

**SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES 2009-10**

Outcome 2

DEEWR Question No. EW712_10

Senator Fielding asked on 22 October 2009, EEWL Hansard page 43

Question

Assistance for students with learning disabilities

Senator FIELDING—I will generally add a bit more. I understand there are always priorities and there is always a limit on how much money can be spent on certain issues. I fully understand that issue. As a principle, I think that children with learning disabilities should not be discriminated against and maybe forced to feel dumb. I assume it is everybody's idea to make sure that that would not happen. I am concerned to know, given that a lot of these kids are not being picked up early enough—and it is something I think the department itself could even champion to make sure that more is done in this particular area—whether if more funding were made available there could be the ability to pick up kids with a learning disability at an earlier age. Do you think that could be so if more funding were provided?

Ms Paul—I think it is hard to speculate because we are not in that situation, but we absolutely agree with you that early identification is absolutely key. I think it is an important conversation that we are having and what I would like to do is to take that away and for us come back to you. We might do a bit of a stocktake on what is happening and come back with some well-informed examples of what is going on and perhaps what could be going on, to take up your point. It is incredibly important. Maybe one of the things that have not been done enough is sharing best practice. You know there would be some fantastic examples out there, but it is a matter of finding them and then sharing them around the country; is it not?

Answer

The Australian Government is working to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of all Australian students, with a particular focus on those students who are struggling to meet the minimum standards, through a number of initiatives. These include:

- Universal access to early childhood education will ensure that every child has access to a quality early childhood education program by 2013. This will provide an increased opportunity to identify children with learning difficulties at an early age.
- The recently released Early Learning Years Framework will provide young children with opportunities to maximise their potential and develop a foundation for future success in learning.
- The Early Childhood Development Strategy includes a number of initiatives aimed to identify and assist very young children at risk of delayed development.
- The Smarter Schools National Partnerships, including the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership and the Teacher Quality National Partnership, through which a number of whole school reforms will be introduced leading to improved teaching and learning outcomes for students, including those with learning difficulties.
- \$41 million for 30 pilot initiatives in over 400 schools to find out what works for disadvantaged students. Findings from this will be shared with states, territories and

education sectors and used to support the implementation of broader reforms under the Smarter Schools National Partnerships.

- Improved transparency measures including providing parents with information on their child's individual NAPLAN performance as well as school level results of each school which will be available on line from the end of the year.
- Through the \$190 million Helping Children with Autism package there are a number of initiatives to assist in the early identification and provision of early intervention services for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs recently hosted a Dyslexia Stakeholder Forum at Parliament House on 16 June 2009. An agreed outcome from the Forum was to establish a working group and develop a paper to be submitted to government identifying key actions on dyslexia and mechanisms to involve government and the community in the progression of a national dyslexia agenda. It is anticipated that the working group will report back to government with the paper by the end of the year.