

Education

Tradies still need school

by Dyani Baggenstos

Students wanting to leave school for trades apprenticeships should think twice before doing so, according to a leading recruitment campaigner.

Peter Reilly, who works for the industry training organisation representing plumbers, sees his role as promoting good career choices to parents and students around New Zealand.

He urges caution for students wanting to leave school early.

"I think it's important students get a good grounding before going off to complete an apprenticeship," he says. "Everyone is different so it comes back to the individual, but generally employers today expect a high level of knowledge and maturity when taking on board an apprentice."

Reilly says it is important to get across to students that school is not a waste of time.

"The big thing students have to remember is that quite a few employers are wary of 15-year-olds straight out of school," he says. "Most expect at least level one NCEA and it's recommended throughout most trading industries that they get level two as well."

Jeremy Ellwood, owner of Auckland company Ellwood Plumbing Limited, left school at 15 to do his plumbing apprenticeship. He says doing an apprenticeship was harder than most people might think.

"I chose to do a plumbing apprenticeship because it was more suited to the way I thought," he says. "It doesn't mean you don't use your brain, it just means your thinking process

is more practically inclined."

At 18, Ellwood aimed to have his own business by 25 and he achieved this two years ago. He says he did not want to leave school early but nothing practical was offered to him.

"It wasn't that I didn't like school," he says. "I just wanted to be outside constructing stuff and there weren't any opportunities at school to gain experience in those skills."

Dr Stuart Middleton, from the Manukau Institute of Technology, says too many students stay at school studying a curriculum that is unduly influenced by those going on to university.

"When a student has decided on their future they should stay at school only if it will be of benefit to do that," he says.

"I firmly believe students should have a transferable education and training allowance up to the end of a level three or four qualification, regardless of where that qualification is to be gained." However, Reilly says secondary education today also includes practical subjects to prepare students for a working environment. It is not just about trying to get as many students through the system as possible.

"I go into schools and talk to both teachers and students, and many schools in the country do offer students opportunities to advance practically while still at school," he says.

"Whether it be from woodwork to schools helping organise work experience in the holidays, to getting a tailor-made programme set up for students; the students' best interests are at heart."

A Secondary Schools

Association spokesperson says schools want students to excel outside of school life, no matter what their talent.

"Maturity is also a big thing. At 17 you can bring a lot more to a working environment than you could at 15."

Reilly says it comes down to the individual.

"Many employers will ring schools to find out about a student they are thinking of taking on, so it is important to have a good attitude towards school."

He says there is strong demand for tradespeople. "Students have to realise that most employers want to take on trainees with experience across the board."

He says it's important to get that grounding both physically, mentally and socially while still at school as no one wants to face unemployment straight out of school.

Ellwood found there was more to his trade than he first thought. "I had a mission to get out of school as soon as I could," he says. "But it wasn't easy leaving so young and many people have this idea that tradesmen don't have to use their brains as much."

He found the hardest part was working towards getting his plumbing certificates at a young age. "I think that schools definitely do have a vested interest in helping students of all sorts, it's not just about trying to keep them there as long as possible."

"I definitely think an extra two years staying at school can do wonders for people wanting to go into a trade," he says. "Because once you're out into the work place things are nearly always tougher than they seem."



LIVING THE DREAM: Jeremy Ellwood owned his own business at 25.

Learning disability kids branded naughty

by Leisha Jones

Learning disabilities mistaken for bad behaviour means many children slip through the schooling system without their problem being picked up.

Julie Nugent, liaison officer for SPELD Auckland, says an estimated one in 10 children have a learning disability that often goes unnoticed, leading to further problems for the child.

"The child will experience frustration because they can't understand what's going on. That's why they often come across as having a behaviour problem rather than a learning problem."

"As they go through the system the more entrenched their negative behaviour becomes," she says.

The most common learning disabilities are dyslexia, dyspraxia and attention deficits.

Children can experience a combination of more than one disability and it can affect them to different degrees.



READING THE SIGNS: There are many reasons for "bad behaviour".

Jane Carew, of Auckland Dyspraxia Support, says there is not enough training in special education and this is the start of the problem.

"Teachers need to be taught what to look for. All teachers should be able to recognise the symptoms."

"Too quickly they will classify a child as naughty."

She says dyspraxia is particularly hard to spot but if teachers were aware of the symptoms they could easily identify a child who was struggling.

Nugent says the Government must recognise the importance of educating teachers about learning disabilities.

"Once they decide to acknowledge it, they can cater for it. It

can be officially included in teacher training and school requirements. At this point there is no mandate for teachers.

"If they don't know how to recognise it, how can they provide a suitable programme to deal with it?" she asks.

Beryl Riley, Manukau district manager for the Ministry of Education (special education), says there should be joint responsibility between parents, schools and health providers.

She says the ministry provides specific programmes for children with learning problems and teachers should be provided with training surrounding these disabilities.

"I think teachers need broad training in specific needs and in adapting the curriculum to meet those needs," she says.

But Carew says often parents struggle to get their child's problem recognised and schools and teachers need to listen to parents more closely.

"You always hear parents say 'I knew there was something

wrong' but the teachers just thought the child was naughty or lazy."

She says parents do a lot of the educating within schools themselves. But more education, funding and a change in attitude is needed.

Nugent says often there is a dispute over which ministry is responsible for handling these issues.

"Because it is neurologically based, the Ministry of Education thinks it should be the Ministry of Health's responsibility. But because it comes up within the education system the Ministry of Health thinks it should be the Ministry of Education's responsibility."

Riley says both ministries play their part in addressing the issue.

"There should be a shared responsibility where children are having difficulty learning. The Ministry of Education does have a role although many parents think we are not providing enough."