



**National Council of  
Women of New Zealand**

Te Kaunihera  
Wahine O Aotearoa

**Oral Submission to the Education and Science Committee on the  
Inquiry into the identification and support for students with the significant  
challenges of dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorders in primary  
and secondary schools.**

by Patricia Byrne and Suzanne Manning on 11 November 2015

***Education and Science Committee***

Chairperson: **Jian Yang**, National Party; **Judith Collins**, National Party; **David Cunliffe**, Labour Party;  
**Catherine Delahunty**, Green Party; **Chris Hipkins**, Labour Party; Melissa Lee, National Party.

Good Evening. My name is Patricia Byrne and I am assisted by Suzanne Manning. We represent the National Council of Women of New Zealand.

There is much inconsistency in the way the special needs of these children are addressed. Different schools are able to deliver differing levels of support. Even within one school the support for a particular child can vary from year to year and is dependent on individuals within the system. What these children need to succeed is stable, continuing support. This is a message that has been given strongly to the government in recent years, and there is a perception among our respondents that the government is being continually told what the issues are but still nothing changes.

Each child has a different level of need, depending on which particular disorders are suffered. It is necessary to have them assessed and a plan drawn up to show what their needs are and this plan needs to be followed over a number of years. The provision of a reader/writer for exams is like the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. If the child has struggled throughout his/her school life to cope, then it will not be possible to suddenly turn on the ability to pass exams.

We understand that the Ministry of Education does not provide assessments for these children and it is up to parents to find someone to assess them which involves a considerable cost in terms of money and time. For many parents, this is an impossible barrier. Parents also need to expend a lot of energy advocating for their children. The majority of parents mentioned in our submission had to fight the system in order to get the help their children needed.

Stereotypes which label boys as slower learners, or naturally disruptive, do not help these children. If they are suffering from one or several of the above complaints, they have to expend their energy in covering their inability to read and write as expected. They often do

this by behaving as 'naughty' children in order to escape from the classroom where they are not coping.

Education Support Workers or Teacher Aides are essential to the system of support for these children. Education Support Workers need training, stability of employment and good pay to keep them in the job. The cost of doing this will far outweigh the costs which would be needed later on if a child is unable to obtain the education needed to cope with life and future employment. If these helpers receive low pay and work only irregular hours, they will naturally leave when they find a better job. NCWNZ is particularly interested in this as the vast majority of Education Support Workers are women.

Although schools generally have teachers nominated as being responsible for children with special educational needs, not all of these have received adequate training in recognising and dealing with the children's needs. This is something which needs to be addressed as part of the Education system.

Assistive technologies are not being used fully enough. In its simplest form, many parents provide a computer or similar device to help overcome a child's inability to read and write. This can be very helpful, but again is not something that all parents can afford.

One of the respondents to our enquiries asked that all those involved with the children stress the child's abilities, rather than making the child feel useless and unable to do what his/her peers can manage.(\*)

In order for a child with one of these disorders to cope and succeed, there needs to be a team effort by the child, the teacher, the parent, education support workers, external experts and other support staff. We recognise that teachers have many pressures to cope with the needs of all children in their schools and this is why it is important that all involved in this area receive adequate funding and training.

Thank you for allowing us to speak to you.

### **Notes**

A woman speaking by tele-link was a mother of a special needs child and had a lot of emotion in her voice.

Two teachers from Island Bay School put a great effort into students with special needs, making it a magnet school.

The next speaker, a man representing Early Childhood Council spoke for rather too long about a survey conducted with ECE services. He mentioned a case where a teacher had to stay with a child who had special needs, leaving only one other teacher to cope with the remaining 19 pupils.

## **Questions**

No specific questions were asked but:

**Catherine Delahunty** mentioned that we had gathered our information from wide sources. She said it was a very comprehensive submission.

**Judith Collins** was trying to make the point (as she had also to the two speakers before us) that there was a responsibility for the other children, and the teachers, to accept and include these children with special needs, and that she didn't like these children as always being seen as "the problem". Attitudes of other people can also be seen as a problem. Our view was that our submission did cover this, and that we did see something like this see \* above. *Suzanne's thought later was that we didn't emphasise this because it is difficult for the government to influence – they can't pass a law insisting that children be friends with their peers who have special needs! But they can fund PD for teachers, they can fund and insist on training and better conditions for teacher aides etc. etc., which would help children with special needs be included more.*