

Summary of Human Rights Commission submission – Education and Science Committee Inquiry into the identification and support for students with significant challenges of dyslexia, dyspraxia and autistic spectrum disorders in primary and secondary schools

The Commission's submission is principally concerned with the application of human rights principles when developing frameworks for identifying and supporting students with dyspraxia, dyslexia and autistic spectrum disorders, in particular the right to an inclusive education under Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. An inclusive education approach celebrates diversity, emphasises individual strengths and serves to highlight systemic shortcomings in accommodating diversity amongst individuals.

Failure to provide adequate educational support for children and young people with learning difficulties can result in lifelong disadvantage. This can include barriers to entering the workforce and obtaining well remunerated employment¹ and disproportionately high rates of contact with the criminal justice system and incarceration². The Commission considers that an education system based principles of inclusive education and reasonable accommodation of the needs of these students is well geared to address such disparities.

This Inquiry provides an opportunity for Parliament's Education and Science Committee to consider wider issues regarding the progressive implementation of inclusive education principles in New Zealand schools. There has been considerable policy focus on this area in recent years, in particular the Government's *Success for All* policy programme.

Now that *Success for All* has concluded, the Commission encourages the Education and Science Committee to examine whether the current education legislation and policy provides an adequately supports students with disabilities and learning difficulties enjoy their right to an inclusive education.

The Commission also encourages the Education and Science Committee to directly focus its attention on the experiences and views of students and their families to ensure that their perspectives are strongly reflected in the Inquiry's findings and recommendations.

¹ See Human Rights Commission, *Tracking Inequalities at Work*, <http://tracking-equality.hrc.co.nz/#/issue/employment>, accessed October 2015. For example, the disabled Maori have over 8 times the rate of unemployment as non-disabled males aged 45-64, over 70% of disabled women earn less than \$30,000 per annum.

² The Department of Corrections has estimated that around 71% of New Zealand prisoners have difficulty reading and writing; see Department of Corrections, *Education, job skills and working prisons*, August 2013, http://www.corrections.govt.nz/resources/education,_job_skills,_and_working_prisons.html