



Submission to the Literacy Advisory Panel

About Square Pegs

Square Peg is a registered charity, founded in 2013 by concerned parents, academics and educators to improve recognition, understanding and action on dyslexia in Tasmania. Square Pegs has also advocated strongly with respect to literacy more broadly, in particular the need for teacher education, introduction of the phonics screener and implementation of an evidence-based structured literacy pedagogy across all schools.

Square Pegs welcomes the Government's focus on identifying strategies for literacy in Tasmania. This submission will focus specifically concerns relating to the wellbeing children with dyslexia/neurodiversity and related learning differences.

About Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a learning disability. Dyslexia affects a child's ability to develop language skills, particularly reading and spelling. Dyslexia is not a problem of intelligence, laziness or vision.

Dyslexia is common. Dyslexia accounts for 80 per cent of all students identified as having a specific learning disability. Dyslexia often runs in families and evidence suggests that at least 10 per cent of the population is dyslexic. This equates to over 8,300 current students.

Dyslexia is on a continuum. Dyslexia occurs on a continuum from mild to severe and each child with dyslexia will have a unique combination of strengths and weaknesses.

Dyslexia is lifelong. But, with the right support people with dyslexia can get better at reading and thrive. Early identification and intervention are crucial to ensuring children are on a positive pathway.

Children with dyslexia often go without identification or intervention and often suffer from poor self-esteem, anxiety and academic failure. This can lead to joblessness, mental health issues and increased risk of interaction with the justice system. The consequences can be catastrophic for the individual as well as resulting in significant costs for our community.

Given Tasmania's low levels of functional literacy, it is critical that children on the dyslexia continuum are identified early and receive effective, evidence-validated reading remediation as well as support with anxiety and mental wellbeing. Failure to do so significantly impacts the wellbeing of these children and diminishes future life opportunities.

Initiatives required to ensure the wellbeing of Tasmanian children and young people with dyslexia

Initiatives that our organisation considers should be a high priority for the Government:

- implement the **Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance [Roadmap to a Literate Tasmania](#)** in its entirety (see attached). This plan will help to identify gaps in essential reading skills early and provide for immediate, effective remediation (structured, explicit, multisensory instruction in synthetic phonics), rather than waiting for children to fail. It will also ensure that teachers are appropriately trained in the teaching of reading and improve access to educational psychologists and speech pathologists;
- fund and train **dyslexia consultants** in the Department of Education (similar to the Autism Consultants that are currently located in each Learning Service) to provide assistance and advice to schools and parents/families on how best to support the 10 per cent of children with dyslexia;
- develop a **mandatory Dyslexia Policy/Procedure** to ensure that the response to suspected or formally identified dyslexia is robust, consistent, effective (and most importantly kind) across all schools, including;
 - information and advice should be made available for teachers and parents to ensure early identification of children with dyslexia - there is currently no DoE Parent Fact Sheet or Policy relating to Dyslexia (or Specific Learning Disabilities)
 - training for teachers and support staff regarding dyslexia and related learning differences as well as the appropriate assessments, adjustments and accommodations
 - assessments should be more timely - time is critical as children are most responsive to remediation before 8 yrs
 - appropriate, specialist and targeted support should be made available when and where it is needed - currently many parents are told schools 'have nothing to offer' and 'no funding' to assist children with dyslexia – despite the roll out of the needs based funding model
 - it should be clear that the Department's inclusive practices extend to children with dyslexia - dyslexia or SLDs are not currently mentioned in any of the materials relating to support for children with disability
 - assistive technology experts should be made available to support students in effective use of assistive technology.
- provide **funding packages for families** to enable to access appropriate assessment services, remediation, counselling and assistive technologies where they are not available in a timely manner through the education system, to ensure that children with dyslexia can access the curriculum and participate in learning.

A summary of issues, complications and resolutions is also attached for Panel. In addition, Square Pegs requests that the Panel view its awareness film (14 minutes) which reflects some of the real stories of people with dyslexia in Tasmania: https://fb.watch/bZ4_JQGZcp/

Amelia Jones

Chairperson, on behalf of Square Pegs Dyslexia Support and Advocacy Inc.

squarepegstas.org



Square Pegs Dyslexia Support

Submission to the Literacy Advisory Panel:
Opportunities to improve outcomes for children with
dyslexia/specific learning differences in Tasmania
March 2022

Situation	Complication	Resolution
<p>Tasmanian children and families (from all education sectors) do not have equivalent access to independent advice, education, support or resources related to dyslexia/neurodiversity/SLDs as their mainland counterparts.</p>	<p>There is no dedicated, multi-disciplinary centre for dyslexia/SLDs in Tasmania. Services are dispersed, disparate and stretched and families struggle to know where to go or who to trust.</p> <p>Square Pegs does not receive Government funding and therefore has limited capacity to respond to the clear demand for services to the scale and depth required.</p>	<p>Recognise Square Pegs as the peak body for dyslexia/neurodiversity/SLDs in Tasmania.</p> <p>Fund Square Pegs to establish a dedicated, centre to deliver outreach, education/community awareness support services commensurate with those available via the Dyslexia/SPELD Foundation in WA and similar to Working it Out. Services would include family outreach/advice/support, community awareness, education/training and resources.</p>
<p>Tasmanian families are unable to access timely assessment or sustained, evidence based remediation.</p>	<p>There is no NDIS or Medicare funding is available.</p> <p>Wait times for assessments in DoE are 1-3 years. Remediation is not evidence-based and rarely available for Tier 2 or 3.</p> <p>Private services are affordable for few. Where available, private services are not financially accessible to most Tasmanian families. Assessments cost around \$1,200 - \$1,600. Private remediation costs between \$80 - \$160 per hour and quality intervention requires 2-3 hours per week for an extended period of time. Needs based funding does not appear to be available for the teaching of reading at Tier 2 or 3, but focuses on accommodations.</p> <p>Employment market for psychologists and speech pathologists is very tight. High level of unfilled positions.</p>	<p>Provide funding packages for families where timely assessment (within 3 months) is not available through the DoE, to cover the cost of private assessment.</p> <p>Provide funding packages for families to access Tier 3 intervention/remediation to ensure the human right of children with dyslexia/SLD to read is met.</p> <p>Provide scholarships for Tasmanians to complete speech pathology and psychology qualifications and relocation allowances/salary incentives to attract talent to Tasmania.</p> <p>Establish a UTAS Dyslexia/SLD Clinic within the new allied health clinics, to build future capacity and to increase access to educational assessments and reading intervention programmes as part of post-graduate allied-health programs. <i>Examples – UTAS Psychology Clinic, Macquarie Uni Reading Clinic, La Trobe Science of Language and Reading Lab.</i></p>
<p>There is widespread misunderstanding of dyslexia/SLD in the community, <i>resulting</i> in stigma, discrimination and bias which has a significant impact on mental health and life outcomes.</p>	<p>Square Pegs has limited capacity to provide community awareness campaigns and education/training at the scale and depth required for impact.</p>	<p>Fund Square Pegs to provide community awareness/education to improve understanding of neurodiversity, reduce stigma and improve outcomes for children and adults with dyslexia/SLDs, similar to those delivered by WIO for the LGBTIQ community.</p>
<p>Children with dyslexia are still falling through the gaps as a result of failure or delay in early identification and provision of ineffective support/remediation that is not evidence-based.</p> <p>The response to suspected or diagnosed dyslexia in the public education system is inconsistent and at times non-existent.</p> <p>The teaching of reading in Tasmania is still primarily based on outdated and disproven ‘whole language’ or ‘balanced literacy’ approaches.</p>	<p>Funding through NDIS or Medicare is not available for reading remediation for children with learning disabilities.</p> <p>Initial teacher education has limited/no content regarding dyslexia/neurodiversity and other SLDs. In-service teachers may not recognise signs of dyslexia and often do not know what to do.</p> <p>ITE has limited/no content regarding effective teaching of reading.</p> <p>Training and promulgation of ‘whole language’ or ‘balanced literacy’ approaches is still occurring in the DoE. Tier 1 and Tier 2 teaching of reading is not consistent with the evidence-base. Tier 3 intervention is non-existent.</p>	<p>UTAS initial teaching degrees to include dyslexia/SLD and science of reading: every teacher is likely to have one or more children with dyslexia in their class. Education on dyslexia/SLDs should be part of <i>all</i> teacher education courses. It is critical that teachers are aware of the ‘indicators’ and the evidence-based response for children with dyslexia/SLDs.</p> <p>Mandate training on dyslexia/SLDs and structured literacy/science of reading required under the <i>Roadmap to a Literate Tasmania Plan, Primary Reading Pledge, Inquiry into Initial Teacher Education, National Inquiry into Teaching of Reading 2005</i>, to ALL in-service school leaders and educators as a matter of urgency. Stop ineffective and disproven methods of the teaching of reading at all tiers.</p> <p>Publish a clear ‘Dyslexia/SLD Policy’ setting out the minimum standard for responding to suspected or diagnosed dyslexia/SLD in DoE schools. Where this can’t be met, funding packages to be provided to access private services.</p>