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**From South Auckland Children's Trust and Oticon NZ Ltd**

**EAST TAMAKI ROTARY FUNDS MAJOR EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR SOUTH AUCKLAND KIDS**

School's back next week and thanks to East Tamaki Rotary Club, children in Rongamai Primary School in South Auckland will be taught in classrooms modified with the latest soundfield technology.

Eight state-of-the-art Easy Listener soundfields have been donated to provide the children with the best possible classroom environment.

"Local and international research has shown that soundfield systems improve language and general education for all children and are ideal for mild to severely hearing impaired children, those with attention-deficit disorder and even those with learning difficulties," says Mike Hickey, President of the Club.

"It's a way of levelling the playing field, so all kids have the chance to hear the teacher properly. Concentration improves immediately and reading levels have shot up in schools that have already installed these," he says.

Mr Hickey said the club was prompted to fundraise for the South Auckland Children's Trust after reports from other schools showed dramatic increases in children's educational achievements and behaviour.

Karen Pullar, a registered audiologist and General Manager of Oticon New Zealand, suppliers of the Easy Listener soundfields, says that there is a real physical need for soundfield systems to be installed in primary schools. "What most people do not realise is that children cannot physically process speech in background noise as efficiently as adults, until their teenage years," she says. "Development of concentration skills is critical but extremely challenging in our classrooms that suffer from poor acoustics." Ms Pullar is delighted to report that recently a clause was drafted for insertion into the Australian and New Zealand Standard for Acoustics - noise levels and reverberation times for building interiors, including teaching spaces. "This is fantastic, at last we are getting some recognition that acoustics need to be considered in building standards for schools."

Research shows that around 37 percent of kids with mild or temporary hearing loss can suffer educational failure, simply because they can't hear. "We also know that Maori and Pacific Island children are twice as likely to have glue ear," she says.

"Mild hearing loss is the least understood and most damaging health and educational risk today affecting 1 in 20 students," says Ms Pullar. "Soundfield systems are a very simple solution using ordinary FM radio waves, so it's totally safe. Teachers wear a microphone and speak in an ordinary voice, with the sound being amplified through four speakers within the classroom. Children are able to hear the teacher's voice at the same level, no matter where the teacher is standing. One of the benefits for teachers is they're less tired at the end of the day and don't have to strain their voices to be heard."

The Rotary Club of East Tamaki held a golf tournament in November 2000, raising \$8,000 for the Trust with an additional \$8000 being contributed by Rotary International.

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