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SPELD New Zealand Inc
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The Chair
Education and Science Select Committee
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Inquiry into the identification and support for students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorders in primary and secondary schools.

SPELD NZ Inc is a not for profit incorporated society (CC46602). SPELD NZ was founded in 1971 to address the needs of those with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) such as dyslexia, which were at that time not officially recognised in New Zealand.

Nationwide we provide:

- diagnostic assessment and one-on-one specialised teaching for individuals with SLD;
- information, advice and support for individuals, whanau, schools, businesses;
- NZQA approved courses for parents, teacher aides, teachers (Level 3 and 5 NZQA approved). NZQA has rated us Highly Confident in our recent External Evaluation and Review.
- Training (not NZQA approved) for assessors

Our vision is to enable the learning needs of those with specific learning disabilities to be met.

Our goals: to work alongside and within the education sector to increase awareness of SLD; upskill families and educators; provide individualised services to learners of all ages; and equip learners to achieve their educational potential and achieve success in their life goals.

At any time we have about 2000 members (individuals, families, schools) who are receiving some form of assistance from SPELD NZ.

1 What's your story? What would you like to tell MPs about students with Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)?

We make this submission from the perspective of specific learning disabilities like dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia etc. While we teach many students with SLD who have high functioning autistic spectrum disorders, ASD is not our specialist field.

1.1 SPELD NZ has a background of over 40 years working with parents disappointed, frustrated, angry and sad that their children with SLD are not better accommodated within the school system; and working with teachers frustrated that they are ill equipped in terms of knowledge, skills and resources to deal with children with SLD in the classroom.

Since dyslexia was recognised by the Ministry of Education in 2007, many newcomers have entered the "market" making varying claims of being able to help or even "cure" those with dyslexia. Some programmes are based on research while others are not.

1.2 SPELD NZ has been the subject of an Effectiveness Review by NZ Council for Educational Research in 2009 and a Pilot Study in 2011. Data from the latter was analysed by Dr Karen Waldie of Auckland

University. It showed a statistically significant effect size both in the cognitive and achievement areas after sixty 45 minute lessons in the course of one year. In other words, functions of the brain as well as ability to read and write showed vast improvements after SPELD NZ remediation. Dr Waldie and others wrote an article on the Pilot which was peer reviewed by Prof John Hattie and published in The NZ Journal of Educational Studies Vol 49 Number 1 2014. (Ref: www.speld.org.nz/downloads/pilotnzjesarticle and Evaluation of the Effectiveness of SPELD within NZ. NZCER 2009)

- 1.3 Students with SLD often start school having shown no indication that they will have difficulty in learning to read and/or write and/or succeed with numeracy. When they fail to keep up with their peers it is often put down to lack of readiness or ability to concentrate or a lack in pre-school preparation in pre-reading skills. If parents become concerned they may be told that their child is just a bit later to be ready. In the past, poor behaviour or lack of interest were also sometimes given as a reason for lack of progress. For the most part, this situation has changed, but there are still pockets of lack of knowledge about SLD within the school system, where such views are still held.
- 1.4 Our observations over the years have shown us that students who fail to learn have different ways of compensating. Some try their best to 'disappear' by being very quiet and withdrawn; others, particularly girls, become the teacher's helper; some become the class clown, others are the ones always sharpening their pencil or going to the bathroom; some begin to behave very badly with the aim of being removed from the classroom. It is easier to be removed from the room and the work rather than to try and fail yet again. Sadly, attention becomes focussed on their behaviour rather than on the learning disability which is the reason for the deteriorating behaviour.

2 What sort of screening happened for the kids you know? Are there challenges or costs involved?

We understand that at Primary School there is no standardised screening for children with SLD, but some schools are screening at risk children within the school setting. Some children with SLD may be picked up at the 6-year net testing of literacy and may be referred to Reading Recovery which is not proven to be successful remediation for children with SLD.

Ref: Why the New Zealand National Literacy Strategy has failed and what can be done about it?
William E. Tunmer James W. Chapman Keith T. Greaney Jane E. Prochnow Alison W. Arrow Massey University 2013

Challenge 1: If parents have concerns about their child's lack of academic achievement they are not in a position to insist that the school refers their child to a Resource Teacher: Learning & Behaviour (RTLb) for screening, or allocates a Teacher Aide to assist their child's learning. If a Teacher Aide is offered, parents may have to pay for this assistance.

Challenge 2: Some RTLb may not have had sufficient training in recognising and remediating SLD due to the timing of their training as teachers and RTLb. While this situation is improving all the time there are still instances of RTLb not "believing in" SLD. The Teacher Aide may not have sufficient specialised knowledge to assist children who require the most specialised remediation.

Challenge 3: Parents may seek 'dyslexia testing' in the open market. Many of the tests are screening only (not diagnostic) so give few indicators to target remedial tuition. Remedial tuition by non-specialised teachers or tutors following those tests may therefore not produce desired results. Where a full psychometric tool is used, such as the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC), or Woodcock-Johnson III (WJIII), the cost is often very high. The fee on the open market may be up to double the fee charged by SPELD NZ Assessors.

Challenge 4: Because SPELD NZ is funded by grants and donations parents/students pay a membership fee of \$100 or \$50 for Community Services Card holders. Members must then pay for the WJIII test of cognitive ability and achievement, to diagnose their SLD. The rate for members ranges from \$400-\$621.

Challenge 5: It is often difficult for the school to use the report to obtain suitable intervention for the student because there is no funding available. Currently schools are told by the Ministry that they have the

Special Education Grant (SEG) and it is their task to allocate it appropriately. Often it appears that most of the funding needs to go to address behaviour issues, leaving little to allocate to addressing the learning issues which are often the root cause of the poor behaviour.

Challenge 6: It is often difficult for parents and schools to find the expert help they need, as well as to fund it. SPELD NZ has NZ certificated teachers who have been further trained in SLD to teach assessed students on a one-to-one basis. No two individuals with SLD have the same characteristics, so interventions need to be individualised. SPELD NZ teachers have the skills to work from a WJIII assessment report to prepare long and short term plans and deliver the intervention needed for each individual. The cost ranges from \$30 to \$60.00 per hour for a weekly lesson.

3 What do you think works best for teaching tamariki with Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, and Autism Spectrum Disorders?

- 3.1 A thorough and comprehensive Phonological Awareness Programme for all students is an essential first step. Ideally this would begin in Early Childhood Education and continue into the early primary years.
- 3.2 A Synthetic Phonics programme which is structured and progressive rather than the ad hoc “as it arises in text” process of teaching phonics needs to be taught in all Year 1 and 2 classes.
- 3.3 Teaching in a dyslexia friendly multisensory way in the classroom situation benefits all, not just those who learn differently. (Ref: www.4Dschoools.org.nz)
- 3.4 Early identification through screening and assessment in about Year 2, e.g. for those showing signs of struggle at the time of the 6-year net. Our experience shows that at this stage, although already falling behind their peers, most students have not lost self-esteem or the ability to keep trying.
- 3.5 One-on-one targeted tuition by specialist teachers for those with SLD. We have had Reading Recovery available for many years, but it is not the best and most efficient programme for those with SLD. Schools need to be allowed the flexibility to provide the best programme for the individual in need and not be tied in to the “one-size-fits-all” approach.
- 3.6 A specialist in SLD in or linked to every school and youth detention facility, in much the same way as Reading Recovery teachers are made available in primary schools.

4 What support and resourcing has been available at schools including for transitions and Special Assessment Conditions (SAC)

- 4.1 The transfer of information about the student's SLD and the uptake of that information by the new teacher or school are not consistent.
- 4.2 There is no structure within the school system for systematically identifying those children in early primary years who have SLD and are at risk of failure.
- 4.3 Although the situation has improved markedly in the years since 2007, there is still lack of knowledge about SLD in some government agencies and within the education system, including schools. This limits the ability to provide effective interventions.
- 4.4 SEG grants are allocated to all schools, but as it is up to the school how it will allocate the grant, children with SLD may receive no benefit.
- 4.5 Once a child has been identified as having SLD, SAC can be applied for by the school. SAC, however, is about accommodations not about remediation.
- 4.6 NZQA has been proactive in addressing the need for accommodations and for accepting school-based assessments. However, schools completing their own assessments struggle with the extra workload of gathering data and completing forms as there has been no additional allocation of funds to release teachers to attend to this task.

5 If you are a teacher, has your teacher training and professional development prepared you for working with students who have Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, and Autism Spectrum Disorders?

- 5.1 At undergraduate level there is no compulsory module which addresses identification and remediation of learning needs of individuals with SLD with sufficient depth to give new teachers confidence in this area. Feedback that we receive continually from our Course participants reinforces that graduating teachers feel ill-prepared in the recognition, understanding and remediation of children with SLD.
- 5.2 In general teachers have to source their own Professional Development in SLD, though many schools have sourced this for their staff since 2007. The Ministry of Education has been proactive in providing literature and websites to assist teachers in the understanding of SLD and ways of catering to the specific needs of those in their class. (ref www.inclusive.tki.org.nz ; 'About Dyslexia' Ministry of Education 2008)
- 5.3 Each year an increasing number of classroom teachers and RTLB are completing our Level 5 Certificate Course in SLD. This empowers teachers, giving an understanding of SLD and what it means for the child and their whanau/family; how SLD impacts on learning and how to teach effectively for those with SLD.

6 Is there anything else you think is important for the Education and Science Select Committee to know about tamariki with learning difficulties at school?

- 6.1 It has now been scientifically proven that the brain can change with appropriate intervention. Successful intervention in the early primary years will eventually lead to less funding being required at secondary level for NZQA SAC.
- 6.2 Screening of all children who appear to be at-risk at the time of the six year net is vital to break the cycle of failure.
- 6.3 If screening indicates a possibility of SLD that child requires a full cognitive and achievement assessment to determine strengths and weaknesses in preparation for targeted remediation.
- 6.4 These services should be available to all learners, not just those who can afford them. There is inadequate funding for RTLB/Resource Teacher Literacy or specialists like SPELD NZ teachers to work with individuals-in-need for long enough to effect substantial and sustainable improvement. Students with SLD do not qualify for ORRS funding. More funding needs to be available to enable schools to assess and remediate at risk children, instead of it being the parent/caregiver's responsibility.
- 6.5 The Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Disability Study (ongoing) has shown that un-remediated SLD has lifelong effects on the individual and society: increased depression and anxiety; increased divorce; fewer entering tertiary education; lower income and job opportunity.
- 6.6 New Zealand has:
 - 6.6.1 a significant number of students who underachieve, and the biggest gap between high and low achievers (PIRLS survey);
 - 6.6.2 50% of the adult population with low literacy and numeracy (Ref: New Zealand data: International Adult Literacy and Lifestyle survey; Tertiary Education Strategy 2010-2015; TEC 2008 "Learning Progressions for Adult Literacy and Numeracy"). Around half the adult population in NZ have literacy levels below the minimum level of competence required to meet everyday life.(Ref: MoE and ' The Characteristics of Adult Readers in Entry Level tertiary Settings in NZ' Janet McHardy 2009 University of Waikato Findings)
- 6.7 The cost to society in terms of unemployment or under employment, mental health and the justice system is high. Studies have shown a disproportionate number of prison inmates with SLD. (Ref: An Examination of the Relationship between Dyslexia and Offending in Young People: Gavin Read and Jane Kirk; Criminal Offending in the US: Dyslexia in the Prison Population: University of Texas Medical Branch & Texas
- 6.8 The impact of SLD pervades every aspect of society. A multidisciplinary collaborative approach is

needed amongst the Ministries of Education, Health, Disability, Youth, Social Development, Corrections,

6.9 People with SLD have a right to access education pursuant to the Human Rights Act 1993. NZ needs to meet its obligations under the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

7 Would you like to appear in front of the Select Committee to speak to your submission?

Marion Fairbrass, Chairperson, and Jeremy Drummond, Executive Office of SPELD NZ would like to appear. Marion can be contacted through SPELD NZ's executive officer Jeremy Drummond at eo@speld.org.nz 09 6240839

Thank you for this opportunity
Yours sincerely



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