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To Whom It May Concern

I am a teacher who worked for the New South Wales Department of Education for 22 years, the last 14 of those as an Intensive Reading Teacher in primary schools.

My final 8 years of service were on the Intensive Reading Class at Willoughby Primary School. This class was closed with no warning to students, parents or the teacher (myself), six weeks before the end of the 1999 school year. The Intensive Reading model was one of the most effective models for children with literacy learning disabilities that the Education Department had ever produced, provided it was in the hands of a qualified and committed professional. Sometimes they were/are staffed by unqualified, misguided or ineffective teachers. I was not one of those and I achieved outstanding results with students, parents and teachers. At the time of the closure of my class, the Department of Education did not want to look at the effectiveness of my teaching program nor listen to the pleas of the many parents of past and present students who begged the Department to reconsider. Any of those parents would be more than willing even now too speak to your inquiry.

The Intensive Reading program in the right hands was perfect. The Willoughby class considered applicants from 15 schools, choosing 6 students per term to participate in 3 hours' instruction, 5 days per week, for 9 weeks. These students were chosen because they presented with average to above average intelligence but were significantly delayed in their literacy development. This intensive instruction took place in the morning at Willoughby Primary School and in the afternoons the children were taken back to their home schools for participation in mainstream class activities. They were withdrawn for highly specialised individualised instruction during the part of the academic day in which they did not cope and integrated in the afternoon for the subjects in which they often shone. These children require more than a token ½ hour session once or twice a week from the school's Support Teacher (Learning) who is more than likely not even trained in Special Needs. They must be withdrawn and their instruction individualised by an expert who is trained in delivering explicit and systematic teaching.

My Intensive Reading program did not stop there. I included training for the parents so that during their child's term in the program and in the terms and years which followed they would feel empowered to constructively support their children's efforts and development. Many parents reported relief, reduction of stress and often a renewed enjoyment in working with their child's literacy development.

As well as students improving and parents becoming empowered and less stressed, I also trained teachers in specialised techniques, using and sharing specialised materials I had acquired and developed. In this way, those teachers who were receptive to my ideas and methods became more empowered to help other children in their class who had similar needs.

Another component of my program was to provide support to the student once he/she had finished the term of intensive intervention and returned to the home school full-time. During that time I continued to visit to continue in-servicing the teacher and usually wrote follow-up programs for the student, training volunteers in the home school to work with the student.

At the end of what amounted to two terms' involvement with each student their reading ages had usually lifted by anything from one to three years. Many of these students were able to maintain a position in a reading group within their classes. Years on, I hear stories of them finishing Year 12 and University with outstanding results. They always had the potential but needed something intensive and very powerful to develop that.

The Willoughby class was one of four Intensive Reading classes in the Northern Beaches district of Sydney. In a year the four classes had the capacity to see 96 students for 15 hours a week, in most cases making a significant change in a student's attitudes, self esteem and literacy abilities. At the end of 1999 three of the four classes were closed. The remaining class now sees 24 students per year from the area which originally saw 96 students per year. Students who would formerly have been included in an Intensive Reading class now have far less chance of being selected. Some parents are being told that their children have to be three, four or five years delayed before they can be considered for inclusion! The closed Intensive Reading classes were replaced with two itinerant support teachers who visit in excess of 40 primary schools, attempting to see students and teachers alike in an attempt to improve learning outcomes. Most schools in this area of Sydney are lucky to be staffed with a qualified Support Teacher (Learning) for more than one day per week. They can apply to have a student considered for inclusion in the Itinerant Support Teacher's case load. If successful the student is paid a visit once a week for up to an hour, for a period of about 15 weeks.

Of course the replacement "programs" for the Intensive Reading Programs are inadequate. I have heard no success stories of students who have made huge gains from them. I am concerned that there is a whole band of students of average ability, with significant delays in their literacy who continue to be overlooked and will continue to spiral downwards in their failure. The Intensive Reading Program had the potential to pick students up early, increase their skills, confidence and self-esteem and send them off to high school expecting and experiencing success. Now these students are more likely to spend their whole school lives feeling like failures, ending up in Dole queues or as recipients of mental health services because of their depression.

The Department of Education was not interested in my highly specialised skills and deep commitment to this specialised role. When my class was closed I was told to apply for a

transfer. I was appointed to Lakemba Primary School, as a Support Teacher (Learning). At that time Lakemba Primary School had an enrolment of nearly 400, with over 95% of students with first languages other than English. I was to be the 5-day per week Support Teacher, but the school also used Disadvantaged funding to buy extra days, so it had 9 days per WEEK Support Teacher (Learning). As well as this they had two (maybe three?) FULL TIME ESL teachers.

Lakemba probably needed that much support and should continue to receive it, but why should students on the North Shore be disadvantaged by their postcode? Why should they have to make do (miss out) with 1-2 days' in-school Support Teacher staffing (often untrained, who may not even see them this week, term or year) or sit on a waiting list for an Itinerant Support Teacher who has a case load covering in excess of 40 schools?

Naturally, I was disgusted with the inequity and I have since resigned from the Education Department. I am now trying to provide a service privately to students and their families in the Willoughby area who continue to miss out on in-school support. The very sad part is that now their parents have to pay for the privilege whereas before it was one of the most brilliant public education models there had been, for children with learning difficulties.

I thank you for your time in reading this. I wish you well with your inquiry and hope and pray that the outcome may be the introduction of more equitable services to ALL children experiencing learning difficulties.

Yours faithfully,

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