

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

## **Submission to Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in government and non-government schools in NSW**

As the parent of a dyslexic student in regional New South Wales, I would like to raise concerns related to the level of support available for dyslexic students and their families in regional areas.

I have advocated for my son from pre-school through to his current position in Year 10 in public education.

In Year 1 my son's teacher told me she couldn't teach him to read and didn't know what to do. The school counsellor referred me to a private phonics (Sounds-Write) tutor, so we took my son out of school one day a week to travel to Lismore for reading. The tutor was the first to confirm that my son was dyslexic.

All through primary school the experience was of teachers who knew nothing about dyslexia, didn't believe in it, or wanted to help but didn't know how to. In Year 5 my son had a formal dyslexia assessment by an educational psychologist recommended by the DET, at a cost of more than a thousand dollars, but his classroom teacher said it was too late in the year to start a literacy support program.

Through primary and high school my son was given various literacy support programs but none specifically recommended for dyslexia. Some were less than useful.

As a parent it is distressing to watch a bright, animated, enthusiastic young child start to lack confidence, feel stupid and become anxious about school and develop low self-esteem as their school life progresses.

In regional NSW many parents are struggling in isolation to work out what is going on for their child. Why they are so good at some subjects and yet struggle so much with reading. And where to go for help.

Dyslexia was officially recognised by the NSW Parliament in 2008, but that recognition has had little impact in the average classroom in regional NSW. It's estimated that dyslexia affects around ten per cent of the population, so all teachers will come across dyslexic students in their careers, but very few know what dyslexia is and how to support dyslexic students.

I have seen a school counsellor refer parents to a dyslexia website run by a private company that charges thousands of dollars for discredited non-phonics based programs specifically NOT recommended by Macquarie University Special Education Centre. In the absence of clear guidelines, people can fall prey to expensive and dubious schemes.

This is why there needs to be a clear, comprehensive guide to appropriate services, interventions, accommodations, technology and support for dyslexia.

It is not acceptable for parents to have to take their children out of school to find private tutors to teach them to read. Not all families can afford private tuition for their child's literacy.

I applaud the new literacy approach of the Education Department, with early literacy screening, phonics-based approach and the move away from Reading Recovery programs (which are not suited to dyslexic learners).

However, there are serious concerns about the new **HSC LITERACY RULES** that require students to achieve a Band 8 Year 9 Naplan result to be eligible to sit the HSC. I agree that a high standard of literacy should be required, but Naplan was not designed for that.

There are not the secondary literacy programs in place to help students who need support to reach that level. It would make more sense to introduce intensive literacy support BEFORE introducing new literacy standards. As it stands, it looks like a punitive approach, and is causing distress for many students and families.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORT IN REGIONAL NSW**

1. The Centres for Effective Reading established following the 2010 inquiry are based in Wagga Wagga, Dubbo and Westmead. This does not help those in regional areas in the north of the state. These centres are effective but only help about 40 students a year, and are based on a 'wait to fail' model where students get help after having failed a number of other programs.  
We need a centre in northern NSW, linked to a regional university, providing literacy research and support for teacher training, schools and students. Preferably not based on a 'wait to fail' model.
2. There needs to be a clear pathway of support for children with dyslexia. Teachers should know what dyslexia looks like, how to support students, the type of interventions and technology available, and where families can find information and support.
3. At least one teacher at every school should be comprehensively trained in recognising dyslexia and helping design programs of accommodations specifically for dyslexic students.

I look forward to the day when there is much greater awareness of dyslexia, and the strengths and weaknesses of dyslexic students; when it is seen as just a difference, like being left-handed, and something that, with support and accommodations, need no longer be a barrier to learning.