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

Organisation: Ms Rebecca Taylor

Date received: 24 February 2017

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in government and non-government schools in New South Wales

That General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3 inquire into and report on the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in government and non-government schools in New South Wales, and in particular:

(a) equitable access to resources for students with a disability or special needs in regional and metropolitan areas

(b) the impact of the Government's 'Every Student Every School' policy on the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in New South Wales public schools

(c) developments since the 2010 inquiry by General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs and the implementation of its recommendations

(d) complaint and review mechanisms within the school systems in New South Wales for parents and carers, and

(e) any other related matters.

Committee membership

The Hon Natasha Maclaren-Jones MLC	Liberal Party	*Deputy Chair*
The Hon Ben Franklin MLC	The Nationals	
The Hon Courtney Houssos MLC	Australian Labor Party	
The Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC	The Nationals	
Revd the Hon Fred Nile MLC	Christian Democratic Party	
The Hon Walt Secord MLC	Australian Labor Party	
Mr David Shoebridge MLC *	The Greens	

* Mr Shoebridge is substituting for Ms Barham for the duration of the inquiry.

Submission for:

A call for submissions Re: Inquiry into the provision of education to students with disability or special needs in government and non-government schools in New South Wales

Summary:

This submission aims to provide a response to some key issues found in different areas of the ***Every Student, Every School: Learning And Support Document*** which is considered as a guidance document for the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in government and non-government schools in New South Wales.

The submission focuses on provisions and inclusive settings within the local school environment from a parents perspective and aims to provide descriptive information on how the ***Every Student, Every School: Learning And Support Document*** is able to provide and apply a useful framework for the school learners with disabilities or special needs, identify local issues and challenges and, finally, to provide local recommendations on ways forward.

The submission considers the following themes:
- recognition and inclusion as a quality issue that is about responding to the diverse needs of all students;
- effective ways to strengthen the capacity of the education environment to be inclusive and diversify the opportunities and resources available outside of the local education unit;
- systems for collaboration and networking to educators, parents and students to provide multi-agency support to as an integral part of education;
- the effective and efficient use of resources for identifying needs and targeting support.

Key Issues:

a) Recognition of Dyslexia within NSW Public Schools:

The ***Every Student, Every School: Learning And Support Document*** recognises Dyslexia as part of *"… a further 55,000 (7.3% of all students) have additional needs relating to disability or difficulties in learning or behaviour, including dyslexia, reading and/or communication delay and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)."* (Page 5, ***Every Student, Every School: Learning And Support Document***)

There is confusion around which terms are universally applied across schools, and recognised or included within the umbrella of learning support that schools can actively encourage and guide both students and parents on within their education journey.

b) Provision of accommodations within the classroom environment:

Under the Commonwealth Disability Standards for Education 2005, all education providers are required to make sure that every student with disability is able to access and participate in education on the same basis as students without disability.

This includes a requirement to make or provide adjustments for the student where needed so that they have the same experience and opportunities as their peers without disability. (Page5, ***Every Student, Every School: Learning And Support Document***)

There appears to be limited information/ documentation available that provides a framework guide to the resources/ training that can be provided, the alternative tools and teaching methods available to be applied within the classroom environment to support different needs.

c) Consultation, Documentation, Professional Understanding and Planning:

"Students, or their parents, must be consulted about the adjustments that are put in place for the student." (Page 6, *Every Student, Every School: Learning And Support Document*)

Commonwealth Disability Standards for Education 2005:
The Standards include obligations for making reasonable adjustments to the student's learning program and /or learning environment. Parents, and where appropriate, students with disability must be consulted on the personal adjustments that will be provided.

"Important work has been undertaken on the development of a new 'functional assessment' tool for teachers to profile the strengths, abilities and needs of students with a disability to inform planning to support the learning needs of these students." (Page 11, *Every Student, Every School: Learning And Support Document*)

"Accelerate the development of a functional assessment tool for teachers to profile the learning and support needs of individual students in collaboration with students and their parents." (Page 16, *Every Student, Every School: Learning And Support Document*)

"Planning for adjustments to support the educational needs of individual students with disability being informed by their functional educational needs, rather than their disability type or label." (Page 16, *Every Student, Every School: Learning And Support Document*)

The issue identified is around the lack of a recognised process through which a students learning program and / or learning environment adjustments or accommodations can be assessed, profiled, and repeatedly monitored with consultation and collaboration for all involved.

d) Provision of/ access to specialist professional learning skilled teaching staff:

"We have increased options for specialist professional learning for teachers and other education personnel to extend their knowledge and skills in working with students with additional learning and support needs." (Page 11, *Every Student, Every School: Learning And Support Document*)

There appears to be limited information/ documentation available that provides a framework guide to the resources/ training that can be provided, the alternative tools and teaching methods available to be applied within the classroom environment to support different needs, both within the local school community and the wider education facilities.

e) Resource and current learning support services provision:

"Principals, through their school learning and support teams, will remain responsible for determining how the school's resources are used to best meet the learning and support needs of students in their school. This will enable more students to access support without the need for formal applications and paperwork outside the school.

Schools will have the flexibility to work together to share or pool their resources to provide specific programs or activities to support learning outcomes for students in their schools. " (Page 14, *Every Student, Every School: Learning And Support Document*)

The issue identified is around a lack of exposure pertaining to how resources and learning support requirements are identified and distributed both within the local school community and the wider education facilities.

Evidence:

a) Recognition of Dyslexia within NSW Public Schools:

Australian Government Department of Education Policy Roundtables – Students with Dyslexia Discussion Paper, June 2014.

> *'I discovered … that nearly all teachers, including me, are not educated or trained in teaching and assisting children with dyslexia and there is much confusion and misinformation'* (Liz Dunoon quoted in Tarica, 2010).

http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/seeking-a-new-deal-on-dyslexia-20100528-wl5z.html

Helping people with dyslexia: a national action agenda
Report to the Hon Bill Shorten, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services, from the Dyslexia Working Party: Jim Bond, Max Coltheart [Chair], Tim Connell, Nola Firth, Margaret Hardy, Mandy Nayton, Jenny Shaw, Angela Weeks
Submitted January 10 2010

b) Provision of accommodations within the classroom environment:

Moore & Hammond, 2010 highlights the potential role of teacher aides and education assistants as a resource in supporting students with dyslexia, provided they are given appropriate training and support.

DSF Literacy and Clinical Services (2014). *Understanding Learning Difficulties – A practical guide.*

Moore, W. & Hammond, L. (2010). Using education assistants to help pave the road to literacy: supporting oral language, letter-sound knowledge and phonemic awareness in the pre-primary year. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, vol 16.

Jahnukainen, M. (2011) Different strategies, different outcomes? The history and trends of the inclusive and special education in Alberta (Canada) and in Finland. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 5595) 489-502.

Kennedy, M. J., & Ihle, F. M. (2012). The old man and the sea: Navigating the gulf between special educators and the content area classroom. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice, 27*(1), 44-54.

Mitchell, D. (2015). Education that fits: Review of international trends in the education of students with special educational needs. University of Canterbury: New Zealand.

NCSE (National Council for Special Education). (2014). *Delivery for students with special educational needs, a better more equitable way*. Trim: National Council for Special Education.

Salend, S. J. (2015). *Creating inclusive classrooms: Effective, differentiated, and reflective practices* (8th ed.). Columbus, OH: Pearson Education.

c) Consultation, Documentation, Professional Understanding and Planning:

D'Alessio, S. & Donelly, V. (2013). *Organisation of provision to support inclusive education: Literature review*. Odense, Denmark: European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education.

http://theconversation.com/the-way-schools-cope-with-learning-difficulties-is-doing-more-harm-than-good-36544

d) Provision of/ access to specialist professional learning skilled teaching staff:

Duff, F.J., & Clarke, P.J. (2011). Practitioner review: reading disorders: what are the effective interventions and how should they be implemented and evaluated? *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, vol. 52.

Banks, J., Frawleyc, D., & McCoya, S. (2015). Achieving inclusion? Effective resourcing of students with special educational needs. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2015.1018344

e) Resource and current learning support services provision:

Contemporary Models of Funding Inclusive Education for Students with Dyslexia
Umesh Sharma, Chris Forlin and Brett Furlonger
Monash University
A report commissioned by the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD) Review Unit of the Department of Education and Training for the State of Victoria

"Funding education for students with dyslexia is complex. Best practice requires that such children have access to all related services as early as possible. It is critical that the funding of students with dyslexia is not seen as the direct cost related to education of a particular student. Schools also need funding to ensure that they can continue to support students who may not have been identified with a label of dyslexia but who still experience the same learning difficulties. The report identified a number of key considerations for developing a new funding model. The key messages from the report could be best captured by the comment made by Pijl & Frissen when they stated:

> *… what is expected from schools without prescribing how it [inclusive education] should be done,*
> *by removing all hindrances in regulations and funding, by stimulating forms of additional*
> *training for teachers and by avoiding as much as possible funding systems requiring formal*
> *labelling procedures (*Pijl & Frissen, *2009, p. 373)."*

Case Studies:

Zara is in Year 2 at a local primary school. She had a history of reading and learning difficulties and during the school year has been profiled with Dyslexia following a counsellor's assessment, paediatricians review and Australian Dyslexia Association Assessment, combined with her Father also being Dyslexic. Following a meeting with the school she has been included on the locally implemented 'Reading Bee's' scheme, and had some participation in Reading Recovery with the Learning Support Team. Meetings have taken place to discuss the strategies already in place for her and identify her strengths and learning needs. It has been an emotional and difficult year for Zara and her family as they determine the focus points for her within the broad spectrum of Dyslexia, in conjunction with navigating the options and accommodations available with the current information or guidance available for learning support provision within the NSW school system. Through externally funded resources recommended and reading with the learning support team within its current capacity, Zara has made good progress with her reading this school year. For the coming school year there is hope that we can develop some sort of personalised learning plan in consultation with her new classroom teachers, detailing adjustments that could be made to promote further classroom based inclusive learning into year 3. Planned adjustments may include: • use of her interest and strengths provide alternative presentation options if required for class tasks and projects • adapted learning materials such as audiobooks or class texts • possible use of speech-to-text software or alternative software specific to learning difficulties in place of broad based homework • inclusion in a Multi Lit or similar evidence based reading scheme to maintain reading progression.

Dyslexia is recognised in Australia under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) and under the Human Rights Commission. Dyslexia is also recognised under the special needs sections of the Education Acts in NSW for additional funding however translating this to action for parents is difficult.

http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/bills/docref/c62e2bfc-13d8-11dc-8fad-00144f4fe975

Positive case studies of schools where active reinforcement and accommodations of learning support resources have been applied (in this instance specifically for Dyslexia) across Australia:

- John Curtin College of the Arts (WA), a Year 8 to 12 college for students who are gifted and talented in the arts, runs the PROPEL programme which provides targeted support to students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties (www.jc.wa.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Specialist-Brochure-Propel-2010.pdf).

- O'Sullivan Beach School (SA) has received media attention for its success in improving literacy outcomes for students with dyslexia through the Jolly Phonics programme (www.todaytonightadelaide.com.au/stories/jolly-phonics-learning).

- Samford State School (QLD) identifies as a 'dyslexia-friendly' school and provides a range of support including a Dyslexia Support Coordinator and a Dyslexia (and other learning difficulties) Support Group (www.samfordss.eq.edu.au/Supportandresources/Studentservicesandsupportprograms/Pages/Dyslexia-support-group.aspx).

- Wasleys Primary School (SA) has received 'Dyslexia Aware School' accreditation (www.barossaherald.com.au/story/2195557/plaque-sponsorship-for-dyslexia-aware-schools) from a Barossa Valley dyslexia action group and has received training from Neil Mackay, the UK creator of the dyslexia-friendly schools concept (www.actiondyslexia.co.uk).

    Ref: *Australian Government Department of Education Policy Roundtables – Students with Dyslexia Discussion Paper, June 2014*.

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation 2015, Reading Recovery: A Sector-Wide Analysis Report prepared by D Bradford and W Wan. This report is available at: http://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/publications/reports-and-presentations

A case study of inclusive school development: a journey of learning
SUZANNE CARRINGTON & ROBYN ROBINSON
Pages 141-153 | Received 29 Jul 2002, Accepted 25 Jul 2003, Published online: 20 Feb 2007

http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/reading-recovery-program-used-in-960-nsw-public-schools-does-not-work-20151218-glqplg.html

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2015. Empowering Teachers to Promote Inclusive Education. A case study of approaches to training and support for inclusive teacher practice. Odense, Denmark: European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Recommendations:

a) A framework and reference list for schools and parents around the disabilities, Learning difficulties and Learning differences currently recognised and supported by both the ***Disability Standards for Education 2005*** and the ***Every Student, Every School Initiative.***

    This will help both parents and teaching staff to recognise, identify and relate any learning support required within the initiative for any disability or difficulty that a student may have no matter what is has been called/ identified as.

b) A framework and reference list for schools and parents detailing the resources/ training that can be provided, the alternative tools and teaching methods available to be applied within the classroom environment to support different

educational needs identified in the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* and the *Every Student, Every School Initiative.*

This will help both parents and teaching staff to recognise, identify and apply any learning support accommodations required within the school environment for any learning support requirement presented across the student body.

c) Provision of some form of standardised assessment and progression tool that enables both educators, parents and students to actively consult, collaborate, plan and frequently review any recognised learning support requirements, achievements, adjustments, accommodations and progress in a timely manner. An online tool accessible to all involved would be a good solution and could perhaps incorporate some of the proposed adjustments or alternative educational solutions recommended, and therefore assist in the collaboration between work in the home and school environment.

d) A framework and reference list for schools and parents detailing the resources/ training that are both currently available in the local school and wider education environment, in addition the alternative tools and teaching methods available both in the local school and wider education environment that can be requested or distributed to support different educational needs identified in the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* and the *Every Student, Every School Initiative*. This can assist in the planning for the distribution or application of such training/ resources in the schools where learning support requirements are identified. Such a document may also identify needs that may not currently be able to be met within the school system and suggest alternative pathways for parents and students.

Such consultation and review would also give parents and students a positive mechanism and opportunity to suggest and discuss adjustments and accommodations they may have found externally and how they might be incorporated or applied within the school environment.

e) Increased availability of information and documentation for the schools and the wider education community to identify and consult with parents and students on the learning support requirements and provision of adjustments and accommodations within their local education community, enabling parents and students to have increased awareness of the resources available and their distribution, as per d) this could be in conjunction with the identification of needs that may not currently be able to be met within the school system and suggest alternative pathways for parents and students.

In addition development and information around a whole-school approach to supporting all students with learning difficulties. This may involve a focus on building the capacity of staff to develop inclusive classroom practices including providing tools such as assistive technology and high-interest learning difficulty texts for the school library.