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By email

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The Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee
Suite S1.61, Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Education of Students with Disabilities

The Dyslexia SPELD Foundation of WA receives some 100 calls per month for information and provides half hour consultations with our staff psychologist for 20 to 30 of these inquiries. About 10 of these subsequently receive a full psychological assessment.

These services are not provided by government for a number of reasons. Below are some points which illustrate the current policy and resource issues:

The Western Australian Department of Education is currently reviewing services to students with disabilities. It is moving to the same line taken some years ago by other States: the focus to be on individual needs rather than specific categories. While this may appear philosophically sound, in practice it tends to lump all 'special needs' students together. The result is that even though practical and proven strategies are available for teachers to alleviate the affects of dyslexia, these will be lost in the search for individual and specific solutions. Note that strategies which help students with dyslexia help a range of other students as well. The 'individual' approach turns a pedagogical problem into an economic and efficiency problem which it does not have to be.

(The current review in WA by the state Department of Education may exacerbate or relieve this problem.)

Disability and discrimination legislation is actually mitigating against clear and early identification because of reluctance and inability of institutions to meet their obligations once a disability is named. Specific learning disabilities are easier to deny than some other disabilities because they are not so visible.

Pre service training and inservice training for both teachers and school psychologists does not prepare them for identifying and intervening to relieve dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties. Assessment expertise and tools are not available in schools. Parents are generally the first to suggest something is 'not right'.

People with knowledge and skills are needed in the school systems. These specialist professional services are inherently expensive. While our Foundation provides some support to needy families for assessments, clearly many families are missing out and their children are not benefitting from early or even late intervention. People who can afford to, buy the extra help.

Gordon Hobday
Chief Executive Officer