

Second Reading

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE [11.16 a.m.]: I move:
That this bill be now read a second time.

The Educational Support for Dyslexic Children Bill, as members would probably know, has been of deep concern to Mr Jim Bond. Mr Bond, who suffers from dyslexia, has campaigned for at least six years to have this provision included in the Department of Education and Training Special Education Initiatives for Students with Disabilities. The legislation is long overdue and should be resolved as soon as possible. The word "dyslexia" was first coined in 1887 by Rudolf Berlin. It comes from the Greek words "dys" meaning "impaired", and "lexis" meaning "word". Dyslexia is a neurological disability that specifically inhibits learning and literacy. The World Health Organisation defines "dyslexia" as:

? a disorder manifested by difficulty learning to read, despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence and sociocultural opportunity. It is dependent upon fundamental cognitive disabilities which are frequently of constitutional origin.

According to the International Dyslexia Association, approximately 12 per cent of the population suffer from varying degrees of dyslexia. Some members of this House may suffer from it. Paediatric neurologist Dr Gordon Serfontein says that children with dyslexia suffer from what he calls the "hidden handicap". In his book *The Hidden Handicap* Dr Gordon Serfontein states:

As a parent of children with this hidden handicap, I am quite aware of the rejection by some sections of the community, but especially by some educational and medical professionals, of the concept of a developmental disability. For most of these people, these are not handicapped but rather normal children who are not being taught, managed or disciplined correctly. It is unfortunate that the very people who should be assisting children with this difficulty are among those in the forefront of opposition to the acceptance of such a condition.

Developmental disabilities in learning and behaviour are not widely accepted for political and economic reasons. Should the prevalence of this condition be acknowledged by governments or other authorities, it would then be incumbent upon those authorities to provide the necessary assistance for these children.

Further, article 23 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states:

Any child with a disability should have access to and receive an education in a manner conducive to achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development.

Sadly, that is not always the case in New South Wales. The Department of Education and Training does not recognise dyslexia as a disability and therefore does not provide appropriate support. To date, children suffering from dyslexia have been catered for under the department's Learning Assistance Program, which provides one junior teacher or teacher's aide through the Support Teachers Learning Assistance program for every special education class. This bill seeks to have dyslexia included in the Government's disability criteria when providing special additional assistance to schoolchildren with disabilities. In particular, dyslexia will be required to be included in the disability criteria for the Government's special education initiative for children with disabilities. I hope all honourable members will support the bill. It is very simple. One measure states:

Insert after section 20:

20A Educational support for dyslexic children

(1) For the purposes of section 20, dyslexia is to be recognised as a disability.

(2) Accordingly, dyslexia must be included within the disability criteria in respect of any special or additional assistance (including the Special Education Initiative of the Department of Education and Training) that is provided under section 20 to government school children with disabilities.

I commend the bill to the House.