher than anyone could possibly imagine. International figures show that at least 10% of school children are affected. This would mean that we have at least 80,000 Children in NZ who are not being supported or funded and this does not include the home-schooled community. Like myself, hundreds if not thousands of parents remove their dyslexic children from the school system each year due to a lack of funding, support and the high levels of anxiety suffered due to the lack of knowledge, training and support in schools.

The education system is not equal, nor is it inclusive for dyslexic children. If anything, dyslexic children are ending up isolated and ignored every day because teachers/schools don't know how to support them and teach them the way that they need to be taught. This leads to dyslexic children feeling like it is their fault they are failing when in fact, the Government agencies/education system are the ones that are failing them. It would be interesting to know how many dyslexic children make up the current high rates of truancy in New Zealand – how would you feel about going to school every day in a learning environment that constantly makes you feel like a failure? This is causing childhood trauma.

In summary, I would appreciate your help with the following questions:

1. What steps do I need to take to ensure we can get dyslexia recognized and acknowledged for funding and ongoing support?

I am involved with the Ministry of Education, providing information, but the Ministry can only offer guidance; it is up to teachers and schools to make decisions. The problem with this is they do not have the knowledge or the training to make these decisions and some of our most vulnerable children are being failed on a daily basis.

2. The Ministry of Education acknowledged dyslexia as a learning disability in October 2007, and my understanding is the child disability allowance would cover dyslexia up until this time. Where can I find out why this changed? I haven't been able to find anything so far. Why can dyslexic children no longer receive the child disability allowance, when clearly their families suffer financial costs in coping with their learning disability?
3. The Ministry of Education uses a working definition for dyslexia, why? Dyslexia is a language disability and it always will be. Changing the terminology to "learning difference" instead of what was stated in 2007 "learning disability" implies it's not as important and removes accountability from the Ministry and schools. I would like this rectified and answers from the Ministry about why they have been using a working definition since 2007. When qualified professionals administer the assessments for a diagnosis they use the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders volume 5 (DSM 5) which classifies dyslexia as a specific learning disability, not a difference.

Lastly, Dyslexia has no official definition in New Zealand as stated above, a working definition since 2007 is not good enough. The International Dyslexia Association states "*Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin*". It is time New

Zealand adopted the same definition and start to provide our dyslexic children with the support they so desperately need and provide them with the same rights as other children. It is a violation of a person's right to deprive them of an education. If you can't read you can't access ANY of the curricula. Everyone has the right to read and everyone has the right to equality.

Any help you can offer is appreciated.

Kind Regards

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