

**Submission
No 416**

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

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Inquiry into the education of students with a disability or special needs in NSW government and non-government schools

Submission by Mr Jim Bond

(transcribed by the secretariat on 31 May 2017 and 1 June 2017)

“It is the duty of the State to educate, and the right of the people to demand education”
– Edmund Barton, Australia’s first Prime Minister.

My name is Jim Bond and I have suffered throughout my life with dyslexia. I left school at the age of 14 and, unable to read, took on laboring jobs. However, after a back injury I was no longer able to work. I have become an active lobbyist for my rights and others with dyslexia and learning difficulties. In December 2008, I had significant involvement in the passage of an amendment to the NSW Education Act 1990 which made children with significant learning difficulties legislatively recognised for the first time as a group entitled to special help in schools.

In 1992, the federal Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) recognised dyslexia as a disability, yet here we are in 2017 still advocating for children with dyslexia in schools. Therefore, I believe there should be state legislation similar to the DDA which recognises and defines dyslexia as a **disability**, rather than a “significant learning difficulty” as found in current state legislation. Without clearly defining dyslexia as a disability in legislation, the NSW Department of Education will not recognise or provide support for it.

I also believe that we should have special schools dedicated to dyslexic children, like those in the United Kingdom and United States. In Scotland, for example, there are dyslexic-specific schools. This would address the problem of mixing dyslexic children, who are otherwise intelligent, high functioning children, with children with intellectual or behavioural needs.

How many generations do we have to miss? I was diagnosed at the age of 7 and I missed all my education until I went to university in 2009. I have suffered psychologically from a lifetime of fighting and advocating. I missed all my life’s opportunities and it is still happening – it is the children today that we need to keep fighting for. We need to give children equal opportunity in receiving an education and empower them to reach their full potential.

1. Equitable access to resources for students with a disability or special needs in regional and metropolitan areas

- The Department of Education provides no assistance or support to parents of students with dyslexia. Because they are not being assisted, parents are seeking information from advocates such as myself. Parents must do their own research and make recommendations for their children.
- The Department is still not supporting students with dyslexia and giving them the appropriate care. For example, very little technology has been implemented to assist the children.

- In addition, teachers are not being trained. Recommendations are not being made to universities to train teachers in educating students with dyslexia.
- I was part of a Dyslexia Working Party who made recommendations on this but they have not been accepted in New South Wales, despite these issues being raised by myself in 2010 and recommended by the Working Party and subsequently taken on by the Federal Government.
- In 2011, the late Revd Gordon Moyes, former member of the Legislative Council, and I promoted the Right to Read program which is technology that scans books and reads them back to you, highlighting each word as it is spoken. I approached Clubs NSW and received \$65,000 in funding to implement this technology. Every school (both government and non-government) in the Port Macquarie district received this program and we paid for teacher training in it. The program eventually died out, however, because teachers did not have the time to keep it up. This is why we need special classes or schools for dyslexics – so teachers can devote time to these students in everything they do.
- The US is the world leader in setting up special schools for dyslexics, for example, the Children's Dyslexia Centres run by the Scottish Rite. Scotland is the world leader in policy and implementation for the needs of dyslexics. Both these jurisdictions have been looking at this for the last 18 years and are so well advanced in this area of educating students with dyslexia.
- We need to look beyond the Department of Education, who has not moved forward since 1992 to 2017, to make real change. We need to seek funding from outside, through private individuals if necessary, to do something positive for dyslexics to get educated given that 1 in 7 people are dyslexic – almost 5 million in population. We need to pool private and public funding, and get professionals to educate these students so they can become tax-paying members of society and fulfill their full potential.

2. 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

- Policies may be in place within the Department but feedback from parents is that they do not know which policies are in place to support their children. This suggests that these policies are not being implemented correctly as parents cannot see that it is assisting their children.
- For example, a professional couple, who would otherwise know how the Department works, approached me not knowing what to do about getting support for their dyslexic child.

3. Developments since the 2010 Upper House inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs and the implementation of its recommendations

- In 2010 the then-Director of Disability in the NSW Department of Education told me that no changes would be made within the Department to assist dyslexics despite there being legislative support for it.

- This leads me to believe that it is the will of the people in leadership at the Department which will affect whether or not changes will be made – we can write all the laws and policies we want, but if there is no will of the people behind them in the Department, then no changes will be made.
- There is an entrenched attitude in the Department and that is why I believe we need a clean out of the Department – bring in the younger generation to renew the Department with progressive ideas – and look to private enterprise to help students with dyslexia.

4. Complaint and review mechanisms within the school systems in New South Wales for parents and carers

- The professional couple who approached me for help with their child asked people up the ladder within the Department what they could do and they come back with no feedback.
- In the Hills area, I assisted a student by getting school support to implement technology for him but when it got to the Department, they did not agree with it. We need new leadership in the Department.
- Legislation is not being implemented in the way it is meant to be, including the complaint mechanisms. People would not be contacting me otherwise if it was.
- It is almost impossible in today's market to pursue complaints and assistance for children with disabilities given the many pressures parents have on them.

5. Any other related matters

- An incredible amount of work went in to the Education Amendment (Educational Support for Children with Significant Learning Difficulties) Bill 2008. It now needs to be enacted. All I am asking for is for the professionals to follow the law.
- This is about people seeking reasonable adjustments and the Department not being willing to provide these adjustments and not allowing children to reach their full potential.