

Brennan

What the right to read means to me...



About the artist: This artwork was submitted by a student, Brennan, who attended one of the Right to Read inquiry public hearings.

DYSLEXIA AND THE RIGHT TO LITERACY

Dyslexia Awareness Week October 6 – October 12, 2025

Press links for videos. Inside our Minds Tips for Teaching Children with Dyslexia

[See Wheeler Primary School in SA website](#)

NO-ONE WOULD DISAGREE WITH THE PREMISE THAT ALL CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT TO READ AND THE RIGHT TO THRIVE IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS. IT'S A HUMAN RIGHT. CHILDREN WITH DYSLEXIA STRUGGLE TO LEARN TO READ AND WRITE. SURPRISINGLY MOST STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS HAVE REMOVED THE WORD DYSLEXIA FROM THEIR VOCABULARY. I'M NOT SURE WHY? IS IT BECAUSE THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT RECOGNISED DYSLEXIA UNDER THE FEDERAL DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT IN 1992? CURRENTLY 850,000 DYSLEXIC STUDENTS NEED OUR HELP NOW AS THEY CONTINUE TO GO UNRECOGNISED AND UNSUPPORTED. **THEY REQUIRE A DIFFERENT KIND OF LITERACY SUPPORT. IT'S CALLED THE MULTI-SENSORY STRUCTURED LEARNING (MSL) APPROACH. IT IS SCIENTIFICALLY RESEARCHED AND EVIDENCED BASED. AND IT IS BEST PRACTICE LITERACY EDUCATION FOR ALL STUDENTS.** CURRENTLY HIGHER SOCIO-ECONOMIC FAMILIES ARE ACCESSING THIS LITERACY SUPPORT OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL, WHILE DISADVANTAGED/INDIGENOUS STUDENTS ARE LEFT BEHIND. SCHOOLS NEED TO TEACH LITERACY FOR ALL AND IT IS NOT DIFFICULT OR EXPENSIVE. PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION WAS MEANT TO BE A GREAT EQUALISER AND OVERCOME SOME OF THE INEQUITIES AND UNFAIRNESS OF LIFE!

Australia is an unfair/unlucky country for some

In Australia there is –

- intergenerational illiteracy (44% of Australian adults don't have the literacy skills for everyday life)
- intergenerational unemployment (985,000 living on unemployment benefits)
- intergenerational poverty (985,000 living on unemployment benefits)
- intergenerational trauma (1 million Indigenous people 2025)
- intergenerational incarceration (First Nations people make up 3.3% of the general population but 33% of people in prison)
- Indigenous deaths in custody (602 First Nations people have died in custody since the Royal Commission in 1991)

Dyslexia and The Law in Australia

Why are 850,000 Australian students with Dyslexia continuing to be ignored in our public schools? Dyslexia has been recognised as a disability under the *Disability Discrimination Act* since (1992) and under the *Australian Human Rights Commission*, yet dyslexic students are still going undiagnosed and unsupported in our States/Territories public education system. Not only is it a *Human Right* violation, it is an offence under the *Disability Discrimination Act*. Public education is supposed to be fair and equitable for all students, including those with Dyslexia.

Dyslexia disproportionately impacts people who are indigenous and/or living in poverty, as they go undiagnosed and without help. In fact, being illiterate and not knowing why, causes trauma which exacerbates the disability and increases poor life outcomes. Current scientific knowledge gives us a

way to immediately address the unfairness of having dyslexia in today's society, and it would not only give those people living with dyslexia a better life, but would also create a fairer and more productive country. People who have dyslexia are amongst our countries brightest, but without recognition and support they fail to thrive.

Dyslexia was officially recognised as a disability in Australia under the federal *Disability Discrimination Act* in 1992. The DDA includes in its definition of disability, "a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction". This broad definition allows for the recognition of specific learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, thereby enabling access to necessary support programmes, services and accommodations in educational institutions. This recognition also means that people with Dyslexia are protected from discrimination and are eligible for academic and workplace accommodations to ensure equal access and participation in education and employment.

Human rights are a set of principles concerned with equality and fairness. And Governments are required to establish and maintain laws and services that enable all people to enjoy a life in which their rights are respected and protected. According to the *Australian Human Rights Commission* everyone has the rights to health, education and an adequate standard of living. The right to education requires Government to provide good quality education facilities and services to all their people, including those who have Dyslexia.

Dyslexia and the Federal/State Education Divide

Unfortunately, most students with Dyslexia have not received any appropriate support. They have been neglected/unseen for 33 years. While the DDA 1992 provided federal recognition, the level of recognition and support for dyslexia as a disability varies at the State level. In some States it's still described as a learning difficulty rather than a disability. This has created a lack of necessary disability support services and academic assistance since 1992. This cannot be mere oversight. People with Dyslexia have been waiting over 30 years for help, which they are entitled to under Federal Law. It appears that the only State that has recognized Dyslexia as a learning disability is NSW?

The *Australian Education Act* 2013 and its regulations set out the conditions for State authorities to receive federal funding for education. These conditions aim to ensure that funds are used in line with the *Disability Discrimination Act* (1992). The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) on school students with a disability outlines requirements for Commonwealth funding to meet the needs of school students with disability. As recently as 2023, the ACT Auditor-General released a report on support for students with disability in ACT public schools which found that the way in which the ACT appraises students' needs does not align with the categories of disability and levels of adjustment established by the NCCD. In other words, the ACT is applying a definition of disability which is much more restrictive than the NCCD definition. It appears that students with learning disabilities are not covered under the ACT Student Disability Criteria. **The Auditor's finding represents a failure in the provision of an appropriate education to students with disabilities in the ACT and a failure in public accountability.**

Most State education departments in Australia do not recognise Dyslexia as a disability or name it. In Canada, where students are screened for Dyslexia, they found that 80-90% of children in learning support had Dyslexia. In Australia students are merely categorised as having **SLD (specific/significant learning difficulty/disability) or LD (learning disability/difficulty)**. This umbrella term is used for all students who experience literacy difficulties, despite the fact that dyslexic children are average or above average in intelligence. **Could categorising dyslexic students as SLD or LD be a deliberate**

attempt by States to abrogate their responsibilities to students with Dyslexia, under the Federal Disability Discrimination Act 1992?

Dyslexia is thought to affect 1 in 5 people living in Australia, that's approximately 5.4 million people. Unfortunately, NDIS regards people with Dyslexia as not eligible participants. Even a search of Dyslexia on the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing website produces zero results. Artificial Intelligence asked me if I wanted to change my search to dyspepsia!

The only way currently to obtain NDIS funding for Dyslexia is to wait and pay for an independent Dyslexia assessment by an educational psychologist, which can cost several thousand dollars. And unless you are found to have multiple concurring disabilities your application for NDIS will be denied. You will then need to apply through the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) for a hearing, where you will usually need a report or testimony from a neuropsychologist, giving evidence of daily substantially reduced functional capacity. This will also usually cost several thousand dollars. Legal representation at the court hearing may be offered free of charge, if requested in advance. The AAT does not recognise precedents, and so requires individual assessments and reports for all people with Dyslexia. Navigating your way through the NDIS application process usually requires very high literacy skills, deep pockets and perseverance. It is therefore not surprising that dyslexia is a social justice issue, as it disproportionately impacts families who are Indigenous and/or live in poverty as they go undiagnosed and untreated. How can disadvantaged Australians access NDIS if it relies on future participants obtaining an expensive diagnosis of disability before you will be accepted into the scheme? You are also not entitled to extra support at school or in employment because you are not diagnosed.

Dyslexia need not always be funded by NDIS. Foundational Supports were going to finally deliver much needed supports to all people with disabilities, such as Dyslexia, outside of the NDIS. A recognition that some people/students, who are not in the NDIS may need more help than what is currently offered, through mainstream or community services like early childhood education, schools and community mental health programs.

But that all changed last week at the National Press Club, when Minister Mark Butler announced that Foundational Supports were to be no longer! Instead, the Government was going to deliver Thriving Kids, a programme only available for children with Developmental Delay and/or Autism. (Which just happened to align with the cost blowout of the NDIS. So much for the widespread consultation process on all disabilities!) Mild to severe Dyslexia affects approximately 824,000, 1 in 5 students in Australia and probably 2 in 5 Indigenous students. **It too, must be a mainstream issue, like Autism and Developmental Delay.**

What is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a neurobiological inherited disorder which makes reading and writing really difficult. It is carried mainly on the **X chromosome**. If one parent has dyslexia the probability of having a dyslexic child is 50%. We now also know that the **brain is structured differently** from birth and processes information differently in dyslexic individuals. Instead of the brain using the left side of the brain to process language, dyslexic students use the right side. (The left side of the brain is considered the dominant one for language processing and is usually responsible for reading, writing and maths. Whereas the right side of the brain plays a key role in visual-spatial processing, creativity and emotions) This creates learning difficulties at school for children who are dyslexic, as they learn best in multi-sensory ways, not written.

“It amazes me that’s so little has changed since I went to school. I can say that going to school with dyslexia is like riding a bike into battle every day, but the truth is we don’t battle dyslexia – we often battle a school system with a one size fits all mentality. And with better awareness this could change in an instant.” Cat Rodie is a freelance journalist and an Ambassador for the Code Red Dyslexia Network.

That’s 824,000 students in Years 1-12 who go to school every day and whose difficulties in reading and writing are not seen or heard as Dyslexia. Bright children who do not know why they struggle with literacy, a cornerstone of our modern society. In Australia people do not talk about dyslexia in public, not in the workplace, nor in schools. Students who struggle with reading and writing and fail written tests from Year 1 are usually placed in literacy support classes for slower learners. Most never find out that they have Dyslexia or receive the right interventions/support/ accommodations, especially Multisensory teaching/tutoring programs like Easyread, Orton-Gillingham, Betsy Sewell, Davis etc, and access to assistive technology, internet, mobile phones, Artificial Intelligence etc

Dyslexia and literacy outcomes for students from high-socioeconomic status vs low-socioeconomic status

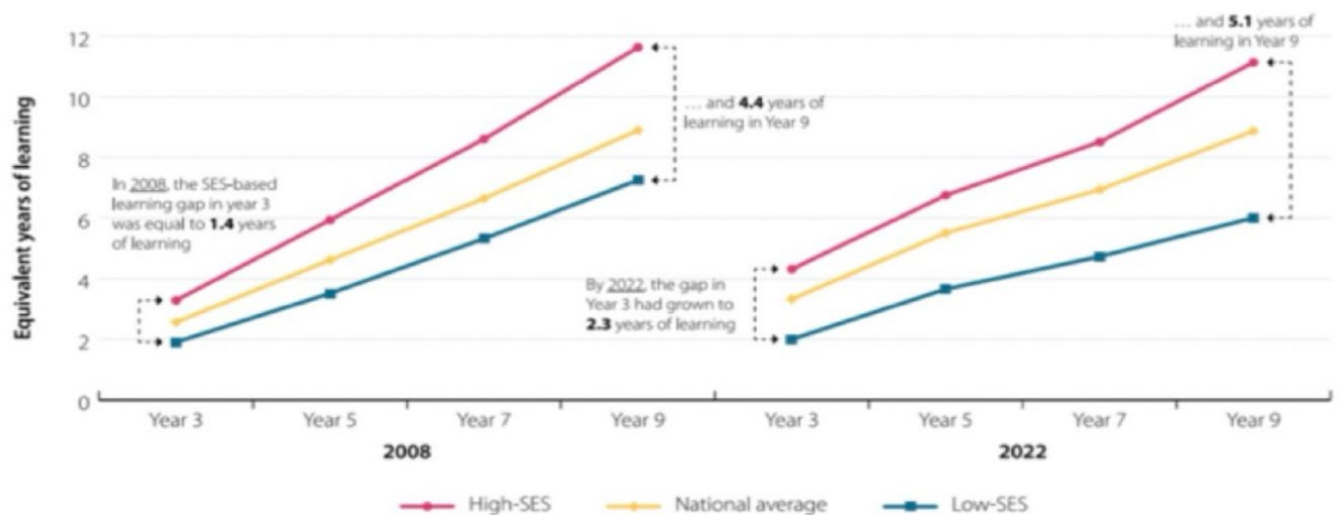
Dyslexia usually creates lifelong difficulties, but many can be overcome with the right support. Many higher socio-economic dyslexic families have learnt how to overcome the challenges of Dyslexia and so succeed. They usually enrol their Dyslexic children in Multi-Sensory Language/tutoring programmes (MSL) outside of the school setting. They also support and encourage their children’s abilities in out-of-school activities such as music, art, sports, clubs and hobbies. Their children can feel a sense of belonging/being successful/validated/supported. **Unfortunately, it is not the same for poor, Indigenous or disadvantaged families. They can barely afford rent and food on unemployment benefits. Here there is intergenerational poverty, illiteracy and trauma. There is very little success.**

Number of actual full-time equivalent student days attended by full-time students in years 1 to 10 in semester one (%) Non-Indigenous / Indigenous 2016-2024

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Years 1-6	93.9 86.2	93.8 86.0	93.5 85.4	93.0 84.5	na	92.9 82.9	88.5 77.8	90.9 81.3	90.7 80.9
Year 7	93.7 83.3	93.6 83.1	93.1 82.2	92.6 81.6	na	92.0 79.5	88.2 75.3	90.1 77.2	89.7 77.4
Year 8	92.0 79.3	92.0 79.3	91.3 77.6	90.9 77.0	na	90.0 74.7	85.8 70.1	87.6 72.0	87.2 71.0
Year 9	91.1 76.3	91.0 76.2	90.4 75.0	89.9 74.3	na	88.8 71.6	84.7 67.0	86.3 68.6	85.9 68.3
Year 10	90.4 74.8	90.3 74.0	89.7 73.0	89.3 72.2	na	88.1 69.7	84.1 65.0	85.7 66.9	85.3 65.5

2024 school attendance rates in Year 10 Indigenous 65% non-Indigenous 85%

The national context of literacy and numeracy education outcomes shows that a persistent and growing equity gap remains across Australian schools (see Figure 1).



Source: Department of Education analysis of NAPLAN 2008–2022 (NAPLAN data accessible via ACARA, [National Report on Schooling Data Portal](http://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia) (www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia)²¹)

* SES = socio-economic status

Figure 1. National achievement gaps between high socio-economic status and low socio-economic status students

The NAPLAN results show an increasing equity learning gap between higher socio-economic and lower socio-economic students from 4.4 years in 2008 to 5.1 years in 2022.

Dyslexia is usually associated with poor academic, economic, vocational, health and stress-behavioural problems and outcomes. Dyslexia then cannot simply be a concern for the education system. Studies show a very strong connection between dyslexia, academic under-achievement, unemployment, substance abuse, homelessness, mental health issues, incarceration and suicide.

In Canada, screening has found that 45% of the Indigenous Inuit population has Dyslexia. I suspect that the rate of dyslexia in our Indigenous population would be similar. Their ancient languages were not written down and being dyslexic had no adverse consequences and the condition was simply inherited and multiplied. Traditionally, before European arrival, Aboriginal languages were passed down through oral traditions, including storytelling, songs and ceremonies. Dyslexia did not pose a real problem until written language was widely used. Increasingly people with dyslexia are being discriminated against in the modern world as the use of written communication is becoming ever-increasingly dominant.

What can we do to bridge the Dyslexic gap?

There is so much we could do to help Dyslexic students and best-practice in other countries and a few dyslexia-friendly schools in Australia, are already doing it. [See Wheeler Primary School in SA website](#) Unfortunately, sadly most state schools are not. Ps Wheelers Hill Primary School in 2023 topped the NAPLAN Literacy test for Victorian State Schools.

There are basically 4 steps (in fact once best practice is in place, schools could probably do it in 3, and leave out screening and have Year 1 and 2 all doing MSL) which if implemented, would not cost anything extra to the Education budget, in fact, it would be easier and less expensive to have every

student succeed! Currently what teachers see in the present system is some frustrated students who become disengaged and disruptive because they are unable complete reading and writing tasks, set by the teacher.

For students with dyslexia, acquiring literacy skills can be particularly challenging and this will greatly impact their learning in various subjects, depending on their individual strengths and needs. These challenges can affect their confidence, engagement, and academic progress. Understanding the specific difficulties that students with dyslexia face in literacy and implementing effective instructional strategies and support is essential for helping them reach their full potential.

This is particularly important for disadvantaged dyslexic students who may not otherwise get the opportunities to excel in creative arts, sports and other hobbies. Elective subjects are particularly important if they have less emphasis on written work and Dyslexic students can shine! A NAPLAN result is not always the best method of measuring a student's success.

In the past, the level of reading skills, writing ability, organisation and rote learning required to be successful, underpinned our education system. All teachers have technological tools that can help them discern a student's level of understanding. Teacher and self-reviews, assistive technology, and varied delivery modes form part of this toolkit. A student's knowledge can just as adequately be reviewed through a presentation, rather than in writing and under timed conditions. It is just as valid for a student to understand and analyse a novel by having it read to them through an audiobook as it is by reading it themselves. It is just as valuable for students to discuss and demonstrate their understanding as it is for them to rote learn a response and regurgitate it in writing. Some would argue these skills are more relevant for a 21st century model of education.

In fact, according to Made by Dyslexia, four in five successful dyslexics attribute dyslexic thinking skills to their success. On top of this, a 2007 study from the Cass Business School London, found that more than a third of the US entrepreneurs surveyed identified as Dyslexic. In 2018 EY published a report on the value of dyslexia – it found that dyslexic strengths such as visualization and logical reasoning align with the changing needs of business. The often talked about skills gap showed a need for creative, different thinkers to make sense of the rapid change and the disruption we are facing in the world today. Dyslexic individuals have a range of natural strengths that make them 'hard wired' to step right in and fill this gap. The tragedy of dyslexia is that while there may be pay-offs in the long run, dyslexic kids still have to navigate a school system that isn't set up for neuro-diversity. Support is a lottery and if you lose, you're on your own.

The talents of people with dyslexia have more recently been recognized, with social media platforms like LinkedIn adding dyslexic thinking as a valuable skill. The wide range of creative and talented people in this group shows that while dyslexia is a learning disability, it can have a significant upside with the following abilities noticeably above average in dyslexic people.

- **Visualising**
Interacting with space, senses, physical ideas and new concept (75% are above average)
- **Imagining**
Creating an original piece of work or giving ideas a new spin (84% are above average)
- **Communicating**
Crafting and conveying clear and engaging messages (71% are above average)
- **Exploring**
Being curious and exploring ideas in a constant and energetic way (84% are above average)

- **Reasoning**

Understanding patterns, evaluating possibilities and making decisions (84% are above average)

A commitment to recognising neurodiversity and naming Dyslexia and supporting inclusive, accessible and equitable education and employment for all is essential to: Australia becoming the lucky country for all! The good news is all people with Dyslexia can benefit from interventions including technology and AI, and it is never too late to learn to read using a Multisensory Learning Program.

Some countries (UK, Canada, USA) have already passed a series of legislation to promote better identification of people with dyslexia and engage them in appropriate learning settings and to protect their rights in education, employment and access to public services.

EARLY SCREENING/IDENTIFICATION, AND SUBSEQUENT INTERVENTIONS FOR CHILDREN WITH DYSLEXIA MITIGATES POOR OUTCOMES AND DRAMATICALLY IMPROVES LIFE RESULTS

What does a Dyslexia plan look like?

1. Increase public awareness and acceptance of dyslexia, disseminate current knowledge of dyslexia to educators, policymakers, and especially parents of children with dyslexia

- Dyslexic students in Australia are generally not recognised as dyslexic in the education system and finding out your child may have dyslexia can be scary, but it's better to know when there's so much you can do about it.
- School halls are a great place to get started and engage the local community.
- Dyslexia brochures easy read (these should also be in audio format for dyslexic parents).
- Easy read Material on school website should also be in audio format.

2. Screen all students in all schools for dyslexia (typically Year 1)

- Early identification and treatment are key to helping individuals with dyslexia achieve in school and life
- Dyslexia can easily be tested online for free on platforms like lexercise.com. It takes about 5-10 minutes on a computer and can easily be administered by a teacher's aide.
- A more comprehensive/expensive educational psychologist report is usually not needed, as all dyslexic students can learn to read and write using a multi-sensory tutoring program. Some schools are already using these programs.

3. Provide interventions/support/accommodations for all dyslexic children

This would include -

a) Behavioural optometrists

- For students who are having vision problems. May be covered by Medicare?
- Some countries (Canada) offer tax deductions for dyslexia interventions/support and allowances for those on income support.

b) Psychologists for students who have experienced trauma

- Get mental health care plan from GP and use Medicare system

c) Multisensory teaching/tutoring programs (Easyread, Orton-Gillingham, Betsy Sewell, Davis etc)

- We already have literacy departments in schools who can facilitate this
- Easyread is a not-for-profit organisation and has an impressive 100% success rate in teaching literacy online. It can also diagnose some reading issues like tracking. It uses a new approach called trainertext, visual phonic cues which helps the child progress in 15 minutes

per day. It is a neurological view of reading and spelling and amazing results can usually be seen in weeks.

d) Access to technology, internet, mobile phones, AI etc

- Using accommodations to bypass the writing weaknesses so that students can produce written assignments etc using voice dictation software, reading pens etc
- Dyslexic students will need more time to do written examinations. The International Baccalaureate gives students with Dyslexia up to 50% more time to complete assessment exams
- Students living in poverty will need special access to technology, phones, internet and AI etc. AI can be a game changer for dyslexic students.

4. Provide mentors and vocational/employment pathways at end of schooling

- Schools already have careers advisers who could facilitate/implement this at the community level.
- It would also be great if we had an employment assistance program which was fit for purpose, and placed disadvantaged people into real jobs and just not punish them for not reporting to Centrelink, by cancelling their social support payments.

Costs of interventions for dyslexia are minimal

\$1,000 - \$2,000 if a Behavioural optometrist is needed

\$2,000 - \$4,000 if 1 on 1 multisensory tutoring is required. Most schools could probably accommodate this in their literacy support program or some years or classes could be taught using Multisensory Learning (MSL).

\$2,000 for personal laptop/phone etc

\$1,000 - \$2,000 for internet plan/subscriptions to relevant AI etc

This \$5,000 - \$10,000 could be tax deductible for parents who work, and paid as an allowance to those on income support. (Canada does this. USA tends to have Dyslexia Centres and schools) It is a one-off payment except for annual \$1000 internet/subscriptions for those on income support??

Currently it can cost up to \$200,000 in Australia to keep a dyslexic student failing in Special Education classes, which aren't meeting their needs, from Year 1-10.

If State schools will not provide relevant tuition and assistance for dyslexic children we could redirect the Federal funding to

- Develop a National Advertising Program on Dyslexia
- Dyslexia ambassadors
- Develop a National Dyslexia website
- Provide a National Dyslexia Hotline - giving out correct information etc
- Open a number of wrap-around support bulk-billed Medicare Walk-in Centres for Dyslexia which provide screening, behavioural optometry, OTs, speech therapists, psychologists, MSL tutors, advice on suitable technology and AI etc
- We could have a volunteer army of retired teachers who could deliver 1on1 MSL tutoring. Its easy to learn in a few hours. Literacy teachers could co-ordinate them.
- Develop suitable employment programs/mentors at end of schooling etc
- The list is endless!