

Education and Training Workforce

The schools Workforce draft is a commendable document and the reforms in place for "...improving teacher quality and addressing educational disadvantage" are encouraging. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the needs of students with dyslexia –the disability sometimes referred to as the silent disability and clearly the unrecognised disability.

As a parent of a dyslexic child, I was initially terribly confused and concerned about the welfare of my child and the lack of teacher comprehension on dyslexia. In April 2011 another parent & I started a support group in the West of Melbourne (DSGW) for parents of dyslexic children. We were both surprised by the number of calls we received from parents from local schools, parents across Melbourne and even interstate. Many parents were very keen to share their stories and meet someone they could discuss their frustrations and concerns. Their stories were alarmingly similar - smart kids struggling at school, feeling anxious, suffering from low self esteem and sometimes refusing to attend school – parents' trialling a plethora of specialists, pursuing their own research and feeling very isolated watching their child/children slip through the education system. Responses from teachers were also remarkably similar; teachers' not knowing or understanding dyslexia and many dedicated teachers wanting to help but admitting it was an area they were unfamiliar with. Dyslexia affects approximately 10% of the population - that's an enormous number of children experiencing educational disadvantage.

We now have 48 families in our support group, (some families have more than 1 child with dyslexia), yet we cover just a small area, a microcosm of families in Australia.

We held a dyslexia information session for parents & teachers on the 1st August 2011 at a local primary school –Dr Nola Firth was our presenter for the evening –we hoped to get 100 people –almost 250 people attended! The numbers alone demonstrate a huge need in the community.

The Dyslexia Support Group West (DSGW) would like the following to be considered:

- Mandatory teacher training on learning disabilities including dyslexia as practised overseas
- Teachers to be equipped to identify & assess dyslexia in the school system
- Schools to become 'dyslexic friendly' as done in the UK

If teachers can identify and support dyslexic students, not only will this address students' literacy weaknesses but the students' strengths can also be highlighted, a better outcome for students, schools and the community.

Thank you for your time to consider this letter.

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