



# Gold Coast Dyslexia Support Group

20<sup>th</sup> August 2015

## **Submission to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee**

**Compiled by Tanya Forbes on behalf of the Gold Coast Dyslexia Support Group**

### **Executive Summary**

Dyslexia is the forgotten learning disability despite inclusion in the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and Disability Standards for Education (2005).

Most students with dyslexia are currently unidentified and unsupported in our schools. Parents have to be experts in both education and legislation to advocate but still their children are often denied differentiated instruction, supplementary adjustments and tiered intervention.

There is a huge research to practice gap in education, combined with a lack of cohesion between state and federal policies. School autonomy and unjustifiable hardship are loopholes in legislation that enable state education authorities and schools to discriminate against students with dyslexia.

The lack of understanding and support for students with dyslexia in education is a social injustice, and there widespread child neglect occurring in too many Australian schools.

### **About Us**

The Gold Coast Dyslexia Support Group consists of over 2,000 pro-active parent and teacher members who are advocates for students with dyslexia. Our focus is to increase awareness, share information and provide support to parents, students, teachers and schools on issues involving dyslexia.

### **Introduction**

Dyslexia is the 'forgotten' learning disability in the education system. There is currently a huge lack of understanding and support for students with learning differences within our education system. Our concern is the education system is doing very little to address the needs of students with dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia and other related learning differences. The majority of students with learning differences are currently unidentified and unsupported in their schools.

### **Definition**

Learning differences are included in both the federal Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1992 and the Disability Standards for Education (DSE) 2005 in section 4 (1) (f) of the former and standard 1.4 (f) of the latter as:

... 'a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction'...

Learning differences are also referred to as learning difficulties or specific learning disabilities. These are neurologically based differences that affect cognition and impact on learning.

Learning differences include:

- i. Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that affects a child's ability to develop a strong understanding of written language and children struggle with reading, writing and spelling.
- ii. Dysgraphia is a learning difficulty that affects a child's written expression and children struggle with handwriting, spelling and organising their ideas on paper.
- iii. Dyscalculia is a learning difficulty that affects a child's ability to develop a strong understanding of arithmetic and children struggle to understand and manipulate numbers, as well as learning maths facts.
- iv. Dyspraxia is a learning difficulty that affects a child's motor coordination and children struggle with fine motor and gross motor tasks.
- v. Memory difficulties can impact on the ability to store, retrieve and process information and are related to short-term, long-term and working memory.
- vi. Attention deficit disorder is a learning difficulty that affects a child's ability to concentrate and children struggle to focus and pay attention.
- vii. Auditory processing disorder is a reduced or impaired ability to process auditory information and children struggle to discriminate, recognise, or comprehend what they hear.

## **Prevalence**

Dyslexia is on a continuum from mild to severe and is far more prevalent than realised. The occurrence of dyslexia is widespread with 10% of the population being directly affected [Australian Dyslexia Association] and up to 20% of the population being on the dyslexia continuum [International Dyslexia Association]. This means that in every classroom, there will be between 3-5 students with dyslexia that will struggle to access the curriculum and participate on the same basis as their peers. These are bright and capable children that are not able to access the curriculum or demonstrate their knowledge and abilities due to their barrier with written language.

## ***Current levels of access and attainment for students with disability in the school system***

### **1. Many children with learning differences remain unidentified in our schools**

There is an obvious discrepancy between the number of children identified and the actual occurrence of dyslexia. Most children are not identified due to a lack of teacher understanding of the key indicators to identify students at risk.

Most students with dyslexia are 'invisible' to the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy data. Many schools strongly encourage parent withdrawal of students with reading difficulties to avoid their data having a negative impact on the school image on the MySchool website. Even though government has committed to promoting maximum participation of students in the national assessment process, the schools are not adhering to this.

### **2. There is a lack of understanding of learning differences by many teachers**

Many teachers assume these students are not bright, are lazy and not applying themselves. Nothing could be further than the truth. The reality is, these children work harder than anyone else in the classroom to achieve a lesser result.

Numerous children experience shame, humiliation and embarrassment at the hands of poorly informed or insensitive teachers. Many children are put on public display in front of the class - asked to read aloud in front of the class, belittled for mistakes and criticised for not completing their work.

### **3. The school autonomy model has failed to identify the 'need' to provide support to students with learning differences**

Most students with learning differences are not identified within their schools. As a result, schools do not identify the importance to address the learning needs of students with dyslexia. Most teachers do not have the knowledge, strategies or skills to address these needs. Schools do not allocate resources, funding or professional learning to support our children.

Many schools and teachers will ignore the fact there are illiterate students in their classrooms. They become invisible and are allowed to slip through the cracks. Providing classroom support and intervention does not seem to be either a concern or a priority to many schools. Knowledge, resources and finances are always allocated elsewhere.

### **4. The popularity of the redundant wait-to-fail model of identification and intervention**

The wait-to-fail model was a belief that a student would 'fail' for two years before receiving additional support. This approach is very flawed because once there is a gap... it is very hard to close. Research by Dr Sally Shaywitz (Yale Centre for Dyslexia and Creativity) indicates that early identification of children at risk and the provision of early targeted intervention using evidence based instruction is more effective than remediation.

### **5. There is minimal or inappropriate support provided to students with learning differences in our schools**

Firstly, most students are unidentified and receive no support.

Secondly, since there is no allocated funding for dyslexia, schools are reluctant to provide support.

Thirdly, since funding and resources are limited, the learning support provided is minimal.

Fourthly, most teachers are not trained in the learning needs of students with dyslexia and do not have the skills to provide appropriate support.

Finally, the prevalence of the whole language teaching of reading and reading recovery has meant students are not receiving appropriate instruction or support.

The most effective support is intensive and targeted intervention using the tiered (or 3 wave) model. Schools currently do not have the specialist teachers, resources or funding to provide appropriate tiered intervention.

Due to the current lack of awareness, understanding and support, parents have to seek extra support and pay for specialist teaching for their children outside the education system.

### **6. There is very little provision of targeted teaching**

Students with learning differences require evidence based teaching methods using explicit and multisensory instruction. Students with learning differences will need more intensive instruction

with feedback and scaffolding, as well as more opportunities for practice and revision. This requires a highly trained and effective teacher with a flexible curriculum.

#### **7. There is insufficient use of assistive technology**

Assistive technology is defined as hardware, software and applications designed to assist students with learning disabilities to access the curriculum. Examples of assistive technology are voice recognition software for writing and text to speech for reading. Assistive technology allows students with dyslexia to demonstrate their knowledge and ability by removing their barrier with written language by assisting students to understand the material presented, store and retrieve information and compose responses.

Assistive technology is not being utilised to its full potential in schools. Many teachers lack the training to assist students with the implementation of assistive technology. Most schools do not provide sufficient hardware or suitable software for students. The Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) initiative has a lot of merit but it has selectively adopted by some schools, not all school. Also BYOD favours middle class students and there is no alternative for students in situations of financial hardship.

#### **8. There is very little of provision of adjustments for exams and assessments**

Reasonable adjustments for students with dyslexia may include assistive technology, a personal reader and/or scribe, large format test papers, a separate room, rest breaks and extra time to complete exams. Extra time is critical for students with learning differences to allow for slower reading rates and slower processing speeds. In most cases, requests for reasonable adjustments are either not granted or are insufficient.

#### **9. Students with dyslexia are underachieving**

The current education system is inequitable for students with learning differences to achieve their full potential. Children with dyslexia have so much potential but they have little opportunity to succeed. There are many obstacles such as difficulties with decoding impacting on their comprehension and problems communicating their ideas in writing. As a consequence, a student's result rarely reflects their ability and potential.

#### **10. The Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and the Disability Standards for Education (2005) are not being correctly interpreted or implemented by education providers.**

Parents have to enforce the DDA and DSE to obtain adjustments due to the lack of awareness and understanding in schools. Schools may not be aware of the standards or are unable to interpret them. Schools will ignore or overrule professional recommendations because it is not convenient or it is too onerous to implement them. Many schools will use the excuse that dyslexia is not a 'funded' verified disability to avoid recognising it as a disability.

#### **11. There is a distinct lack of recognition, and often a denial of the existence of dyslexia**

For years, we have had parents advocating in schools and receiving very little assistance for their children. Many parents have even faced denial from schools that dyslexia actually exists. Parents are intimidated by schools and will not question or challenge the school's decision to deny adjustments

and learning support. The source of the problem is that dyslexia and other related learning disorders are not explicitly named or described in the legislation.

## **12. Parents are required to be experts in both education and legislation**

Due to the lack of awareness and understanding, parents have to ensure the standards are enforced to obtain reasonable adjustments for their child. Parent advocates are often the ones to advise schools on accommodations, assistive technology and literacy intervention, as well as advocate for their children's rights under the Disability Discrimination Act and the Disability Standards for Education.

## **13. There is a discrepancy in disability legislation between federal and state departments of education**

According to the National Collection of Consistent Data (NCCD), students with learning differences are in the "cognitive" category of disability. These students are eligible for at least 2 of the 4 adjustment categories - differentiated teaching practice and supplementary adjustments.

In Queensland, dyslexia is an unverified disability and there is no allocated funding.

As a consequence, many parents are told by schools that there is no specialist support available within the school for students with learning differences. There is also resistance with the provision of adjustments.

## **14. There is a variation in the provision of adjustments between states**

Students with the same dyslexia profile will receive different entitlements in different states. A Year 12 student may be granted entitlements for their final exams in Queensland but denied entitlements in South Australia. The state based Testing Administration Authorities are not aligned with each other and not all states adhere to the recommendations provided by ACARA. Most states are very reluctant to grant provisions to Year 12 students for their final exams, even though these students have been receiving provisions throughout their academic life.

## **15. There is variation in the provision of adjustments between schools**

Some schools will understand a student's entitlements and adhere to the standards in the implementation of adjustments. Many schools do not understand how to apply the standards resulting in minimal or no provisions. Some of these schools chose not to provide adjustments as they consider them too difficult or costly to implement.

## **16. The demand by schools for 'formal assessments' and 'diagnosis' is disadvantaging lower socio-economic students and regional/remote students**

Since dyslexia is an unverified disability, it will not be included in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and is not eligible for any subsidies or financial assistance. However, educational institutions expect a 'diagnosis' from an educational psychologist before granting any adjustments. A psychologists report is expensive and this is beyond the financial capacity of most families. For students in regional and remote areas, access to an educational psychologist is very limited and there is the added expense of travel. Even though the Department of Education have educational psychologists that could conduct an assessment, most schools do not utilise these professionals because teachers and schools are unable or unlikely to identify children at risk.

## ***The impact on students and families associated with inadequate levels of support***

### **1. The impact on students associated with inadequate levels of support**

These children are made to feel stupid, lazy and inadequate on a daily basis, often humiliated by teachers and teased by their peers. Students experience feelings of confusion, stress, disappointment, frustration, embarrassment, shame and anxiety on a daily basis. This destroys their self esteem and can lead to the student withdrawing or being disruptive - both the invisible children that try to hide and the troublemakers that act out in class.

After many years of failure, the child will disengage from learning. We are losing bright and capable children to a system that understand and support them.

### **2. The impact on families associated with inadequate levels of support**

Families will experience emotional turmoil with tears of anguish and angry outbursts after a long exhausting day at school. This creates a lot of tension within families, as children vent in the safety of their homes. Many children are so distressed and traumatised by their school experiences that they require a clinical psychologist to assist with anxiety disorders and chronic depression.

Parents outlay large amounts of money to provide the support that does not occur in our schools. A learning assessment with an educational psychologist can cost between \$800 to \$2000. Intervention in literacy and numeracy with a specialist teacher costs \$70 to \$120 per hour. None of this is subsidised under Medicare or can be claimed as a tax deduction - this financial cost is worn solely by families.

Then there is the 'neuromyth' industry that preys on vulnerable parents desperate to assist their child. Many treatments are cleverly marketed using scientific jargon to attract both teachers and parents alike. These are expensive, ineffective and controversial treatments that have no scientific research (evidence) to support their efficacy.

Fortunately Macquarie University Special Education Centre provides MUSEC briefings to inform parents and educators about the evidence base for a variety of educational practices.

[http://www.musec.mq.edu.au/community\\_outreach/musec\\_briefings](http://www.musec.mq.edu.au/community_outreach/musec_briefings)

Sadly, not everyone in our community is aware of this vital information. Many families have wasted both time and money as victims of a false promise for a quick fix or miracle cure.

## ***The social, economic and personal benefits of improving outcomes for students with disability at school and in further education and employment***

Education is an investment in the development of human capital and education has a strong correlation with social development and economic growth.

The negative impact of unidentified and unsupported dyslexia may lead to mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicide. Being deprived of the opportunity to acquire basic literacy skills is a social injustice that can lead to social exclusion, poverty and limited employment opportunities. Some become involved in criminal activities and many studies reveal the

incidence of functional illiteracy is much higher in prison populations than the general public. Unemployment, mental health concerns and incarceration are a significant social and economic cost for Australia.

We need education reform to address the learning needs of students with dyslexia and improve their life prospects. We can no longer afford to turn a blind eye and allow these children to slip through the net in our education system.

***The impact on policies and the education practice as a results of the More Support for Students with Disabilities Program and the impact of the cessation of this program in 2014 on schools and students***

The aim of More Support for Students with Disabilities (MSSD) was to increase the skills and quality of classroom teachers and creating a more inclusive culture in schools.

MSSD activities included:

- Provision of services by health or allied health specialists within a school (e.g. occupational therapy)
- Curriculum differentiation, or making adjustments to the curriculum
- Provision of assistive technology to support students' learning in the classroom
- Develop centres of excellence
- Online professional learning module

<https://education.gov.au/more-support-students-disabilities>

**School autonomy has failed the MSSD initiative.**

The More Support for Students with Disabilities has not had a significant impact in most schools. The time intensive nature of the online courses has not achieved the 'necessary' school wide blanket awareness. Effective teaching strategies for students with dyslexia have not translated into classroom practices. Improving capability development by using teacher aides for intervention may be cost effective, however a student with learning difficulties requires the most skilled educator. Dedicated teachers that have completed online training have had little impact due to limited resources and inadequate support.

The impact of the MSSD programs varies between schools. Some schools have capitalised on this initiative with uptake of the online training and implementing change within their schools. Robina State School has had every teacher complete the online training in 'Understanding Dyslexia and Significant Reading Difficulties.' The whole school has adopted best practices to support students with dyslexia including evidence based teaching with classroom accommodations, assistive technology, adjustments for assessment and tiered intervention for both literacy and numeracy. Sadly, these enlightened and proactive schools are few and far between. These schools, despite their best efforts, have a limited capacity to offer tiered intervention to students identified with learning difficulties due to no allocated funding for students with dyslexia.



## **The Queensland Context**

According to MSSD Evaluation Progress Report 3 “DETEQ is working to ensure that implementation does not occur in ‘silos’ so that the medium- to long-term sustainability of the initiative is assured.”

The National Partnership in Queensland claims that regional implementation teams have successfully engaged 97% of Queensland state schools with 31.000 staff participating in programs.

<http://education.qld.gov.au/studentservices/learning/disability-partnership/>

However, it appears we still have Queensland schools operating as isolated silos. Most parents of students with dyslexia have found MSSD had a negligible impact on their school’s ability to cater for students with dyslexia.

The focus in Queensland has been on Autism Spectrum Disorder with scholarships for teachers and school leaders for post graduate study in Autism Spectrum Disorder and the establishment of two Centres of Expertise in ASD.

## ***The progress of the implementation of the needs-based funding system as stated in the Australian Education Act***

The intention of the Australian Education Act (AEA) is to ensure that all Australian students have access to a high-quality education. Needs-based funding includes additional and targeted assistance to disadvantaged students (students from low socio-economic backgrounds, students with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and students in regional and remote areas) via School Resource Standard (SRS) loadings.

Commonwealth funding is made through lump sum payments to the states and territories which is distributed to the Government, Catholic and Independent education authorities. That means we currently have 24 different models for needs based funding in Australia.

## **The current legislation allows discrimination against students with dyslexia by education authorities and schools.**

The source of the problem is inconsistency between national and state criteria for disability funding.

At the federal level, the term ‘student who is a person with a disability’ is linked to the definition of ‘disability’ in the Disability Discrimination Act – this definition includes students with dyslexia.

At the state and territory level, they apply the term ‘student with disability’ used to determine the student with disability loading and this is the basis of the Australian Education Act (2013) – this definition as applied by the states and territories is used to exclude students with dyslexia from SRS disability loading.

<http://aeaguide.education.gov.au/>

As I see it, our states and territories are in breach of the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and Disability Standards for Education (2005) by excluding students with dyslexia and related learning differences from their ‘student with disability’ criteria that determine SRS disability loadings.



All schools must comply with the Disability Standards for Education 2005 under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. However, schools can avoid complying with the Standards where it would cause 'unjustifiable hardship'. This means that a school can legally discriminate against a student with a disability if the cost of providing the support for that student is so high or 'unfair' that the school cannot do it. So when schools tell our parents they can't afford intervention, their discrimination is protected under the legislation.

### **The Queensland context**

Discrimination occurs based on the distinction of 'verified' and 'unverified' disabilities.

Verification is the process of confirming that a student's identified impairment and the associated activity limitations and participation restrictions which require **significant** education adjustments meet criteria for one or more of the six EAP categories.

- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Hearing Impairment
- Intellectual Disability
- Physical Impairment
- Speech-Language Impairment
- Vision Impairment.

<http://education.qld.gov.au/students/disabilities/adjustment/>

Learning disabilities are considered 'unverified' and attracted no additional funding. According to the DETEQ website for learning and reading difficulties:

"Schools support students by using differentiated teaching practice, assistive technology, and where necessary, focused and intensive teaching. Some examples of learning disability are dyslexia, central auditory processing disorder, language learning disability, developmental coordination disorder, dyscalculia, dyspraxia and attention deficit disorder. The school does NOT need a formal diagnosis of a learning disability to provide students with support. Schools identify and respond to learning needs regardless of cause, through ongoing monitoring and assessment of student progress. "

<http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/disability/learning-reading-difficulties.html>

Schools are using the unfunded and financial hardship cases to deny students appropriate support.

"We have not got enough funding to provide tiered intervention.... providing reasonable adjustments such as a reader or scribe is too expensive... we use teacher aides for specialist intervention because it is more cost effective.... we cannot afford sufficient assistive technology" Unfortunately, current legislation empowers schools to discriminate against students with learning difficulties.

### **Disability loading is not determined in consultation with advocacy groups**

Disability loading based on actual student need and must happen in close consultation with advocacy groups. Essential this practice does not occur.

As a member of Speld Qld, the Australian Dyslexia Association and Learning Difficulties Australia, I am aware that none of these associations have been consulted regarding disability loadings for students with dyslexia.

While we have legislation that enables dyslexia discrimination by state and territory education authorities to allow the denial of disability loadings, perhaps consultation with advocacy groups is considered unnecessary?

***The progress of the National Collection of Consistent Data on school students with disability and the findings, recommendations and outcomes from this process***

The National Collection of Consistent Data (NCCD) is intended to count the number of students with disability in a consistent manner across Australia and counteract discrepancies between the states and territories. The intention is to assist schools to identify and to support students with disability so they can access and participate in education on the same basis as their peers.

The model for the national data collection on students with disability consists of four steps.

1. Determining which students are receiving reasonable adjustments to access education because of disability, consistent with definitions and obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) and Disability Standards for Education 2005.

The definition includes:

- students who have formally diagnosed disability by a health or allied health practitioner
- students who may not have a formal disability diagnosis but have impairment that requires an adjustment
- students with intellectual, physical, sensory and social/emotional disability as well as students with difficulties in learning or behaviour due to disability
- students who are gifted and talented and who are impacted by disability.

Firstly, students with dyslexia are included in the definition as “students with difficulties in learning”.

2. Determining what level of adjustment is being provided to each of these students across four adjustment categories:
  - Support provided within quality differentiated teaching practice
  - Supplementary adjustment
  - Substantial adjustment
  - Extensive adjustment

Students with dyslexia and related learning differences are eligible for at least 2 of the 4 adjustment categories - differentiated teaching practice and supplementary adjustments.

3. Determining the broad category of disability under which each student best fits of four categories:
  - physical
  - cognitive
  - sensory
  - social/emotional

Students with dyslexia and related learning differences are in the “cognitive” category of disability.

#### 4. Recording and submitting the data

The school principal is responsible for verifying that there is evidence to support the inclusion of these students in the national data collection. It is important the school maintains and stores accurate, up-to-date records. The NCCD requires consultation regarding the provision of adjustments. A student is counted in the data collection when there is ‘evidence’ of the school consulting with the student and/or their parents to determine the reasonable adjustments to be provided.

<http://www.schooldisabilitydatapl.edu.au/>

The NCCD should provide the evidence base to inform the distribution of the funding loading for students with disability based on student need under the DDA and the Standards.

Finally the NCCD provides formal recognition and inclusion of students with dyslexia. These students are no longer the forgotten learning disability and for the first time they have an opportunity to receive appropriate instruction and adjustments they are entitled to.

#### **A widespread lack of understanding of dyslexia in our education system may lead to many children at risk not being included in the NCCD.**

We currently have schools in Australia that claim to have no students with dyslexia. We also have teachers that believe after 20 years in education they have never taught a student with dyslexia. These are not isolated comments and one has little faith in the ability of our educators to identify a child at risk of reading difficulties.

#### **Parents are not actively included in the consultation process to determine the provision of adjustments**

According to a report by the Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth for the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau, parents play a critical role in a child’s education. They provide learning opportunities at home and connect what children learn at school with what happens elsewhere. By participating in and facilitating diverse learning experiences and activities outside the school, parents become an important factor in children’s overall learning and education.

[http://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download\\_file/id/7/filename/Parental\\_engagement\\_in\\_learning\\_and\\_schooling\\_Lessons\\_from\\_research\\_BUREAU\\_ARACY\\_August\\_2012.pdf](http://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/7/filename/Parental_engagement_in_learning_and_schooling_Lessons_from_research_BUREAU_ARACY_August_2012.pdf)

Parent and caregivers are often best informed to guide schools but they are not being included in the consultation process regarding the provision of adjustments. Many schools are opting to just provide notification that students will be included in the NCCD.

#### **Schools and teachers are not adequately resourced to meet the requirements of the NCCD**

Our teachers need access to evidence based programs, in-class support and assistive technology to implement individual learning plans. Our schools need to have the resources to provide teachers with the necessary support.

The Australian Education Union 2015 State of Our Schools survey found

- 84% of principals said they have they needed to reallocate funds from other areas to assist children with a disability at their school because they are ineligible for funding or don't get enough
- 79% reported not having enough resources to meet the needs of students with disability
- 63% of teachers said that they did not get the training they needed to properly teach students with disability.

When respondents were asked what they needed, the top four responses were:

- assistance for teachers in the classroom – 82%;
- specialist support – 56%;
- funding to pay for the professional development of classroom teachers – 56%
- dedicated programs – 45%

<http://www.schoolgovernance.net.au/2015/03/26/schools-lack-resources-to-teach-disabled-students/>

**Recommendation: Tiered model of disability loading base on the degree of impact on learning and the level of adjustment required.**

The findings from the National Data Collection will influence disability funding for schools.

Even though students with learning differences are included in the NCCD, current legislation allows state and territory education authorities to deny disability loading to students with learning differences.

Every child has the right to a quality education and schools must be adequately resourced to support students with dyslexia. This means schools need to receive SRS disability loading to provide differentiated instruction, supplementary adjustments and tiered intervention.

Dyslexia is a high incidence but considered a lower impact disability. The potential higher occurrence does not mean it should be excluded from receiving funding. Even though the needs of a child with dyslexia may not be as costly as a physical or intellectual impairment, there is still a need for specialist teaching and learning support to ensure these children receive an appropriate education.

Student with disability loading is paid in respect of each student with a disability. Currently disability loading is calculated at a flat rate of 186% SRS, irrespective of the impact of the disability.

<http://aeaguide.education.gov.au/>

The NCCD is an opportunity to introduce tiered disability loading based on the extent of impact the disability has on learning and the level of specialist instruction and adjustments required to support the student. A low incidence, high impact disability will receive a higher rate of disability loading compared to a high incidence, low impact disability.

## ***What should be done to better support students with dyslexia in our schools?***

### **Tiered model of intervention**

Tiered intervention has three levels of instruction which is responsive to the student's needs based upon research-based interventions.

Tier 1 – high quality evidence-based classroom instruction for all students.

Tier 2 – additional small group early intervention for children identified 'at risk' of difficulties.

Tier 3 – intensive individual intervention for students with severe and persistent difficulties.

### **Evidence based reading instruction**

Research supports an explicit and structured approach to the teaching of reading with instruction in phonology (phonological and phonemic awareness), sound-symbol associations (letter-sound correspondences), as well as syllable structures, morphology, syntax and semantics.

<https://www.ldaustralia.org/client/documents/LDA%20Position%20Statement.pdf>

The Big 6 of Reading includes oral language, phonemic awareness, structured synthetic phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.

<http://www.appa.asn.au/big6articles.php>

### **Targeted teaching**

Explicit instruction is a systematic method for presenting learning material in small steps (explain, demonstrate worked examples, guided practice then independent practice) while checking for student understanding. Research indicates this is the most effective teaching practice to maximise progress and achievement of ALL students. It caters for individual differences among students through different entry points, reinforcement, opportunity for practice, and corrective feedback.

[http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=learning\\_processes](http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=learning_processes)

Multisensory learning involves the use of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic-tactile pathways simultaneously to enhance memory and learning of written language. Links are consistently made between the visual (language we see), auditory (language we hear), and kinesthetic-tactile (language symbols we feel) pathways in learning to read and spell.

<http://eida.org/multisensory-structured-language-teaching/>

Differentiated teaching – use a range of teaching strategies and learning experiences to cater for individual needs

Focussed teaching – providing additional classroom support using explicit instruction and scaffolded learning to consolidate prior learning and to present key concepts and skills

Inclusive practices – recognise the differences among learners and ensure no one is excluded.

Universal Design – designing the curriculum, learning materials and instruction methods to be accessible to all learners with different abilities.

### **The provision of classroom accommodations**

- Simple, clear and concise verbal instructions
- Demonstrate examples of what is required
- Don't give too many instructions, too fast
- Proactively monitor for understanding
- Rephrase if the child does not understand or remember
- Encourage questions
- Be prepared to repeat instructions
- Be patient with mistakes and requests for help
- Break tasks up into small manageable steps
- Allow extra time to complete their work
- Emphasize major ideas
- Restate important points
- Support explanations with a visual display such as diagrams, concept maps or flow charts
- Give lots of positive feedback for effort and application

<http://eida.org/dyslexia-in-the-classroom/>

### **Access to assistive technology**

Assistive technology is defined as hardware, software and applications designed to assist students with learning disabilities. Assistive technology can assist students understand the material presented, store information and composes responses.

Assistive technology can:

- Increase independence and minimise students need to seek help
- Improve speed and accuracy of work
- Reinforce effective classroom instruction
- Strengthen skill development in literacy and numeracy
- Help students cope with classroom learning and routines
- Empower and motivate students
- Reduce stress and frustration experienced by students

### **Reasonable adjustments for assessments**

Adjustments provide students with disabilities an opportunity to participate in education *on the same basis* as student peers without the disability.

Suggested Disability Provisions for Assessments:

- Additional time
- Separate venue
- Rest breaks or split sessions
- Use of a reader
- Use of a scribe
- Access to assistive technology
- Alternative formats
- Present information in a range of media

- Alternative assessment methods - oral assessments as alternatives to written tasks
- Use generic terms and inclusive language when constructing assessment tasks

### **Teacher Training**

Pre-service and in-service teacher training for a better awareness and understanding of:

- Explicit and multisensory instruction
- Evidence based teaching methods
- Identifying and supporting the range of learning differences in a classroom
- The importance of early identification and early intervention for students 'at risk'.
- The provision of targeted teaching to students with learning differences
- The implementation of appropriate adjustments for students with learning differences
- The tiered model of intervention for students with learning differences

### **Specialist Associations**

Financial support for valuable services provided by not-for-profit associations to provide valuable information and support:

- Telephone advisory lines
- Workshops for parents and students
- Professional development for teachers and schools
- Information from resources and publications

The inclusion of not-for-profit associations in policy development, professional learning and advocacy – SPELD, Australian Dyslexia Association, Learning Difficulties Australia

### ***The early education of children with dyslexia***

The primary difficulty experienced by children with dyslexia involves problems in learning to accurately and fluently identify words in their printed form. This difficulty is caused by a phonological deficit (processing speech sounds in words) combined with problems understanding letter-sound relationships (phonics)

Early recognition and treatment of weaknesses in phonological awareness and sound-symbol correspondences are an important step in the prevention of reading problems in the child who is at risk of dyslexia.

### **Early Identification**

Dyslexia can be identified with 92% accuracy at age 5 ½ years old (National Institute of Child Health and Development, 1998). Indicators to accurately identify young children at risk:

- Phonemic awareness (the ability to process the individual sounds within words)
- Knowledge of letter names and sounds
- Rapid automatic naming (the speed of lexical retrieval for naming of objects, colours, numbers, and letters).



## **Early Intervention**

Children at risk of reading failure learn to read when they are provided with systematic, explicit and intensive instruction in phonemic awareness and synthetic phonics in the early years of school.

Early intervention to develop phonemic awareness and letter-sound correspondences allow children to acquire the knowledge and strategies necessary for decoding (reading) and encoding (spelling). This enables children to understand the alphabetic principle and grasp the way letters (graphemes) represent sounds (phonemes) in words.

## **The Importance of Early, Early, Early**

EARLY prevention, EARLY identification and EARLY intervention significantly reduce the number of children with reading difficulties. A weakness in early decoding skills impacts on the development of fluent word reading, vocabulary and comprehension.

Research conducted by Linda Siegel identified 23.8% of kindergarten children were 'at risk' of reading difficulties. With appropriate evidence based early intervention, only 5% of the children still had reading difficulties at the end of Grade 1, and by Grade 6 that number was reduced to 1.5%. (Lesaux, N. K. and Siegel, L. S. 2003 Developmental Psychology, 39, 1005-1019). The results of this study show that it is possible to detect the children who are at risk for reading difficulties early and provide an effective classroom based intervention to help most of these children. Early intervention is less expensive since it is taught by teachers as part of reading instruction done in the classroom.

Research conducted by Sally and Bennett Shaywitz using functional MRIs demonstrated early phonological-based intervention facilitated the development of neural pathways required for skilled reading. Evidence based intervention increased activation in the left hemisphere (including the interior frontal gyrus and parieto-temporal regions), the brain regions that correlate to improvements in word reading fluency. Intervention was optimum before the age of 8 years old. (Shaywitz et al 2003 Development of left occipitotemporal systems for skilled reading in children after a phonologically- based intervention).

Early intervention allows students to get help before reading problems become entrenched. Once there is a gap, it is very hard to close. 74 percent of poor readers in Grade 3 remain poor readers in Grade 9 (Francise et al 1996).

Early reading failure can have damage a child's self-esteem which can have a negative lifelong impact. The lost and wasted potential of the bright dynamic young people should no longer be ignored.

## **Appendix 1 – Submissions from individual members of the Gold Coast Dyslexia Support Group**

### ***Current levels of access and attainment for students with disability in the school system and the impact on students and families associated with inadequate levels of support***

***Claire***



I look at this picture of you as a 4 year old daughter and I see all of the hopefulness in your eyes and I would often ask you “What do you want to be when you grow up?” and you would say “a policewoman mummy.....so I can throw all the baddies into jail” and I laugh and think to myself you can be whatever you want to be.

You started kindergarten with the bravery and curiosity of all the rest. But by 7 or 8 or 9 years old, after years of struggling with what seems to come naturally to the others, after years of holding your head up anyway and trying so hard without success, you seem removed. Separate. You realize this place is not for you. School is not for you.

Your pride is at risk and you must preserve what little self-esteem you have..... you memorise things, avoid reading in class, act the class clown to protect yourself from the reality that you cannot read, .....but you are constantly surrounded by the printed word... text messages, emails, magazines, internet, books and exams..... it is a constant reminder.

I would often think about you walking along the corridors of school, when you were 5 and 6. I can hear you laughing and talking. There is a peace in your voice and an eagerness about being at school.

Then I see you at 8 years old and I wonder when it all changed for you? I will tell the teachers constantly, I think you are dyslexic- you do not seem to be learning letters or sounds-and they all said “we don’t use the “D” word and it will all click for her, you wait and see”..... and I would think to myself, these were the professionals, they should know.

But you were heading down the same path as almost every dyslexic kid before you. An eventual label of dyslexia was stamped on your file after I had you assessed. The diagnosis was one thing, but the real battle was about to start.

You and I became a team as we go down a path of tutor after tutor after tutor, trying SPELD, the Davis dyslexia program, neuro-feedback sessions, counselling and testing for glasses/tinted lenses etc. And you look at me.... Tired..... “Mum, what on earth are you taking me to now”??

Teenage years, and the ensuing battle for you to get to school each day. After years of being brave and strong, the overwhelming feelings of anxiety and depression kick in which adds to these layers of struggle and we fight to keep this at bay. Your teacher calls me wondering why you are not at school today, why homework has not been completed, why the book has not been read, some teachers just want to pass you on to the next year level, not a clue how to help and work with you. There are others that are very eager to help but these are few.

It's a confronting moment when you realize the system is not for your child. It's a confronting moment when you realize that no matter how hard you try and no matter how hard the special education team is trying, school is structured in a way to benefit one type of child with one type of mind and abilities.

I get small glimpses of what it is like for you at school and what it must be like to sit an exam and sporadically colour in the multiple choice answers, because you cannot read the questions. Asking what is on the board (embarrassed) and about how you don't have any reading jobs and you want reading jobs because all of the other kids have them, and all you ever wanted was to read "chapter" books. Signing forms that you are not sure what they are all about, not sure how to spell the street name that we live in when completing the plethora of forms that you will be asked to complete over a lifetime.

I consider taking you out of school to learn in other ways, but I do not know how to teach a dyslexic child to read.

So I send you off to year 10, trying to make sure you are not one more casualty, one more bright, capable mind slipping through the cracks, moved onto become next year's problem, passed on because nobody quite knows what to do. Everybody is trying, but the system is not meant for kids like you.

I tell you that you are smart, creative, funny.....but you are in an environment every day that does not always recognise this.

I drop you off at school each day and you get out of the car, and you walk bravely ahead, alone. I think about you sitting there watching the teacher write on the board. Maybe the other kids start writing right away, answering her question, responding "as they should." Maybe hands shoot in the air. And I wonder what you're thinking in those moments?

As we head towards the business end of your schooling life, I ponder can a bright, capable mind such as yours, actually achieve whatever you want to be? Can the current Victorian schooling system that currently does not facilitate and support a person with dyslexia, become a nurse, or a vet .....or a policewoman so you can "throw all of the baddies into jail"?

The early childhood development years are almost past. What is the future for a caring, intelligent, nurturing child whose only difficulty is the written word? How can you become the nurse or the vet that your heart desires? How can a teenager with intelligence and compassion achieve the goals that she covets simply because she is dyslexic and is tormented by the written word. I feel we have explored many avenues for assistance but there are many dead ends. How many other children continue to run out of options and optimism? My daughter is bright, active, nurturing and has a great ability to work with and care for people and creatures in need.

As Albert Einstein- "Everyone is smart, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will spend its entire life believing it is stupid?" What more can be done to enable her to climb her tree?

***Name Withheld***

The Principal told me less than 2 years ago that 'dyslexia - Isn't that the new ADHD and I don't know of any schools doing anything about dyslexia' (so I enlightened him). It has been years of banging my head against a brick wall and watching my twins with dyslexia struggle and have to do so much extra work outside of school. We have done every test that they have mentioned and we've been promised so much, but the school goes about it in the wrong way. These days when I meet with the new teacher each year and they ask what they want me to do I say, please be nice to them and they usually shrug in response and say of course. But we haven't always had that, some teachers are fantastic and some are noxious. I ask them to try not to shove my little square blocks through their round educational holes, as the corners are what make them who they are.

I know others are having the same issues as I have people come up to me on a regular basis and say "You don't know me but I was told to come and talk to you by....so and so. What do I do...?"

This year the principal employed a lot of 'Master Teachers' to teach the teachers, but cut the Teacher Aides time. So the teachers don't get help in the classroom, which means the kids don't get as much help either. The teacher who is most trained and has the most expertise should assist the kids that struggle the most and the Teacher aides should help the other ones. They should be drafted into times with the most challenging subjects. That is not rocket science.

One of my twins cries every Sunday night at the thought of going to school on Monday and is only in grade 4. She literally gets down on her knees and begs us to not make her go. I cry as much as she does these days and I'm actually crying now as I type this at the thought of it. She ticks all the boxes on the anxiety and depression scale and we now have more professionals to add to the ever expanding team.

I have also have an older child who has had Leukaemia twice (and is now doing well). The second time we spent the best part of 7 months in hospital and she had Total Body Irradiation with a Cranial Boost and toxic chemotherapy as part of a Bone Marrow Transplant. When you're child has cancer, the wonderful medical team in a public hospital has a plan and a strategy to treat the cancer. They do a brilliant job. They know what to do. I cannot say the same for the handling of dyslexia and specific learning disorders in schools. These learning difficulties may not life threatening but the stress created, the flow on emotional problems and private costs the family must endure is so incredibly frustrating, traumatising and exhausting. The statistics of the literacy rates of jail inmates around the world must surely make you want make changes. It's terrifying for the parents. What about the families that cannot afford a Speech Pathologist, or tutor? What about the parents that are dyslexic themselves and cannot help their own kids? Good grief.

We currently send all three of our girls to a Speech Pathologist, two have dyslexia and the other one has missed nearly two years of school.

The teachers need to know how to accommodate these kids as part of the curriculum. No note taking by hand, or writing out drafts etc. Technology, technology, technology. There should be an amplification system in every classroom in every school for those kids with Auditory Processing problems, diagnosed or not - it will help improve Auditory Processing until the age of 16. I've heard wonderful things about Universities, and TAFE colleges offering subjects to high school students. We need to tap into this. There needs to be a mentoring program for teachers and for the kids. We need to change the curriculum in Universities so our new teachers teach our kids better. The

Learning Support should be evidence based and allow differences in teaching that still meet the criteria. Have a lunch time learning club for those that are struggling socially, emotionally and with the education so they have somewhere to retreat. Use audio books, no group reading, Buddy reading, peer reading, reading to preps etc. Let them record oral presentations rather than delivering them in person. Little things make a huge difference.

Please make changes to encourage schools, if not enforce them to make the lives of the individuals, their families and their teachers better.

### ***Jane***

In year 3, my daughter was diagnosed with dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia. Since her diagnoses we have attempted to work with her teachers, and to elicit from the school the support she needs, with very little success.

In year 3 we made her teacher aware of the diagnoses, circulated the report to the school, and requested an individual education plan to take account of her disability - a standard procedure after such a diagnosis. While this was not actually refused, it never happened and our persistence eventually gave out. On advice from SPELD and the specialist who diagnosed her we bought her a laptop and appropriate assistive software. Lily was so excited at this as she thought it would solve all her problems. Trusting the teachers to do their jobs as professionals, we thought it would, too, or at the very least we would be informed of her progress and that we could work with the teacher to help her along. She was never given any assistance to learn to use this technology in class or asked to use it at home, and though iPads were promised, they never materialised. The most support that was ever given to her was one of her contemporaries scribing for her on two occasions, to her humiliation. Through a succession of 4 relief teachers in term 1 of that year, no attempts were made to accommodate her disability despite our attempts to explain how she learned and the adjustments that she needed. Lily attempted to advocate for herself, something no 7 year old should have to do, by asking for pictures to help her organise her thoughts. This was ignored.

In year 4 we again made the teacher aware of her disability and asked for appropriate adjustments to be made. As far as we were aware, none were forthcoming. Lily was forced to read (she had difficulty tracking, sounding out and deciphering letters) to write (she has dysgraphia which means she has enormous trouble translating her ideas from her head to her hand) and to do the same maths as the class (she has dyscalculia which means she is, among other things, unable to keep a maths equation in her head long enough to work it out. She still reverses numbers). Perhaps you can imagine what effect this had, and still has on her well-being and self esteem.

When her year 4 teacher left suddenly at the end of the term, we met with the 2 teachers who were to take over the class. While they were sympathetic, they did not read any of the literature we gave them on appropriate class adjustments, or implement them. They did not read her report either.

One of the teachers, who was also the Special Education teacher at the time, questioned her diagnosis and said that he had seen no evidence of dyslexia. The school also lost her report. We are aware that Special Education teachers are given only one week's training in dyslexia and are angry at the teacher's presumption to challenge a diagnoses made by a specialist in that area. My husband's recollection is that he actually went so far as to say that dyslexia does not exist. It does and is widely documented.

We met with the school psychologist and principal to try to get support for her that year. The response was, and I quote 'there are kids here worse off than your daughter' and a request to do yet more testing. At this stage Lily had undergone the tests on her physical and cognitive development and tests from a behavioural psychologist. We did not see how further testing would help her, given that the evidence from other professionals was clear. We had seen no change in the classroom delivery, and refused, as we felt she had been through enough. Plus we wished to see more proactivity from the school in actually helping her. No further support, guidance or assistance has been made available from us from the school psychologist since then, more than 3 years ago.

In year 5 she was given a history assignment, using printed cards with complicated vocabulary and tiny font, which she was required to independently read, analyse and write about - something no dyslexic child should ever have to do. When we questioned this, it was blamed on the teacher who gave it to her. Why was she not informed of Lily's disability? Consequently, Lily now hates history.

Lily struggled along with her 2 teachers in years 4 and 5, sometimes achieving but mostly failing. Throughout, her resilience, patience and stoicism in a situation where she fails at almost every task she attempts, have never failed to win our admiration.

I have on two occasions and each time at the previous principals request sent educational material from SPELD and my own research, to be distributed throughout the staff in order to achieve a greater understanding not just of Lily's disability but to help teachers recognise the undiagnosed dyslexics they may have in their class and understand how to engage them. Since I found out about her condition 4 years ago I have educated myself on the condition and on managing it in the classroom. Teachers at her brother's high school (he is also dyslexic) have taken the information on board and changed their method of delivery with great success, as have teachers in the 'dyslexic-friendly' schools such as Samford State School. I have also offered to make myself available to talk to the staff about my experience, and sent SPELD workshop material to the principal. Nothing has been done as a result of this, despite promises.

This year we have met and spoken with her class teacher on many, many occasions, both with and without the principal present. We have courteously and amicably explained her disability and the required classroom adjustments needed for her to learn. We have given literature that explains Lily's condition, how she learns, and how to make the necessary classroom adjustments to support her, to him. We have said, repeatedly, that we are available to meet and support Lily in whatever way the teacher feels is appropriate. We have treated this year's and all other year's teachers with courtesy and professionalism, wishing to work positively rather than adversely with them and trusting them to do their jobs as professionals and support her. And yet we are now at the beginning of term 3, after 4 years, and nothing has changed. She has come home extremely angry, stressed, frightened and frustrated every day since the start of term. She says that her teacher has told her that 'there won't be any help for you at high school'. In fact, the school we have chosen for her makes a point of supporting its students and has a well resourced learning support centre; they are also aware and supportive of dyslexia as a disability. She has said her teacher has told her that this work is 'easy' and that he can't understand why she can't do it. It is NOT easy for her, and it is not her fault if he is unable to understand how she learns. She has not been given any extra time, or help, or extra assistance, or scribing, or assistive technologies, (all things that are her right to receive by law) or anything at all, to help her complete her work. Consequently we are, yet again, dealing with a frightened, angry, humiliated, frustrated child who thinks she is stupid. She isn't.



Lily is frightened of her teacher's manner which she sees as him being always angry with her. She says that he rushes her and never explains things properly, and gets angry if she asks for help from other students or asks him to explain something again. He says he is just being firm, however it is Lily's perception that is important here. She is unable to learn while she is under this much stress. She needs time to work things out, simplified instructions, a gentler manner and encouragement. While we are sure her teacher's intentions are good, as we have talked to him several times about this, he has not changed either his manner towards Lily or his method of instructing her to any great degree that we can see. We have observed that he, like the other teachers she has had, is sticking with a 'one-size-fits-all' delivery which is patently unsuitable for a child with Lily's disability. As stated we have given him Lily's reports and also some literature on dyslexia and said that we are available to explain more to him if required but as far as we can see this has not been pursued; at least we have not been contacted and Lily remains stressed and unable to learn.

We requested earlier in the year that she be moved to Miss Hamilton's class, as we understand that she is more sympathetic and willing to give children who need it time to work things out. This was refused.

We have at our own considerable expense secured tutoring for Lily in english and maths last term. The progress she has made has been enormous. Her maths tutor has diagnosed her maths development as being at year 3 level. After 4 years she has made no progress at all.

We are extremely angry and frustrated at the damage that this lack of will to help Lily and 4 years of mismanagement of her disability has done. We have seen no evidence from the school whatsoever of willingness to either understand her dyslexia, or accommodate it, or even see it as a disability.

Rather, there is an across the board ignoring of the evidence pertaining to her condition. From our experience we are unable to share your view of the commitment of the staff to the student's wellbeing and learning, as this has not been the case for us. If any of the teachers in the school had taken the trouble to read her report and any of the information I have circulated, and/or to discuss it with us, they would understand the damage their ill-informed approach has done to Lily. Their encouragement of 'just try harder, you will get it' is in parallel to asking a one-handed child to 'try harder' to knit.

The failure of the school to even attempt to meet Lily's needs is in direct contravention of both the Disability Discrimination Act, and Education Queensland's policy on the treatment of children with a learning disability.

Many times we have asked Lily if she would like to move schools. It is a credit to her resilience and her social and musical skills (another difficult journey) that she has said she would like to stay with her friends.

We feel that we have been more than patient with the school and that too much emphasis has been placed on working collaboratively with teachers, to no avail, and that Lily has suffered enormously both educationally and emotionally as a result.

Assistive technology, alternative format material and special provisions for assessment are listed as strategies among others for teachers to follow when managing these disabilities. These strategies should automatically form part of Lily's teachers' delivery of the curriculum, and that is what we are trying to achieve, and we have to be honest and say we do not feel that this has been adequately recognised or dealt with.



From our research we know that recognising and managing dyslexia does not currently form part of teacher training in Queensland, and that even Special Education teachers are given only a basic understanding of the condition. We have also observed that most teachers are unaware that dyslexia is a recognised disability under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, and thus not aware of their legal obligations in this regard.

While we understand that there are other students requiring learning support in the school, from our point of view they may or may not have a formal diagnosis. Lily does and thus is entitled under the law to receive reasonable adjustments in the way the curriculum is delivered to her and with appropriate support in all classes. Her dyslexia has not been recognised in the way that physical disabilities, which are more visible, have been, by the school. We would be surprised and disappointed if the school expected a physically disabled child to manage their disability in that way that Lily has been expected to manage hers, by simply 'trying harder' or 'applying herself more diligently'. The law that recognises and supports a physically disabled student is the same for a cognitively disabled one and that is where the problem lies from our point of view.

A change in culture at the school, from eye-rolling at the mention of dyslexia to actually acknowledging its place as a registered disability under the law and making appropriate adjustments, will help not only Lily, but also other students with similar disabilities, diagnosed or not. On average, the research has found that 1 in 5 or between 20-25% of all students in every class are on the continuum for dyslexia. Further, it is widely stated in the literature that accommodating dyslexic students will not disadvantage other students in the class and may help students with other conditions such as ADD, ADHD, and Aspergers.

This is not a discretionary issue, it is a legal rights one and needs to be resolved. We are really at the point where we are out of patience and are not willing to wait any longer to rescue Lily from further damage and give her the support to which she is entitled under the law.

### **Karen**

Our journey with Dyslexia started in Prep, when our son and only child, was trying to learn his 'sight words'. It was such a struggle and he could just not remember them from one day to the next. We would spend ages learning them one day and then the very next day, it was as if he was seeing those same words for the very first time! My gut feeling was telling me there was something not right, but when I spoke with his teacher, she said "it will all "click" one day, he just needs to unlock the "code". I then asked – "Do you think he has Dyslexia?" Her response – "No, but maybe he has auditory processing disorder." I had never heard of that term. I have since discovered that Auditory Processing Disorder falls under the Dyslexia umbrella.

So we struggled on into Grade 1. At this stage, the other kids were really starting to read and write. Our son was just not getting it. He still couldn't remember his 'sight words' and was struggling to read, let alone write. This is when the situation really started to affect his self esteem, because he could see his peers progressing and he felt like he was the only one who couldn't learn how to read and write. There would be tears and school refusal issues on a daily basis. He didn't know what was wrong with him and neither did we. His teacher didn't understand him and the school didn't give him the early intervention or support that he needed. His teacher did not manage the negative reaction of his peers well and he felt alone, very confused and stupid.

We couldn't continue on like this day in, day out, so at age 7 and in Year 1, we decided to spend the \$600 to have him assessed for Dyslexia through QLD Speld. This was despite being told by the school, not to waste our money. It was the best thing we did, because we understood that he had Dyslexia, the extent of it and his areas of weakness. It also provided us with recommendations for his education. I also believe having had him assessed at this age prevented long term issues with anxiety. I passed this report onto the school, but there was very little response. I don't believe they knew what to do with it.

Having our son assessed allowed me to go on a journey of self-education. I have learnt so much from the Gold Coast Dyslexia Support Group and other Dyslexia Support Groups. I have had to become an advocate for my child's condition and have passed on information on Dyslexia to his teachers and learning support teachers. Many teachers generally have very little awareness of Dyslexia and in some cases don't believe there is such a condition. Schools don't provide any early screening for Dyslexia. There is a lack of awareness on how to best teach Dyslexic children. Sometimes schools refuse to make adjustments to their schoolwork or to provide accommodations to make the learning "playing field" more even. They need to recognize that these children learn differently, but are still intelligent and are capable of learning.

I will never forget a comment from our son's Year 2 teacher at our 'start of year' parent/teacher meeting. She had been teaching for over 30 years and she said to me "I have never taught a dyslexic child". I was so shocked, as I knew that between 10 – 20 % of all children are Dyslexic. It highlighted to me the lack of understanding of dyslexia in the education system.

This teacher turned out to be so wonderfully supportive and encouraging towards our son. She was open to receiving information regarding Dyslexia and happily made adjustments & accommodations to his schoolwork. She would test him verbally to determine his comprehension or understanding and give him longer to process the information. She would read the questions to him in Maths, Science and other subjects. She was even able to get him to start to write about topics that he was interested in. With her help and our support & understanding at home, our son's self esteem improved dramatically. During Year 2, the school engaged a Speech Therapist to assist Grade 1 students, who were struggling with learning the basics of literacy. As we had the Assessment report, which showed that our son had moderate Dyslexia, he was able to be part of this program and for approximately 18 months, I accompanied my son to see the Speech Therapist at school for short 15 – 30 min sessions once a week. I then followed the program at home with him and there were regular sessions of this program were followed within his class. This explicit multi-sensory teaching provided him with strategies to help him read and write.

Our son is now almost 10 and in Grade 4. Despite this intervention, he is still well below his class in reading, spelling and writing, although he is progressing and learning. Fortunately, he is now a very happy, imaginative, resilient and popular child. He attends a weekly tutoring session with a specialist Speld teacher. We are fortunate to be able to pay for this, in addition to school fees at a private school, but for many parents this option is simply out of reach. Whilst we are happy to pay for this, it does mean making sacrifices in other areas. We are just starting to experiment with Assistive Technology in the classroom and whilst the school is receptive to using it, there is a general lack of awareness on how best to use this to help our son. I need to be a pro-active partner to his teachers to ensure he is able to learn to the best of his ability.

Dyslexia is not a lack of intelligence but a lack of access. Our children are bright, but they are not getting full access to the curriculum. They require understanding, accommodations and assistive

technology. Most importantly, they need extra time to read and process information. They need adjustments to demonstrate what they know and to perform to their true potential. I don't think it is unreasonable to expect a school to acknowledge my child's learning difficulty and to provide the support and assistance they need. We need the education system to have a greater awareness of what Dyslexia is and teachers need to be trained in how best to educate these children. There needs to be early screening and intervention. There are so many simple changes that can be made within the education system, that don't need a lot of funding and our dyslexic children deserve a better start in life, so they can succeed to the best of their ability.

### ***Renea***

Dyslexia runs strong on both sides of my family. I have many adult family members not having been taught to read or write at school because they were labelled 'stupid, dumb, lazy' etc. this attitude has left deep emotional scars. Out of four of my siblings three have some degree of dyslexia. Fortunately for my siblings they have a supportive family and they have all achieved their career aspirations. My 13 year old son has dyslexia and struggles at school on a daily basis. He is labelled as 'the class clown' and I'm often told he daydreams and avoids tasks. Working with him at home doing homework or preparing for exams is extremely time consuming and tries my patience as he tries to avoid the task. I have to stay strong and make the adjustments needed so he has a chance of success. His teachers say he wants to be independent and often refuses their help. My son says that he doesn't want to be seen as 'different' or 'special'. Even though his teachers have said they have read the dyslexia information and try to support him they are stretched to their limits. I do believe that there is some ignorance in the school about dyslexia and other learning disabilities and teachers would rather label the child as naughty and bad parenting than catering for individual needs. As a year one teacher I know too well how exhausting catering for the 23 children in my class is but it is so worth it. To have a class of six year olds who can write continuously for 20 minutes independently, read back their work and have a smile from ear to ear. Children who recognise their strengths and proudly share their success whilst giving their best at the areas of school that create anxiety and fear. To have children who share with visitors that our class is a safe, caring, loving and a happy place to be makes me the proudest teacher on Earth. I fear letting these little ones move on to year two next year without me, as I fear what the next teacher may do to their self esteem and self worth. There needs to be change and teachers must be forced to change or leave, for the sake of our children and society as a whole.

### ***Kylie-Anne***

Where does one start... First by saying that I hate having to count the hours down till school is over everyday so that I know my daughter (8yrs) is home and happy and away from an environment that does not support or encourage her to learn in a way she understands. To know she doesn't have to be scared to ask a question or for help and receive eye rolls and ignorance as a response from her teacher to further lower her self esteem, which in some cases is not the teachers fault for not being equipped with the skills or knowledge to assist and guide her. For her not to have the other kids tease and make fun because she can't read like the rest of the class. For me not to have to go to school and spend endless time asking for help and support for broken promises and plain ignorance. For me not to have to bribe my daughter with treats from the tuck shop to get her to school for the

day. To not to be asked for endless amounts of \$\$\$ every corner you turn to seek guidance, support and knowledge on how to help your child. To not feel like I am failing as a parent every time I see a little more of her breaking inside. So where does one stop because I am 100% positive I am not alone and could go on and on about how I am drained from the tears and the nights of no sleep trying to figure out how to make everything ok! It's not right that our children don't receive an equal opportunity at an education they deserve. What will it take for our voices to be heard? But most of all, what will it take for their tears, our children's tears to be noticed and something to be done about it before they don't have the fight to keep trying to be their best. Our children should not be punished for being a square peg trying to fit in a round hole!

### ***Dannielle***

Appears not much has altered in the past 10 years. Except for a very few select schools. In 2001 we were told her reading would happen it would just 'click' were told the same for next 2 years.. No assessment no support. We organized and funded that ourselves. Everything pointed that she was an intelligent child. If we hadn't intervened, the school would have left her as a D student. We went to 5 different schools in 2 states Qld and ACT. teachers unaware of how to support dyslexic children and parents today are saying the same! It's a disgrace. We are one of the lucky ones to find a private college in high school (school number 5) that supported us. 10 years that we are aware of without any change to education to support these families! So much for the Smart State.

### ***Melinda***

My sons 'academic' successes are almost at average grade level, but because he works so hard, he doesn't feel successful. This is only 2.5 years of hard work, with early intervention but his confidence is still low and he is seeing a psychologist as part of his mental health plan. I have had to have 4 'This is how to get the best out of my son meetings with different staff members this year to date. Without fail, each meeting starts with the teachers telling me that he is fine, he is happy at school, he is close to age-appropriate levels in subject areas and if he is showing anxiety and depression at home I need some strategies to deal with that 'home' problem. Each meeting, thankfully has ended with the school staff taking some of my strategies on board, and taking (hopefully watching) the DVD. Our school has him in a supported literacy Programme and has worked hard and smart to support his academic development, but his mental health still needs attention. I wish teachers would know to wait a while after they ask him a question, so he can do all the decoding, think of his response and put it into words. He can tell them what he needs, he is very self-aware, but he needs more time and positive feedback.

### ***Lisa***

Ok diagnosed at 6 given an iPad at 7 by the school and still not using assistive technology. Actually iPad confiscated because he was playing the games they put on it!!! I somehow don't think he will be able to play Goat simulator for a job when he is an adult! He is 10 in November.