



**THE HON CHRISTOPHER PYNE MP
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION
LEADER OF THE HOUSE
MEMBER FOR STURT**

Our Ref BR14-000422

21 MAR 2013

Dr Dennis Jensen MP
Chair Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Dr Jensen

Thank you for your letter of 31 January 2014 regarding a petition on the recognition and awareness of, and targeted measures for, dyslexia in the education system. I am also replying to petitions 760/1212 and 764/1216 which I tabled on 5 June 2013 regarding the recognition of dyslexia.

The Australian Government is committed to improving school and education outcomes for all students. As the Minister for Education, I am focused on improving schools and student outcomes through proven policies and initiatives. Under the *Students First* approach, the Government is working with the states and territories on the priority areas of teacher quality, principal autonomy, parental engagement and strengthening the curriculum. These initiatives will support all students including those with learning difficulties, such as dyslexia.

Apart from these broad reforms the Government is also committed to better support for students with disability, including those with learning difficulties such as dyslexia. This includes extending the More Support for Students with Disabilities initiative (MSSD) by \$100 million for a further twelve months, and the inclusion of a funding loading for school students with disability in 2014.

Under the MSSD initiative several education authorities have chosen to focus on dyslexia or learning difficulties more broadly. MSSD activities that will benefit students with dyslexia include: targeted professional development for school staff in understanding and responding to dyslexia and other learning difficulties; the use of assistive technology (e.g. iPads); allied health professionals (in particular speech pathologists) working in schools; and specialised literacy resources.

The Government is also working with states and territories to implement a Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability. The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data uses a broader definition of disability which includes 'learning differently' and is consistent with the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. The focus of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data is on the level of educational adjustment provided regardless of a student's disability type or diagnosis. This approach will inform policy development at the national and jurisdictional level and increase understanding about these students' needs, and how they can be more effectively supported.

The Government has also established a Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group to advise on how teacher education programmes could be improved to better prepare new teachers with the right mix of academic and practical classroom skills. The Group will identify common components regarded as being world's best practice in teacher education programmes with a particular focus on pedagogical approaches, knowledge of the school subjects to be taught, and teacher professional experience. Further information is available from the Students First website www.studentsfirst.gov.au/teacher-education-ministerial-advisory-group.

In addition the Government is committed to improving the literacy and numeracy outcomes for all Australian students, particularly those most in need. It has committed \$22 million over four years for improving literacy learning for students in remote locations. Funding will be used to increase professional skills of teaching through the application of Direct Instruction and Explicit Instruction.

I have provided a response to the six specific suggestions provided by the Dyslexia Support Groups affiliated with the Australian Dyslexia Association in the enclosed attachment. More information on the Australian Government programmes and policies outlined above can be accessed from the Department of Education website: www.education.gov.au/students-disability.

You may also be interested to learn that I am proposing to conduct a policy roundtable with key stakeholders focusing on students with dyslexia in 2014. I expect the round table to provide me with valuable insights into the major factors influencing the experiences and outcomes of students with dyslexia.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Pyne MP

Dyslexia Support Groups suggestions	Australian Government response
1. Greater recognition and awareness of dyslexia in the education system.	<p>The Australian Government recognises dyslexia in the education system. The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability uses a broader definition of disability which includes ‘learning differently’, which includes students with dyslexia, and is consistent with the <i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992</i>. The focus of the data collection is on the level of educational adjustment provided regardless of a student’s disability type or diagnosis.</p>
2. Appropriate pre-service training and professional development for teachers in evidence-based teaching, teaching for differentiation and multisensory instruction.	<p>The Government has established a Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group to advise on how teacher education programmes could be improved to better prepare new school teachers with the right mix of academic and practical classroom skills.</p> <p>The More Support for Students with Disabilities initiative is also providing professional development opportunities for both pre-service and practicing school teachers in evidenced-based teaching and differentiation.</p>
3. Early identification and effective early literacy intervention for children identified ‘at risk’ of reading difficulties.	<p>State and territory governments have responsibility for the day to day delivery of school education in Australia, with schools operated by government and non-government education authorities including Catholic Education Commissions and independent school authorities. As such, education authorities are best placed to determine early identification and effective early literacy intervention in their jurisdiction.</p> <p>To assist with the early identification of ‘at risk’ students, the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) is a population based measure of how children have developed by the time they start school. Teachers complete a checklist for children in their first year of full-time school, including school based language and communication skills. Further information is at www.rch.org.au/aedi/</p> <p>Additionally, a range of measures of student performance are used across Australia. These measures allow teachers to report progress and identify areas of need. The Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT) in Reading and Maths is the most widely used. PAT Tests provide standardised student scores enabling improvement to be demonstrated between testing periods and the identification of students who might have particular learning difficulties.</p>
4. Ensure that students with dyslexia receive sufficient disability loading to provide appropriate learning support and reasonable adjustments.	<p>The Government is working with states and territories to identify the level of adjustment for students with disability, including students with dyslexia.</p> <p>In 2013, the first 20 per cent of schools across Australia participated in the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on school students with disability. All Australian state and territory governments and the Catholic and Independent sectors have committed to implementing the data collection in a phased approach. Up to 66 per cent of schools will participate in the 2014 collection.</p>

<p>5. The provision of specialist dyslexia teachers at the third level of intervention.</p>	<p>State and territory governments have responsibility for the day to day delivery of school education in Australia, with schools operated by government and non-government education authorities including Catholic Education Commissions and independent school authorities. As such, education authorities are best placed to determine the provision of specialist dyslexia teachers for students who require more intense, explicit and individualised instruction (which is sometimes known as the third level of intervention).</p>
<p>6. Implementation of the National Dyslexia Working Party recommendations.</p>	<p>The report of the National Dyslexia Working Party was presented to the previous Government. The report and the Australian Government response is available from the Department of Social Services website: www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/publications-articles/general</p>