

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Teaching children with autism focus of new educational video**

An educational video focusing on teaching children with autism in New Zealand schools has just been released. *Autism at School* highlights issues using case studies in mainstream primary and secondary schools, satellite classes and a special school.

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), a developmental disorder that affects the brain's ability to process information, learn differently from their neuro-typical peers. In this video, teachers and students demonstrate the type of support and programmes that enable a child to cope successfully at school.

"We filmed in several schools where teachers are creating learning environments in which ASD students can thrive," said video director Jude Smith from Southern Moon Productions. "*Autism at School* focuses on examples of best practice but teachers and families also talk about what can happen if a teacher does not know how to programme effectively for an autistic child, and the impact that can have on the student's anxiety levels and behaviour."

A key issue raised by both parents and teachers is the need to maintain good communication between home and school and the problems that result when teachers are not sufficiently aware of a student's particular challenges.

"The impact I am hoping this video will generate more understanding of the challenges both the student and the family have when their child with autism enters the school environment," said Catherine Forsyth, the mother a 10-year-old boy featured in one of the case studies.

Teachers say that understanding the child, being able to recognise signs of anxiety and taking appropriate steps to alleviate the problem, helps to maintain a calm environment in which a child with ASD can learn.

"At times, carrying on with a normal routine can be a recipe for disaster and a detriment not just to the child but to the whole class and the environment of safe learning," said Cromwell teacher Laetitia de Vries.

In the video, students talk about what they find difficult at school, including teasing and bullying. One example shown is the blame-free bullying approach, where the bullies themselves help to support a teenage student with Asberger's Syndrome at Cromwell College.

Amongst the case studies is a ground-breaking initiative from Parkside special school in Pukekohe, which sends specialist teachers into local schools on weekly visits to support teachers and teacher aides working with ASD students.

“This allows autistic children to access their neighbourhood schools with support and appropriate programmes. The schools at the same time gradually learn how to work with these children,” said Parkside Principal Judith Nel.

“Feedback from the schools shows they are feeling far better supported, parents feel they have a viable option for their child and the young children are coming out with their learning intentions met,” she said.

*Autism at School* was filmed in several schools in the Central Otago town of Cromwell and the South Auckland town of Pukekohe. The video production is a follow up to *Living with Autism* (2006) which focused on families dealing with the diagnosis of a child with autism.

“Teachers who saw the first video talked about the problems they faced at school and *Autism at School* has been developed specifically to address the issues they and the parents of ASD children have raised,” said Jude Smith.

For more details about *Autism at School* go to <http://southernmoon.weebly.com> or email [judesmi@gmail.com](mailto:judesmi@gmail.com).

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**Note to editors:**

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