



RAISING AWARENESS TO RAISE SUPPORT

8 June 2009

For the first time in New Zealand's history, national and regional gifted educational organisations have combined forces to highlight the needs of gifted students in our country. Gifted Awareness Week will be promoted and celebrated across New Zealand from the 15th- 22nd June.

Kathy Williams, director of the Gifted Education Centre, explains, "It is imperative we continue to raise awareness by using a strong united voice and have some fun along the way as we celebrate the birthday of our inspiration, Professor George Parkyn, who was born on June 17th in 1910. Much ground has been gained since Professor Parkyn took NZ to the world stage, but there is an awfully long way to go until gifted children have educational equity."

George Parkyn was one of the most distinguished scholars in the field of educational research. He maintained a high interest in gifted education throughout his career and in 1975 was one of the keynote speakers at the first World Conference in gifted education.

Dr Tracy Riley, an Associate Professor in gifted and talented education at Massey University and Chairperson of giftEDnz The Professional Association for Gifted Education says, "It is both exciting and timely that advocates join together to raise awareness of the needs of our gifted and talented learners. To lose sight of their potential would be a tragic outcome."

The organisations involved in the Gifted Awareness Week promotion hope that collective support will assist with demonstrating the level of commitment nationwide to educating our brightest minds in the hope that their creative energy can be harnessed and that we can together foster a long-term ability to solve the problems of tomorrow.

"There are still many educators who do not fully understand that there is a difference between nurturing the gifts of all students and providing an appropriate education for gifted students", says Rosemary Cathcart of REACH education. "The past few years have seen some developments in gifted education, but further resourcing and professional development is required for these children to have their needs met."

Despite research indicating the need for specialised educational opportunities and support, the 2009 Budget cuts funding for professional development advisers. Additionally, the Ministry of Education has undertaken a review of its provisions for gifted and talented learners. The outcome of the review remains unknown, but initiatives have decreased since it began over a year ago.

The budget cuts and current review means there is uncertainty regarding the future of gifted and talented education. There is no shortage of challenges in this area, many requiring urgent and thoughtful attention.

During this week of Awareness parents, families, students, teachers and all other interested parties are encouraged to increase their understanding by taking the time to undertake a gifted focused activity. Ideas have been supplied by The Gifted Education Centre, giftEDnz The Professional Association for Gifted Education, The Gifted Kids Programme, The New Zealand Association for Gifted Children, REACH education, the Christchurch Association for Gifted Education, the Otago Association for Gifted and Talented, the Canterbury Association for Gifted Children and Youth, North Canterbury Support for Gifted and Talented Children and the Waikato Association for Gifted Children. Links to these activities and ideas can be found on www.giftednz.org.nz and www.giftedchildren.org.nz