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Press Release from New Zealand Foundation for Character Education

For immediate use

Deteriorating student behaviour – answers not descriptions required

A damning NZCER report on student behaviour in the Hawkes Bay is likely to be reflected in classrooms all around the country according to Rod Galloway, chairman of the New Zealand Foundation for Character Education.

Mr Galloway said that this is the fourth report in less than 12 months to highlight a situation that is all too familiar to New Zealand principals and classroom teachers. "These reports provide overwhelming evidence that deteriorating classroom conduct is worse than ever before and is having a significant impact on teaching and learning for all students."

"Disruptive behaviour is nominated as the most common classroom barrier to learning, the number of students involved keeps growing and this is a greater problem than the Ministry of Education acknowledges."

According to Ministry figures, there were a total of 22,467 stand down cases and 5008 suspension cases in 2006 for extreme behaviours. But Mr Galloway says a much greater number of challenging students, whose behaviours may not be extreme enough to be removed from schools, are present in many New Zealand classrooms. "This is evidenced in the recent Hawkes Bay data showing 20% of pupils in schools displaying dangerous and disruptive behaviours that interrupt learning. When this percentage is translated across the country we have an epidemic of 150,000 students who are difficult to manage on a daily basis."

Mr. Galloway said, "There is now an urgent need for better answers and not more descriptions.

"If education administrators are serious about solving the problem of unacceptable student behaviour they must learn from those schools that have transformed their school culture and student behaviour by implementing effective character education."

Mr Galloway who is also Principal of George Street Normal School in Dunedin said that the main reason for poor classroom behaviour was a failure in the formation of character.

Research supervised by Dr. Gael McDonald of Auckland UNITEC in 2007 into the outcomes of character education in New Zealand schools included:

- Improved relationships between staff and students and between students
- Improved playground behaviour
- Positive effect on school discipline and stand-downs
- A majority of schools noticed a decline of 60 – 70 percent in vandalism
- Schools easier to manage
- Improvement in effectiveness of teaching

Mr. Galloway said, “The good news is that effective character education does not cost a lot of money, effects are cumulative for the whole community and it works.”

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