

Specialised help for children with dyslexia pays dividends

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Compelling research shows learning outcomes for children with dyslexia can be vastly improved.

Specialised, early intervention can significantly boost success at school for a child with dyslexia, a pilot study shows.

One-on-one, personalised tuition resulted in vast and surprising improvements in achievement skills, Karen Waldie, Associate Professor of the School of Psychology at Auckland University, says.

SPELD NZ, in collaboration with school RTLBs (Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour), carried out the study involving 42 seven-year-old students struggling in the classroom as a result of dyslexia.

Ms Waldie says she was taken by surprise and "truly impressed" by the resulting data.

"The children increased their predicted reading success by 20-44 percent in areas of sound blending, phonemic awareness, verbal comprehension and reading fluency.

"We saw vast improvements in thinking ability, cognitive fluency and processing speed."

The New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies has published the research findings, noting the improvement of cognitive efficiency and processing speed was "testament to the ability of the brain to be modified, presumably via strengthened neural connectivity, following even a relatively brief (60 session) exposure to an enriched environment in the form of SPELD intervention."

The students in the study came from a variety of schools, ranging from decile 1 to decile 10. They received 60 45-minute sessions of one-on-one tuition, twice weekly, from SPELD NZ teachers. Each child had assessments of their academic and cognitive abilities before and after the 60 lessons.

SPELD NZ's chairperson, Marion Fairbrass, says although the sample size was small, it was a first step and the findings were very encouraging.

"They indicate that specialised teaching, built on solid foundations, can make a strong contribution to those with dyslexia and to the wider education sector."

