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## TEACHERS JOIN TO URGE HELP FOR GIFTED

Educators and parents throughout New Zealand are combining for an event that is surely unusual in any country's history – Gifted Awareness Week!

The event has been sparked by real concern about what is happening to gifted youngsters in our schools.

2008 research undertaken in New Zealand by the Education Review Office (ERO) found that in 58 percent of the schools reviewed, the provisions for gifted and talented students were not adequate. "Gifted and talented students expressed dissatisfaction, boredom and frustration at the lack of challenge in their classroom programmes" (ERO, 2008, p. 30).

In human terms, this means that hundreds of gifted children potentially underachieve in our schools. They are continuously frustrated and bewildered by the constant barriers to their learning. Their belief in themselves is all too often undermined by misunderstandings by other children. Many daily beg their parents not to have to go to school.

Teachers, principals and other educators are also deeply frustrated by this situation, many expressing an awareness they are short-changing their gifted pupils, but unable to overcome the barriers of time, resources and lack of professional support. Very much aware that "one size fits all" is a maxim that has no place in education, more and more teachers are seeking guidance on how to adapt their classroom programmes so that gifted children can have their needs met just as fully as other children do.

But this is a topic which has never been adequately covered in teacher education in New Zealand, and teachers are further hampered by extremely limited access to resources and professional development in this field.

Hence, the decision to highlight this yawning gap in New Zealand's education system with a week of special activities.

One of the organisations strongly supporting this event is giftEDnz, a professional association set up specifically to encourage and help teachers acquire the skills they need to provide for gifted children. The association is building a rapidly growing network of educators throughout the country as a means of disseminating information, sharing expertise and supporting advocacy

Dr Tracy Riley, Associate Professor in gifted and talented education at Massey University and Chairperson of giftEDnz, says the association believes Gifted Awareness Week could not be more timely, given the short-sighted Budget decision to axe all existing advisory positions in this already under-resourced field. She says, "Schools have an obligation and responsibility to identify and provide for the needs of gifted and talented learners. It is obvious that those who can and will make a difference are the educators themselves. This is why raising awareness and networking with professionals is so critical."