

Inquiry into the education of students with disabilities.

My response to this inquiry is in relation to students with Learning Disabilities as a result of dyspraxia. Learning Disability implies that the child has at least normal IQ on standardized and commonly used assessment but in spite of this has great difficulty learning in the education system that is in existence at present. Children with learning disability due to a type of dyspraxia have difficulty planning a task. The World Health Organisation has recognised Dyspraxia as a disability. But it is not recognised in Australia, at least by the education department as a disability. Within the medical community of Australia it is a poorly recognised and understood disability. I often feel that the education departments response is that if the disability isn't recognized then it follows that there is no need to provide any intervention.

These students needs are not assessed appropriately by school concellers or teachers. If the student is recognized as having difficulty, and that is a big "if" the response is often to have an IQ done. When the results of this indicate that the child has at least normal IQ I sense that the response is then that they need more practice of the same and are then withdrawn into programs that are not always appropriate as the reasons for the difficulty have not been assessed appropriately in the first place and are not understood. For those parents who can afford it, there is the option of having assessments done by either/ or a speech pathologist, an occupational therapist and possibly a clinical psychologist or an educational psychologist but these assessment are rarely performed by education department staff and only available to the section of the community that are either or both highly motivated and financial. Many children are left undiagnosed to struggle in a system that will not meet their needs and relegated to a school life of failure and the personal and social problems that come with this. As a society it is criminal that we allow the educational system to do this to our children. Strong words but it is what is happening. It is also a huge waste of money to keep providing these children with an educational system that can't meet their needs. Surely the money could be better spent. In England and in the United States there is tailored education for students with dyspraxia. For these students who are unfortunate to have to suffer the Australian education system Australia will never be a clever country that values all its citizens and who all have a right to an education.

Early intervention programs for these students prior to beginning school is better organised than the help that is provided once the students are at school. Pre-school have more funding for support staff to go into preschool to implement special programs into their educational program offered at the preschool. Once at school intervention is currently provided through Specific Learning Disability teachers visiting the school and writing programs for the students to be implemented by the parent school. Availability of the SLD teachers appears to depend on the number of them in the region and on the number of schools that they service and not on the individual needs of the student, it is resource driven and not need directed. It appears as if the SLD help is so thinly spread that it is of little use to anyone.

Students with dyspraxia have no access to integration funding at present. This integration funding is provided to students whose disability affects their ability to access their education. Students with dyspraxia may have great difficulty in literacy, numeracy and writing; they cannot read or write at the level of their peers which greatly affects their ability to access their education. But under the current integration funding criteria they receive no financial help to provide for the implementation of a program that may have been recommended or an aid in the classroom. But the issue is greater than just integrating these children. The children need tailored education that is different to the education offered to their peers, they may not be able to be integrated but surely have a right to be included. I wonder if it would be better to recognize their disability and provide these students with tailored education coordinated by appropriately qualified special education teachers in a segregated class in mainstream school. The students should be included in all other aspects of mainstream school life. To me this seems like a better use of the funds provided to educate these children which are currently not spent appropriately.

I feel that Special Education teachers should have special education qualifications from a recognized tertiary institution. An interest in the area plus related more general qualifications should not be seen as appropriate qualification to work with children with learning disabilities due to dyspraxia.

From a frustrated Parent of an 8yr old who has been withdrawn from mainstream school as the educational system couldn't meet her needs. She attends Macquarie University Special education school.