

**INQUIRY INTO STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR
SPECIAL NEEDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES SCHOOLS**

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 20 February 2017

Partially
Confidential

Submission on Students with a disability or special needs in New South Wales schools

I write in regards to the needs of children with dyslexia (and other related learning disabilities) who are constantly falling through the cracks in the current NSW Education system.

I write as a parent of two children currently in the NSW Education System with dyslexia, and as Administrator of Australia's largest support group for dyslexia 'Dyslexia Support Australia' with over 6500 members

Due to the lack of understanding of this learning disability by teachers, principals and in general the community there are currently children sitting in classrooms across the state feeling helpless and anxious about their learning.

According to the Australian Dyslexia Association 1 in 10 individuals are on the dyslexic continuum that goes from mild to severe, yet experienced teachers can still be quoted as saying 'I have never taught a child with dyslexia' . When in reality statistics show that on average each classroom has 1, 2 or even 3 children on the dyslexic continuum.

The truth is that these children fall through the cracks and become too easy to pass on the following year to another teacher or school, and eventually these children are passed onto society, often unable to even read or write at a low primary school level, often by then they have accompanying mental health issues due to years of feeling a 'failure' at school. The lack of understanding of dyslexia from within schools can have long life implications, affecting their health and life outcomes. Around 20% of children with dyslexia also develop anxiety, and a further 20% develop depression at a young age. A high number of prison inmates are unable to read and write, and in other countries links to suicide have also been made to dyslexia.

The solution to help these children is relatively simple, and can in fact be used to help all children. Implementation of an evidence based synthetic phonics pedagogy in the early years of primary school will ensure that these children are given the same opportunity as other children in the classroom, along with the federal government's plan for a Phonics Check in early primary to help to identify these children at risk. Along with some simple classroom accommodations such as work sheets instead of copying from the board, not asking these children to read in front of their peers and the possibility of the use of assistive technology to name just a few.

Professional Development in the area of dyslexia should be mandatory for all teaching staff in NSW, and to not implement changes that ensure these students have equal access to the school curriculum, is a human rights issue.

But what about the children already in the system now? One current example of the NSW Education systems appalling treatment of students with a learning disability is the planned changes to the HSC commencing in 2017, requiring Naplan results to be at a particular level in Literacy and Numeracy in order to receive the HSC in 2020. This proposal is nothing but a slap in the face for these children, who have not had the opportunity to be identified or appropriately remediated in their early years of school, and now at the latter end of their schooling they are being punished for something that is the departments fault and not theirs.

If the department was to remove the ramps from its schools that assist those in wheelchairs to access the curriculum, there would be an outcry from the community, yet because dyslexia is an invisible disability the lack of assistance to these children to access the curriculum is seen as acceptable by the department, the principals and the teachers.

This is a national shame, and as mentioned above a Human Rights issue.

Please consider the needs of children with the learning disability dyslexia when considering this enquiry.

Yours faithfully