

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

Organisation: Northern District Council of Parents and Citizens Association
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Submission to the NSW Upper House Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in government and non-government schools in New South Wales

Northern Sydney District Council of P&Cs represents public school parents and citizen associations in the Northern Sydney area in NSW. The following issues in relation to:

- Special Education Support Classes including transition to and between such classes and material issues with the Department of Education's lack of allocation of library and careers to students in special education classes; and
- Disabled access in schools

These issues are raised in the interests of ensuring resources are appropriately allocated and improving the learning outcomes for students with learning disabilities in NSW public schools. An example of how support for one type of disability could be improved is provided at Appendix A.

The information provided in this report has been provided by parents and people involved in providing services. It is mostly anecdotal. The parliamentary enquiry is an opportunity to independently test these perceptions.

We are a volunteer organisation and in the time available for this submission we have not been through our normal processes of review or formatting for such documents. However this submission broadly reflects our general position on the issues raised.

1. Allocating the placement of students with special needs

Once it has been decided that a student fulfills the necessary requirements to be placed in a support IM (mild intellectual disability), IO (moderate intellectual disability), IS (severe intellectual disability) or high needs classroom in NSW public schools, students are more often than not being left in the mainstream class for the remainder of the year to start the new year in the support class, even though there are vacancies in the departmentally allocated local school support classes. As an example, one IM class had 10 students (maximum 18) and a student was signed off to attend that class in April but was not allowed to attend that same support class until the following year despite much parental pressure.

This delay in starting a specialist program has serious consequences for the child and the special educator. This happens regularly in NSW. Often the necessary documentation is signed off by the school counsellor, her supervisor and head of her department, but the child stays put for whatever reason. It is our understanding that it is rare that a student starts in special education classrooms in Term 2, 3 or 4.

If the current processes were changed to better meet the needs of students:

- Children could be getting the necessary attention and assistance to engage and begin a specialised teaching program to ensure their learning progresses sooner.
- There would be a reduction in wasted time by moving children from a mainstream classroom as soon as the need is established instead of leaving them disengaged, continually facing each day academic work that does not cater to his/her needs.
- Child can end up thoroughly discouraged, with very poor self-esteem, continued and often subtle, underhanded discrimination by other children and unmotivated to apply effort. It can take a specialist educator up to and sometimes more than 12 months to reverse these effects.
- Specialist teachers can often have a huge influx of new students into a support class at the beginning of the year. This places a heavy workload on that teacher who then has to establish new routines and expectations with a large, cohort of new students usually from a variety of other schools. Staggered entry when a sign off has been successful makes the task of the special educator be much easier and is less disruptive to that classroom.

It is recommended that students begin straight away or the very least the next term when vacancies are available.

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2. Transitioning special needs students

Documentation transitioning primary school students with disabilities from one public primary school to another public primary school setting is often poor. Students can transition from a mainstream class to a support unit at a different school; or transfer between a support unit in one school to a different level of support in another school (eg from IO class in one school to an IM class in a different school when there is no IM class at their current school).

In many cases, little or no documentation is sent to the new school. The principal of the new school is only sent the name of the student and year of schooling of a particular student that will be arriving on a particular date for a particular support class. This documentation can arrive in the last few days before the end of Term 4 for the start of the next school year.

More student information than a student access request from the previous child's teacher to the next school is required to smooth the process and reduce the stress load of the receiving school and teacher. Often there is missing documentation as to the nature of the child's disability and other factors such as medical, behaviour and emotional needs. The student's record card can take several weeks to arrive at the new school after the student has begun. If there are special needs and requirements for that child, much time is lost learning these without the right information. At times, there can be up to ten or more new students with disabilities starting in a new support class. It is left to staff in the new school to iron out any difficulties. The stress load is high and unnecessary.

It is recommended that:

- a basic form be completed by parents informing the new school of all the necessary information about the child with disabilities before they begin;
- that all school records in relation to a child with disability be transferred to the new school as a matter of urgency; and
- that the special education teacher be provided with these files prior to the enrolment of the new student so they are fully informed of the student's disabilities and special needs prior to the student commencing.

3. Transitioning IO students to IM classes

In some cases, problem students are being bumped out of IO (moderate intellectual disability) classes into IM (mild intellectual disability) classes. Staff (teachers and school counsellors) who want to get rid of problem students in their schools write student progress reports that inflate the social and academic capabilities of these students. In these cases, teacher Individual Education Plan (IEP) reports from one semester to the next reveal grossly improved results.

Counsellor IQ tests (meant to be objective) are inflated to push the IQ score into the IM range, sometimes by as little as 1 point. E.g. from 54 to 55, so that child now is technically classified as an IM student and must be moved to that type of class. In one case a school counsellor verbally admitted to the receiving new school's counsellor that this is what actually happened.

IO classes are much smaller (6 – 10 students depending on the factor of need) than IM (mild intellectual disability). These support units are often physically segregated (with fences) from the mainstream classes of the school. This means the students are educated in an area of the school that has little to do with the mainstream classes. Students with additional needs to their academic ones often have greater difficulty coping with the change. For example, a Year 3 student with a moderate disability and behaviour problems is moved from a class of 6 IO students and placed in an IM class of 18 students Years 3-6, many of whom have come from mainstream classes. This student displays major difficulties assimilating into this type of environment and disrupts the learning environment for the remaining 17 students for months and even years. In their former IO environment the student was considered at the top of the class. Now suddenly they are at the very bottom. These students start to display their inability to cope with negative behaviour.

- There needs to be better safeguards in place and independent assessments to ensure that IO students are not being shifted to IM classes inappropriately and beyond their capability; and

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- IO students being shifted to IM classes should be placed into Year 3/4 IM or Year 5/6 IM support classes not a Year 3-6 IM support class.. Splitting these types of classes would make a considerable difference to successful education, but unfortunately these types of classes are few and far between.

4. Retraining to become approved special education teachers

The Department of Education is continually calling for and funding suitably qualified and experienced teachers to retrain in the area of special education. During retraining, teachers are financially supported to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to support the full range of learning needs of students. Full tuition fees are paid for, plus half a full-time teacher's salary whilst studying. The participating teacher is required to remain in the permanent full time teaching position they are appointed to on completion of their qualification for a minimum period of three years. This is the average time that a teacher lasts in special education positions. Stress and burn out of teachers in this field of education is high.

However, this need not be the case. To ensure that students have continued access to specialist special education teachers some solutions could be:

- Better management of student placement when forming or compiling a cohort of students would alleviate much of the stress of teaching students with disabilities. For example: Catering for a broad range of disabilities i.e. very low – moderate disability (bordering IO range) to very low mainstream students in a class catering for Year 3 – Year 6 is huge, to the point that these teachers burn out and transfer back into mainstream. It is almost impossible to efficiently and functionally run a successful classroom such as this. A class such as this should be split into Years 3/4, and Years 5/6, or alternatively students with more similar academic abilities could be placed together.
- Reduce IM class size to 15 instead of 18. The number of students in a class was increased over 8 years ago, probably as a cost cutting exercise. Those extra 3 students make a big difference to managing such classes. Class size could be made flexible depending on the need of the current students in that class. From year to year there are additional needs that need to be addressed, such as behaviour, autism, sensory and general health that impact on the dynamics of a special needs classroom adding to further demands on the classroom teacher.

5. Differentiated Curriculums

There is the acknowledged need to respond more effectively to the learning and support needs of the full range of students with disability in New South Wales public schools, and to meet obligations under the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*.

Many mainstream teachers do not differentiate their teaching & learning programs to ensure that all students are progressing academically.

Teacher expectations of students with learning disabilities are often low. Teachers still teach the same content to the whole class regardless of the ability levels within that class. This is regardless of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, which promotes equal opportunity and access to education. Also, documentation of differentiation may be evident in a teacher's program, but in reality, is not being taught in the classroom.

There is evidence that students are often left sitting without additional support, or with a modified activity or worse still, doing nothing in lessons. Whilst this is hard to believe in the 21st Century, a student can reach a mainstream Year 3 (their fourth year of schooling), for example, and can only orally count to 20 with no understanding of the concept that number is linear. That is their total of understanding in Mathematics. These students become disengaged. Teacher expectations are too low.

- Teachers in mainstream need to become much better informed about how to cater to the needs of these students.
- Special educators within and outside schools need opportunities to inform staff during staff development days and staff meetings.

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6. School Learning and Support Teams

Some schools do not include their trained, experienced special educators on their Learning and Support Teams. Meetings and decision-making may only include the Deputy Principal, school counsellor and parent, none of whom may have any experience teaching students with special needs.

The expertise of trained and/or experienced special educators and classroom teachers on staff are not allowed, in some cases, to be part of the team, have no input into what is being discussed once a referral has been made to the team leader and no communication is given back to the teacher requesting the referral.

- It should be mandatory, that if special educator expertise resides in a school, they should be included as a team member on the school's Learning and Support Team. This would enable schools to make better informed decisions as to how best meet the learning and support needs of students in their school; and
- There should be protocols put in place to improve communication between referring teachers and the Learning and Support Teams.

7. SLSO's (Student Learning Support Officer - teacher aides)

Teacher's aide duties and tasks are to assist teachers in the classroom and give extra attention to student's learning (many with additional medical, social, emotional, or behavioural needs). They are also required to nurture and support them with their learning and development. They work in a range of classroom contexts. Whilst they are often required to perform duties not necessarily associated with actual instruction, much of their time can be taken up with instruction of children in different settings, most often in preschool or special education classrooms.

SLSO's are not fully trained teachers. This means that students with learning difficulties and other disabilities i.e. our most needy students in our schools are being supported in the classroom by the most untrained personnel.

- SLSO training takes place at TAFE - a 6 month Certificate III course. Better qualified, specialist training needs to be provided and established for SLSO's, to enable improved assistance given to students with disabilities.
- There needs to be a register maintained where SLSO's who are found by schools to be unsuitable are listed. Limited training is probably a cost cutting process in the short term but long term has significant ramifications for each child who enters adulthood possibly not reaching their full potential – therefore a liability to our society. Whilst schools try to make the best decisions as to who to employ even on a casual basis, days can be lost employing poor quality staff. Often teachers are too busy to communicate the quality of the aide and so executives in schools are none the wiser and these SLSO's keep getting work.
- Limited qualifications are required to do the SLSO course. Prospective teacher's aides who do the course at TAFE, are only required to complete a simple Maths and English test on registration day. TAFE chooses students from those test results. Checks of the other skills needed to become a good teacher's aide, are required. This ensures that those who enroll are suitable candidates. Special educators need well qualified (eg good grasp of written English, communication and social awareness skills, which in turn enable self direction when required).
- Pre-checks such as interviews and more comprehensive written tests need to be put in place. Teacher education providers such as private operators and even public ones such as TAFE and open universities, are driven by course enrollment numbers and finances to keep operating rather than suitability of candidates.
- Some primary schools are accepting newly trained casual SLSO's without the necessary background checks and certificates such as E-Learning Emergency and Anaphylaxis training. With regards to the latter, TAFE tells their students to do the ASCIA anaphylaxis course but the schools need the APTS course qualification. This documentation (i.e. written evidence) should be necessary and submitted to the Department of Education before being given a number by the payroll department. At present, schools can request that a new casual SLSO be added to their school without these documents. It is left up to schools to decide when these requirements are fulfilled after SLSO's begin work. This is a WHS issue with possible serious consequences.

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8. Library time and careers teacher time for students with a disability

It is our understanding that the current NSW Department of Education funding allocation model for schools may be discriminatory, because students with learning disabilities who are in various types of support classes (IM, IO, IS, Language Disability, Emotionally Disturbed, Conduct/Behaviour Disordered, Autism, Hearing) are not included in a school's numbers for determining a school's allocated teacher/librarian hours. A similar issue exists in high schools for the calculating the allocation of careers teacher resources.

Northern Sydney District Council of P&Cs has raised this issue with the Department of Education previously and has been advised that students with disabilities are included in resource allocations, however we have been advised by some Teachers Federation representatives, school principals, teacher librarians and special education teachers that the forms for calculating librarian resource allocations for schools excludes IM and IO and other support class students. There is a similar issue for calculating high school careers teacher resource allocations.

The concern is that the Department of Education may be contravening either or both of Sub-Sections 49L (2) (a) and (c) of the Anti Discrimination Act 1977 under which it is unlawful for an educational authority to discriminate against a student on the ground of disability:

- (a) by denying him or her access, or limiting his or her access, to any benefit provided by the educational authority, or
- (c) by subjecting him or her to any other detriment.

It appears the current approach implicitly implies that these students do not require library time as it would be of little benefit to them. There is also the perception that these classes have not been provided for in the past and has this has always been the case. These students derive enjoyment and learning benefits from library time, books and technology, and therefore should have the same funding and access that normal students do. Because of this discriminatory practice, these intellectually impaired students either miss out, or librarians are using their Release From Face to Face time (RFF), working on their own time, or schools are just providing time out of their allocated times for their other students, so all students are disadvantaged and particularly so in those schools that have multiple support classes. This practice has been going on for years and years.

Department of Education policies and practices re school funding for students with disabilities must not be discriminatory. Funding for library time must extend to all students regardless of their level of ability and must be equitably provided for those who do have a disability.

Many principals of primary schools with support units are of the impression that these classes do not or are not eligible to have library lessons. Mainstream classes are given 30 minutes per week. Often support classes do not get the same allocation time. This is in direct contravention of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

Whilst principals are becoming more aware of the areas in which students with a disability cannot be treated inequitably, there still seems to be much confusion with allocating library time to all school students in a school. The Department of Education maintains that on paper, it does provide library time but evidence from schools at the grass roots suggests otherwise. However, principals are being verbally advised by the appropriate section of the Department of Education that they cannot apply for library time for support classes in their school and these classes are still being excluded.

It needs to be ensured that all relevant resource calculation forms make it clear that ALL students, including IM and IO support students, must be included in calculations for librarian and careers teacher resource allocations for individual schools, and that all Principals across the State are also aware that this is the case. This could be done via a direction from the Secretary of the Department instructing all principals to include all students in their total numbers. eg School Biz and/or direct email that all schools must provide library time for every class in their school no matter whether they be mainstream and support classes. At present, there seems to be a distinct lack of knowledge about the proper way to work out the number of hours that a school requires for library. Teacher librarians around the state would love to have this anomaly fixed once and for all.

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9. Staffing mainstream and special education classes.

Improved results for student outcomes would be achieved if the most qualified and experienced candidates who apply for special education teaching positions are employed. Whilst the NSW Department of Education has policies in place that should result in this outcome, the policies are being widely circumvented across the NSW public school system. We have been told that experienced and highly qualified teachers with recognized results for students in the special education have applied for special education positions and not been appointed, and instead mainstream teachers who are not qualified in special education but are 'known' have been appointed.

Many principals are choosing to staff mainstream and support units in their school through advertising the position. However often this is just a procedure that schools go through to employ a casual/temporary teacher already working in that school - someone they know well versus an unknown candidate. This practice of favouring current staff over those who are more qualified and experienced appears to be the case in many NSW public schools not just in relation to special education positions. In some cases, however, this practice is used to avoid receiving a poorly performing teacher via the transfer system. There needs to be a thorough review of the processes used by the Department for employing, allocating and retaining teachers, with a strong focus on the needs of the students. The current processes are heavily weighted against the best interests of the students.

10. Issues relating to the Installation of Disabled Access Facilities in schools due to changes in Federal Legislation and the Disability (Access to Premises - Buildings) Standards 2010 (Premises Standards)

Northern Sydney District Council of Parents & Citizens Associations strongly supports the importance of ensuring suitable disabled access in schools for students and teachers with disabilities so they can participate fully within the education system and in society throughout life. However we have concerns that the current legislation is working sub optimally in NSW public schools, and in some cases is imposing significant unnecessary costs for facilities that may never be used, at the expense of other much needed works and programs.

Under the previous legislation that existed in NSW, the Department of Education was required to install disabled access into schools as and when it was needed by disabled students or teachers, and in consultation with them and/or their families as to what was appropriate. As we understand it, it was considered reasonable to ensure that only a set portion of the school had full access. Under the new legislation, the Department of Education is required to ensure that the whole school is fully compliant, and that any new building has full access, even when there is already good access in the rest of the school. This is imposing considerable costs for no practical benefit.

Over the last five years, the NSW Department of Education has installed double storey portable, modular pre-fabricated buildings in lower North Shore Schools with critical space issues. These were the first such buildings installed in public schools in NSW. The changes to the disability access requirements (National Construction Code), just prior to the first installations, have meant these buildings must have lift or ramp disabled access to the second storey, and large rain water tanks. This requirement added significantly to initial capital installation costs and ongoing maintenance and servicing costs. It is our understanding that the initial installation costs of the lifts add some \$200,000-\$300,000 to the cost of installing a pre-fabricated building. The lifts and ramps also consume valuable space in schools that have none to spare. There can also be requirements to install such facilities with other building works.

Parents and P&Cs have raised the following concerns because it was considered that these costs and facilities may be unnecessary for the following reasons:

- At least three of the schools did not have any disabled students or teachers;
- Even if these schools had disabled students or teachers that required such facilities, they would be unlikely to put the disabled students or teachers in the position where they needed to use second storey class rooms but would always facilitate them in the most readily accessible, ground floor classrooms. Schools are not like public spaces like shopping malls or office blocks. They know their communities and are able to actively manage classes so that any disabled students or teachers can be accommodated on lower levels and where

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there is the easiest disabled access. If parents with disabilities are attending functions or meetings at the school, suitable arrangements are put in place;

- Some of the places where disabled access is being required, many able bodied students would have no reason to go to during their school years either;
- We are also concerned that if it is a number of years from when the access is installed until when it is needed, the access may be aged and need replacing or updating.
- In addition there are considerable ongoing servicing costs for lifts etc., which is also a waste of scarce funding, particularly when there is no identified need. To put these costs in proportion, the total annual minor capital works budget for the 167 schools in Northern Sydney is usually approximately \$2-3million in total (which is approximately \$15,000 per school per annum), and we have aging infrastructure and a greater than 10 year backlog in much needed minor capital works, as well as a huge waiting list for major capital works funding. It is our understanding that funds to facilitate disabled access in schools comes from the general minor capital works budget, and there is no extra funding provided for the region when funding for disabled access is required.
- Whilst in some major building projects it is best practice for disabled access facilities to be incorporated as they are built, for other building projects such as double storey prefabricated buildings, there needs to be some discretion provided for the Department of Education so that there can be a common sense approach and funding is not wasted on facilities that may never be needed or used even if the school has students with disabilities.

Prior to the new legislation, in the NSW Department, school executives and disabled students and their families requiring disabled access in schools were able to work together to determine how school facilities could be best amended to ensure that arrangements and facilities were in place to ensure that disabled students could enjoy the full range of school activities. This previous approach ensured that disabled students and teachers were required to be properly provided for but that wasteful and costly additional facilities that may never be used were not installed.

When the new planning laws and their implications for these buildings came to light, the Department unsuccessfully applied for an exemption from one local Council. Our District Council of P&C Associations has also raised this issue with our State and Federal elected representatives over the last several years. There needs to be a common sense approach.

Under the current legislation, some exemptions are possible in some circumstances, for reasons such as financial hardship, however the Department of Education, as a State owned instrumentality, will not meet these conditions for exemption, and is required to fully comply with legislation, as Government Departments are required to be 'model compliers'.

Northern Sydney District Council of P&Cs understands that the ideal situation is for all disabled people to have unfettered access to all facilities in a school or other facility without having to take any special action or fight for this right. As noted above, this ideal has practical difficulties on school sites which already have serious overcrowding issues. In addition, governments are not able to meet all funding needs across the full range of its responsibilities, and must prioritise spending.

It would be preferable for either:

- schools to be required to provide appropriate facilities and access with proper consultation between the school, Department and the parents and disabled student or disabled teacher, using the then best practice methods and technology, if and when a student, teacher or parent with a disability becomes part of the school community; or
- the current requirements be amended to provide certain appropriate exemptions for schools, or to enable the Department of Education to have appropriate discretion in some circumstances. By way of safeguards:

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- The Department be required to provide a written statement as to why certain physical works to offset disabilities were not carried out at a school or other facility, including the operational measures and rationale behind that decision, and details of the consultation process and outcomes.
- Should there be any material changes to the circumstances at any site, the Department would be required to repeat the above process and demonstrate that proposed rectification actions, including physical works, meets the objectives of the legislation i.e. hassle free access to all necessary facilities for disabled persons.
- A compliance process should be included.

This is a similar process to that carried out in assessing how to best meet the special learning needs of individual students with a disability.

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Appendix A

Example: Dyslexia Support for Students in Our NSW Public Schools

Appendix A was provided by one of our P&C Presidents and provides an example of some options for improving support for dyslexia, one type of disability, in our schools

Dyslexia is a condition affecting around 10% of Australian children consistent with the studies of its prevalence in most western countries.

Northern Sydney District Council of P&Cs is concerned because it seems that there are regular examples of students who struggle for years in the school system with 'learning problems' and remedial programs that are not effective for them, who in later school years are diagnosed with *dyslexia*.

Early intervention is critical for this disability, and some of the current remedial learning programs and strategies offered in schools are ineffective for dyslexia. The latest research concludes that children not having meaningful support to improve by the 3rd year of schooling will not catch up their peers even if such support is given later.

There needs to be:

- Training for teachers with particular focus on those most involved in the K-2 years and brochures to increase awareness of parents on the key indicators of dyslexia (NSW provides online courses to deliver basic understanding to teachers but no guidance or requirements for each school and grade stage to have teachers that have undertaken the course of study);
- Access to appropriate testing for students deemed 'at risk' of dyslexia;
- Development of effective teaching programs and also support programs for students with dyslexia in school, with sufficient hours allocated to allow for meaningful improvement in outcomes; and
- Debate about appropriate funding support.

"Dyslexia is phonologically based, children identified "at risk" should receive evidence based multisensory approaches in early intervention for reading & spelling and teachers must be able to identify, plan and tailor the needs of individual students." - *Australian Dyslexia Association*

Background

Dyslexia can have a number of facets sometimes separately defined under the headings of Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Dyscalculia and although at its heart is a phonological disability many also have visual processing problems and light sensitivity such as Irlen's syndrome. These may sometimes be grouped under the banner of Specific Learning Difficulty/ Specific Learning Disability.

A review of local/national media and expat websites provides lots of anecdotal evidence that Australia is well behind global best practice, and NSW whilst in the best position, is a long way from best practice as it is impacted by national teacher training norms and limitations on funding:

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

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>

Schools seem to assess support needs based on standard class rankings so that a diagnosis does not necessarily result in help until the situation has become dire. A student that could be performing in the top quartile but is instead preforming in the bottom quartile is not regarded as a priority. Significant loss of educational opportunity results from such a situation.

Furthermore students in schools in high socio economic areas with high NAPLAN test results seem to have been overlooked in most discussions of funding models needed to overcome educational disadvantage. For

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example, primary schools with close to 1,000 students, including a number with special needs, are allocated a support teacher for only half a day per week.

The laudable intention that funding for special needs follows the pupil seems not to work for dyslexics who are unable to turn a diagnosis onto meaningful support (teachers aids and specialized individualized teaching for example) at schools in Northern Sydney.

Independent practitioners in this space who step in to fill the void report as follows:

- *"I have little girls who are struggling with literacy as they are dyslexic. Almost every second word or number is reversed. But because they are not in the bottom 10 of their year they miss out of getting additional help"*
- *"The mum of one child asked if she got a formal diagnosis would her child get help, but the answer was no as there is no additional help for dyslexia."*
- *"It is unfortunate but schools are just not giving these kids the help they need."*

There are also a number of private operators using unproven and expensive programs which without appropriate educational oversight have a risk of failure and risk giving the impression of a "cure" being possible, when in reality it is a lifelong issue.

International best practice seems to be following the following broad themes

- Going beyond acceptance of the condition and access to testing towards widespread community discussion and funding of the special needs of dyslexics in primary secondary and tertiary education sectors.
<http://www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk/changing-legislation>
- Provision of tools and resources to support teachers students and specialist practioners to improve educational outcomes
<http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6056007>
- Push for inclusion of training and awareness of dyslexia, its forms, characteristics and appropriate educational responses in teacher training.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26m7j1J0eus>

It's worth noting that a search on the website of NSW DEC for dyslexia delivers 13 hits, none of value to parents most referring to teacher training statistics. A similar search for the Scottish government's Education Scotland website delivers 36 hits most extremely useful to parents including clear definitions, how to access support and even a link to Scottish government funded support toolkit for parents/children and practitioners supported by a major university.

Definition: There are a number of different definitions and descriptions of dyslexia, which may be variously appropriate for certain contexts or purposes.

In 2009 Sir Jim Rose's Report on 'Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties' gave the following description of dyslexia, which was adopted by the British Dyslexia Association (BDA) Management Board, but with the addition of the further paragraph shown below, which should always appear with it.

The description of dyslexia adopted in the report is as follows:

- Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling.
- Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed.
- Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities.
- It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut-off points.

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- Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor co-ordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia.
- A good indication of the severity and persistence of dyslexic difficulties can be gained by examining how the individual responds or has responded to well founded intervention.'

In addition to these characteristics, the BDA acknowledges the visual and auditory processing difficulties that some individuals with dyslexia can experience, and points out that dyslexic readers can show a combination of abilities and difficulties that affect the learning process. Some also have strengths in other areas, such as design, problem solving, creative skills, interactive skills and oral skills.

In October 2007, the British Dyslexia Association Management Board approved the following definition:

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that mainly affects the development of literacy and language related skills. It is likely to be present at birth and to be life-long in its effects. It is characterised by difficulties with phonological processing, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed, and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual's other cognitive abilities. It tends to be resistant to conventional teaching methods, but its effect can be mitigated by appropriately specific intervention, including the application of information technology and supportive counseling.

Recommendations

1. Increase Awareness of Teachers and Parents of dyslexia and how to detect it:

- Teachers should be trained in the key signs of dyslexia with School Principal's required to have teachers that have successfully completed the Department's training in this available in each learning stage. K – 2 teachers should be a particular focus as this provides the intervention points most likely to deliver sustained and cost effective educational benefits;
- An information sheet on the key signs of dyslexia and what steps to take if a parent thinks their child is showing signs, should be prepared and issued to all parents of kindergarten students annually; These points are consistent with BDA campaign in the UK:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26m7j1J0eus>
and the report of the working party on dyslexia in Australia:
<http://dyslexiaassociation.org.au/uploads/Dyslexia%20Working%20Party.pdf>

2. Access to testing for at risk kids to enable problems to be clearly identified and correctly diagnosed

- Access to screening enables problem to be addressed;
- Early intervention is critical, research shows that untreated the vocabulary gaps between a poor reader who is a dyslexic to a normal reader become impossible to close by the 3rd year of school;
- Many unidentified cases turn into behavioral problems, yet early intervention can deliver significant (multiple quartiles of attainment vs. overall school population) improvement; and
- Testing should reflect major subgroups of dyslexia such as Irlans syndrome and Dyscalculia, the costs of which would be very cost effective compared to providing years of remedial learning support which is poorly targeted so often fails. In contrast children who are identified with Irlans improve rapidly once diagnosed and treated.

3. Development of Effective teaching methods for Teachers who are teaching dyslexic students.

- Standard "remedial" teaching won't work, multisensory programs tailored to the specific elements of the problem are best practice.
- A basic understanding of dyslexia and best practice responses to it should be a core requirement of all Undergraduate teaching education programs in NSW/Australia.

4. Development of effective support programs for Diagnosed Students

- Support programs should be based on best practice, that is they should be phonologically based, tailored to individual needs and start early (year1-2);

NSCP&Cs Submission to the NSW Upper House Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in government and non-government schools in NSW

- Programs should be well promoted and accessible to parents and teachers alike and should be available on a needs basis to any school child in early years in NSW/Australia;
- There should be a recognition that as well as an equity issue this is actually an overall educational attainment issue, the scale of improvement a dyslexic student can make with early intervention and the likely numbers undiagnosed in the school population means this is a significant opportunity to boost overall results; and
- Support should not be “outsourced” to third party’s but be a core responsibility of the public school system. Parents should find it easy to access support for their child.

5. A debate about funding availability to turn a diagnosis into a support program.

- Funding cost should be evaluated against costs of failure to address dyslexia including an analysis of impact on prison population and other markers of social depravation. Studies have shown up to 50% of the prison population is dyslexic;
- Funding should be based on individual need and demonstrated disability not current class ranking;
- Funding should be “school blind” not based on expectations about school need;
- Funding should reflect the scale of the opportunity to deliver an overall improvement in educational outcomes in NSW/Australia; and
- Funding should be provided to develop State Government / Major University and NGO based web based guidance and centralised best practice guide such as Dyslexia Scotland’s ‘Addressing Dyslexia’ Toolkit (<http://www.addressingdyslexia.org>).