

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria

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**WITNESSES**

Amelia Matlock, Vice-Chair, Code Read Dyslexia Network; and

Heidi Gregory, Vice-President, SPELD Victoria, and Founder, Dyslexia Victoria Support.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Welcome back to the proceedings of the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues inquiry into the state education system. Ms Gregory and Ms Matlock, thank you very much for coming in today.

All evidence you are going to give us today is protected by parliamentary privilege in accordance with the *Constitution Act 1975* and the Legislative Council standing orders. The information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded, and after the hearings you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to review. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

My name is Ryan Batchelor. I am the Acting Chair of these proceedings today and a Member for the Southern Metropolitan Region. Joining me we have got Melina Bath, Member for Eastern Victoria; Joe McCracken, Member for Western Victoria; Rachel Payne, South-Eastern Melbourne; and Richard Welch, North-Eastern Metropolitan. On Zoom we have got Moira Deeming from Western Metropolitan and Aiv Puglielli from North-Eastern Metropolitan.

For the Hansard record, if you could both state your names and the organisations you are appearing on behalf of, and then I will invite you to make a short opening statement.

**Amelia MATLOCK:** Okay. Amelia Matlock, Vice-Chair of Code Read Dyslexia Network.

**Heidi GREGORY:** And Heidi Gregory, Vice-President of SPELD Victoria and Founder of Dyslexia Victoria Support.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Do either of you want to make an opening statement?

**Amelia MATLOCK:** It is off the cuff; sorry, I was not aware I had to prepare anything.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** That is fine. Brevity is good. We are pushed for time today, so whatever you can do, briefly.

**Amelia MATLOCK:** Beautiful. I think I will start this by saying Heidi and I are both parents of dyslexic children, so this is something that we are both incredibly passionate about. It is slightly nerve-racking to be sitting in this environment in front of you, so if we get a little bit lost in our discussions, please do feel free to keep us on track. Personally, I think sometimes the stories that are best told are the stories that are from a lived experience. My son – I am glad I have got the tissues – started primary school and by the end of grade 1 could not write his name. He could not read. He knew the names of five letters but not what sound they made. He was offered to go into a program called the ABLES program, which is a program designed for children with intellectual disabilities who are not expected to achieve those learning outcomes that would be expected in mainstream school, and that was offered off the back of no IQ testing or anything done to assess where he was. The teachers could not explain to me why he could not read. Nobody could tell me where his deficits were, so it was not until actually through Heidi's organisation that I was able to find a very experienced ex-schoolteacher who had left the school system and was a tutor in explicit instruction, who was then able within a matter of weeks to clearly identify where his learning deficits were, what sounds he did not need and what we needed to do to remediate that.

We then had to go through an incredibly expensive process, which people who are not able to afford it would not be able to go through, to get him diagnosed with dyslexia and have that diagnosis then enabled for a raft of accommodations to be applied at school. His NAPLAN results were consistently terrible but improving over the time of his education. We were very fortunate in the postcode lottery to be able to move him to a school

where they used explicit instruction in his everyday education setting, and that really enabled him to flourish. He is in year 8 now. He is sitting on 90 per cent in every subject, including Italian. This is a kid that, if he did not have very strong advocates at home who were not prepared to accept it, would never have been able to achieve the things that he is going to achieve in his life. I think that that is something that the education department really needs to reflect on and fix so that every child, regardless of what their parental capabilities are in terms of advocacy, are able to achieve to the very best of their abilities.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thanks very much, Ms Matlock. Ms Gregory.

**Heidi GREGORY:** I have prepared a speech, because I will probably cry; I am just giving you fair warning. My name is Heidi Gregory, I am the founder of Dyslexia Victoria Support and I represent over 10,300 members currently, mostly Victorian parents who seek guidance and support as they navigate the challenges posed by an education system that has long neglected children with reading disabilities. I have spent the past decade fighting for the fundamental rights of families and children impacted by poor literacy instruction in Victorian schools. Today I present to you not just the data and recommendations but the lived realities of millions of families devastated by decades of educational neglect. Let me share with you the stories of two families which represent generations scarred by a system resistant to change and dismissive of those who dare to challenge it.

First, let me tell you of my own story. I have changed the names. My husband Michael, who is now 52, attended a school in Glen Waverley during the 1970s and 80s. Bright and eager to learn when he started school, Michael soon struggled to learn to read, yet the only intervention he received in secondary school was when he was pulled out from his accelerated science classes, a subject he loved, to participate in remedial reading classes that were ineffective. He missed the critical years of effective reading intervention, and the stigma and humiliation of being taken out of class left a lasting impact on his self-esteem and educational engagement. The damage was done. Our son Jayden, who started primary school in Richmond in 2008, faced similar challenges. Bright and curious, Jayden struggled with reading, spelling and writing from the start of school. Despite clear early signs of difficulty, the only support he received was the outdated intervention program Reading Recovery, which proved to be ineffective. As a mother with a background in libraries and knowledge of the world that public libraries offered, it was heart-wrenching to see my son's continued struggle with reading due to poor literacy instruction. My son's literacy did not improve. I was desperate. I wrote to multiple state and federal ministers and the Department of Education looking for support. I received replies detailing the billions of dollars invested in our school systems, claiming to guarantee quality education and intervention for my child. However, it was all empty promises. The truth is that the Department of Education and my son's school endorsed teaching methods do not work for millions of children. The damage was done yet again. So we are talking about intergenerational failure.

Let me share the story of Tony and his son Harry, which mirrors the intergenerational struggles that many families face. Tony, now 52, attended school in Warrnambool during the 1970s and 80s. Despite being bright and eager to learn, he struggled with reading from an early age. The only help he received was removal from class for more ineffective teaching that only deepened his shame and disengagement. He began to dread school, believing himself to be dumb, a belief that dominated his youth and early adulthood and shaped his self-worth. His mother's attempts to provide help outside the school were fruitless. Tony had missed the early critical years for effective reading intervention. The damage was done. It will not take long.

Decades later, history repeated itself with Tony's son Harry, who started school in Sandringham in 2011. Like his father, Harry was bright and eager to learn but faced immediate barriers. His struggles with reading were obvious in his first weeks of school, yet when his mother approached the teacher she was met with the same dismissive attitudes that plagued Tony's childhood. She was advised by his teacher to read to him more and make learning fun, while he was being told by his principal to consider a trade as not all children can be academic. These responses not only undermined her concerns but also echoed the sentiments of indifference to her son's needs. More importantly, they meant Harry, like his father decades before, missed the critical early years for effective reading instruction. The damage was done yet again.

The stories of Michael, Jayden, Tony and Harry reflect broader systematic issues, a system that supports a wait-and-see approach over proactive targeted early intervention and the perpetuating cycle of literacy myths, neglect, failure and shame. The balanced literacy approach used in our schools and endorsed by the education department relies on teaching methods consistently debunked by research. This approach has left millions of

children believing they are at fault and not capable of learning to read and spell, directly impacting their life choices and opportunities and in some cases leaving them vulnerable to crime, incarceration, addiction and suicide. This is not about poor educational outcomes. These are issues of social justice, inequality and the ongoing psychological trauma and torment inflicted on children when they are told that their struggles are of their own making. Committee, yes, the chronic abuse – yes, abuse – of neglecting early education needs and dismissing parent outcomes must come to an end.

Out of desperation I founded Dyslexia Victoria Support in 2014. It was born out of a necessity to gather the advice and support I was not getting from the school or the Department of Education. It has become the largest parent-based education state group in Australia. The lived experience of DVS parents illustrates the stark reality of systemic failure within Victoria's education system. Their burdens are immense: leaving jobs to teach their children, which I have done; homeschooling; paying for costly out-of-school assessments and interventions; and managing the emotional toll of seeing their children struggle with anxiety and depression. Most feel ostracised when seeking help and face dismissive attitudes that suggest they are overreacting rather than addressing urgent needs. This cycle of neglect replicates the challenges many parents themselves faced as students within the same system. We demand change: a system that listens, supports and values each child's potential and ensures no family must carry this weight alone. Our schools must be hubs of excellence.

I met the education minister the Honourable Ben Carroll at a literacy conference on 1 June. His address to the audience of teachers and principals was crystal clear: he is committed to closing the chapter on balanced literacy. He said the evidence is settled. We assume that the current teaching practices endorsed by the Department of Education being used in all schools all over Victoria will change. Committee, it is time to close the chapter on balanced literacy. We need to stop the intergenerational illiteracy in our great state. Our precious children deserve better. As parents we must be reassured – in order to be successful – our children will have access to the highest quality evidence-based education and we will have the necessary reading, writing, spelling and numeracy skills needed before the end of primary school. Thank you so much.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you so much for that opening statement. I might go straight to the heart of that point: if there was a systematic, explicit instruction model, particularly in relation to phonics and literacy, in government schools in Victoria, would you support that?

**Heidi GREGORY:** Yes, we would, including the big six of literacy.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** What do you think the barriers are to the introduction of such a model, and what role do you think school autonomy should play in setting decisions about instructional methods in our schools?

**Heidi GREGORY:** It needs to be led from the top. Obviously the minister in his statement on 1 June indicated that it is possible, that he is currently looking at changing it. It is something that we have driven for the last 10 years, the research. Explicit direct instruction and systematic synthetic phonics certainly are programs that have been looked at, and there are some fabulous schools in Victoria that are currently doing this – Bentleigh West, for example, and quite a few other schools. It needs to be led from the top. We have schools who actively refuse to move to an evidence-based model.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Why do you think that is?

**Heidi GREGORY:** I do not think they are convinced by the research, and I do not think it has been mandated by the department. The department clearly support a balanced literacy program and currently have running records on their website as an assessment tool. That has long been linked to Reading Recovery.

**Amelia MATLOCK:** I think also it is very challenging for an educational leader to completely change the manner in which they have been teaching, or instructing their primary school to teach, for the last 20 or 30 years, because there will need to be an acknowledgement that perhaps what they have been doing previously was not right. I think if you have walked that path for such a long time and genuinely believe it, it is very challenging to change that thinking.

**Heidi GREGORY:** It is a resource issue as well. Obviously we need to have more resources for teachers but also a driven program that is based on evidence not just on a marketing idea, which is what balanced literacy was. Balanced literacy is very hard to define.

**Amelia MATLOCK:** And I think there are some excellent examples where it has been done successfully. I think if we have a look particularly in Canberra in the Goulburn region with the Catholic ed system up there and the Catalyst program – we have mentioned that in our report – the results within a very short timeframe were astounding. From 2018 I think to 2022 we saw such a big change in school performance and such a big region – 56 schools – implementing a program. I think that is the sort of system that could easily be replicated.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** So you think there is demonstrable evidence that change is both possible and would lead to success and improved outcomes?

**Amelia MATLOCK:** Absolutely.

**Heidi GREGORY:** Yes. And mentioned in the Grattan report is Churchill Primary. They have been able to lift their NAPLAN scores, and they have also been able to address some of the behavioural issues that were at the school. Their children are learning to read effectively.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thanks very much. Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. Amelia and Heidi, you have just described my early life. It is really hard to hear you say that, because I know you have lived it too. It is only the valuable expertise of people outside the system who were once in the system that were really supportive and also going, I hate to say, or I am saying, to a private school, where there was a greater focus. However, my now 28-year-old is about to sit his A-grade electrical exam, so he is winning and he is doing really well. But I think it is brave that you keep going, because where there is compelling evidence, we have to change the tide of those behaviours – noting, as you said, that people are very passionate about education, and when they see a particular line that worked, a balanced approach, they want to say stay on track. But the evidence here is quite compelling: we should ditch running records.

**Heidi GREGORY:** Yes.

**Amelia MATLOCK:** Yes.

**Melina BATH:** We should adopt phonics assessments.

**Heidi GREGORY:** Yes.

**Amelia MATLOCK:** Victoria does have a light-touch phonics test in the English Online.

**Melina BATH:** You mentioned that in your report.

**Amelia MATLOCK:** But it is not sufficient and it does not allow for national benchmarking, so to my mind it is a pointless exercise. If we are going to introduce phonics screening checks, which do not necessarily diagnose dyslexia but will identify all children who need assistance regardless of whether they have the diagnosis or are just instructional casualties, it needs to be a system that is being implemented across the nation. Otherwise, where are we benchmarking? How can we measure our performance against other states? We are just testing in a bubble.

**Melina BATH:** And how do you see this rolling out? Because you have mentioned there are case studies in Australia and in Victoria. How do you see this? If you were planning this for us, for state government, what would you say? Does it need a regional rollout? Does it need a city – what do you think?

**Amelia MATLOCK:** Look, it could be a regional rollout. I think it needs to be certainly a policy. It needs to start from government and from a policy setting.

**Melina BATH:** A policy directive recommendation.

**Amelia MATLOCK:** Or a mandate, a policy mandate, that these are the systems. There needs to be support for educational leaders to be able to go out into the schools and assist. There needs to be time allocated for teachers to learn, perhaps, the new methods that they might not be familiar with, and there needs to be ongoing monitoring and evaluation both of the teaching that is being implemented but also the results.

**Heidi GREGORY:** I do not think we are doing this on our own. South Australia have already adopted this model. New South Wales are working towards it, if they have not already implemented it.

**Melina BATH:** There is a tide of change.

**Heidi GREGORY:** Tasmania, ACT – we are basically the last state.

**Amelia MATLOCK:** The pariahs.

**Heidi GREGORY:** Yes, and in addition to the English Online, we do not have transparency as parents, so the assessments are being done of our children but we do not get to see the results of these.

**Melina BATH:** And you would like that?

**Heidi GREGORY:** Absolutely. It is the only indication other than NAPLAN that we have that our children are not succeeding.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Payne.

**Rachel PAYNE:** Thank you, Deputy Chair. Thank you, Heidi and Amelia, for presenting to us today. You did touch on this in your submission but also in relaying your personal experiences. You mentioned that when advocating for your children or for those that you represent you are coming against roadblocks, and I just wanted to delve into that a little bit further. You mentioned that not only is it the schools but the department. Can you talk us through what some of those roadblocks are and that resistance that you are receiving? How best, then, do you position yourself to continue to advocate on behalf of young people that you are representing?

**Amelia MATLOCK:** I think there is a degree of acceptance in schools that it is okay for some kids not to read, and I think that is possibly one of the biggest barriers. I think you mentioned it, and I am sure you probably have heard it as well – I have heard it: ‘Not all kids are going to be academic’. Well, all kids should have the opportunity to choose. They get to choose their path, but you are limiting that pathway. So there is a degree of acceptance. There is a lack of knowledge from frontline teaching staff, and that is not their fault. They are not taught this at university. The universities have a big responsibility in this path as well because they are continuing to churn out graduates who are not trained to teach our kids to read. There is resistance from the department perspective because to do something would be to acknowledge that there is an issue and would have to force that policy change. And then I think one of the major barriers as well is funding – it costs a lot. We had to pay privately. I am sure everyone has to pay thousands of dollars to get an assessment done to adequately identify exactly what the issues are and what the plan is for remediation. So I think that gives you a pretty good snapshot.

**Heidi GREGORY:** It is a good umbrella. From my perspective representing the families that are in DVS, often the roadblocks to us are getting a high-quality intervention plan. Some of the school leadership will say that the child is not funded, therefore they are not entitled to one, which is completely incorrect. Most of the cases we have are children with a full diagnosis, and the SMART goals sometimes are completely lacking at all. There are no targets, there are no goals, and children often in our schools are not exposed to evidence-based programs, so you will see an ILP that is basically a meaningless document where meetings are missed and parents do not get an opportunity to touch base with the school to ask the pointy questions about, ‘How is my child doing?’ So it starts at the coalface, and parents are very frustrated. There is some information on the department’s website, but there is often not a lot of training that happens in that space and there is not a mandatory approach to making sure that our children are taken care of and they have a learning disability.

**Rachel PAYNE:** This is something that we have heard as a committee more broadly from many different stakeholders.

**Heidi GREGORY:** Yes. It is frustrating from our perspective because parents do not know how to push, and they also do not want to be targeted as being the parents who are creating a fuss. Often we would just like it all to be handled within the school without having to employ a speech pathologist or a psychologist to assess our kids.

**Rachel PAYNE:** That makes sense.

**Amelia MATLOCK:** I did hear the buzzer, but I just want to throw something quickly in around funding, because I think that is something that we as parents hear a lot – ‘Your child’s not funded. We can’t provide support’ – and I think there is a disconnect between what is happening at a federal level and what is happening at a state level. The kids are included in the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data, which generates a funding bucket, an activity, from the federal government to come down. Now, what happens in the Catholic or the private system is generally the funding will follow the child. So the child is identified as a tag and gets the funding, and that funding will go to wherever the child is. In the state system what happens is the funding goes into a bucket, and it is a big bucket and it gets washed around and then it gets disbursed. But it is not being disbursed to the schools at the level at which they are putting in. So case in point for the primary school that we were at: I did a review of that, because it is publicly available. That school should have got – I cannot remember the figures; I would have to take it a little bit on notice – maybe 188-something thousand dollars. They got \$25,000, and I am happy to provide that review.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** That would be great. If you can take that on notice, that would be really good.

**Heidi GREGORY:** The disability and inclusion money is also sitting there for our kids, but as Amelia says, it goes into a bucket.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Mr McCracken, did you want to ask a question?

**Joe McCracken:** Yes, thank you. Firstly, thank you, both of you, for your time and effort today. I can see it is really such a thing that you are passionate about and care deeply about both at a broad perspective but personally as well. So thank you. Your work needs to be acknowledged, and I applaud you for it.

My question – I have got a couple, but I will try and be quick: I think, Heidi, you might have said before that you had some contact with the department and they responded with letters such as ‘We’ve spent millions and millions on this’ and that sort of thing. I think the word you might have used was ‘empty promises’. My question is: what do you think should be the priority, then, given that you have been told that all these other things are happening but clearly no outcome of meaning has come from that?

**Heidi GREGORY:** Teaching our children to read is not mandated by any school in Victoria, and that is quite shocking when you realise that your children are actually going to school – my children went to state schools, and the obligation on behalf of the school was to find tier 2 intervention, which is insufficient. So for us as parents, we are forced to make that financial decision to go and get tier 3 intervention for our children, and it is incredibly cost-prohibitive for families to make the choice between getting interventions and finding a psychologist for a child who is not thriving within our schools. So we are faced with this – I am certainly faced with this scenario in my house at the moment. I actually have two children with SLDs, and the process that I have witnessed over the last 10 years and from talking to other parents has just been horrific. If you do not walk out of primary school with the literacy and numeracy skills to function as an adult, you have decades, as in the examples that I was reading before, of intervention that we have to find and of ongoing, lifelong support for our kids. And it is also intergenerational. What we would like to do is nip it now and just acknowledge that the evidence is there and that we can move into a greater responsibility situation.

**Joe McCracken:** It is almost a case of that old saying, you know, ‘A stitch in time saves nine’ sort of thing.

**Heidi GREGORY:** Yes. Prevention is better than cure, and there is no cure for literacy difficulties. There is intervention – and we acknowledge that our secondary schools are also ill equipped to support our kids with literacy and numeracy difficulties, as I am experiencing at the moment with a child in year 12.

**Joe McCracken:** One of the other questions I had, which is sort of related to that – and I think you might have raised it too, Amelia – is about the federal system and how there is different funding that follows a particular student. I guess part of the challenge of a situation like this is the identification that there actually is an issue to deal with, and I guess once something is identified it then triggers a whole lot of other steps. What do you think we should do in that initial step of screening, identifying, to help identify factors that might help with situations like you have described?

**Heidi GREGORY:** Certainly from our perspective screening should be taking place in kindergarten, and a lot of the good schools in Victoria are currently doing that to identify where the gaps are. I mean, my children would have already been identified for a learning difficulty because it inherent in our family; it can be genetic. But it is also hard to identify when our children are instructional casualties. We have intergenerational instructional casualties. I was brought up in the 60s and 70s, so I was exposed to phonics as a child, whereas anybody who was born in the 80s and so on has not been necessarily exposed to explicit teaching methods that are evidence-based. So we have generations and generations and generations. I was talking about empty promises. It is nice to receive lots of money, but the programs are ineffective, so it is an empty promise in effect.

**Joe McCracken:** We hear a lot of the time that a lot of money is being spent, but the results do not seem to improve at all.

**Heidi GREGORY:** They are not.

**Amelia Matlock:** It is not necessarily more money that is needed; it just needs to be better spent.

**Heidi GREGORY:** And resources too. I have an example at the moment of a family who were promised high-quality intervention. The child does have some attendance issues, but the intervention teacher may be absent due to a whole range of issues. There are not enough staff at one school in particular. A new child had come in from overseas – excellent literacy skills – and needed some attention with their literacy. There were eight children on the waiting list with one intervention teacher, who was only there part time.

**Joe McCracken:** My time is up, I am sorry.

**The Deputy Chair:** That is all right. Mr Puglielli.

**Aiv Puglielli:** Thank you. Good morning. What kind of screening or assessment should be done in the prep to year 1 years to identify children who are struggling or at risk with regard to the concerns you have raised?

**Amelia Matlock:** I think there are a number of universal screenings that can be applied. As Heidi mentioned, there is a very simple screen that can be done as children exit kindergarten before they enter school to identify kids that might need a little bit more support as they start their schooling journey. The phonics screening check – which is implemented pretty much nationally now, except for in Victoria and Western Australia, who have got their own unique version and are out of step with the rest of the country – is in grade 1. Again, that is 40 words for the kids to read, and that identifies their phonics pick-up that they have been taught in those first couple of years. Then there is some universal screening that continues through that primary school journey and as they enter high school so that you have got another chance to capture kids as they go into high school. We know that once the kids enter high school, if they cannot read, they are disengaged. That then leads a lot of the issues that might come up in terms of behaviour, attendance and all of the other things that will impact on everybody's learning. So we have got such a good opportunity before kids finish those early years – prep to grade 2 – where if we can get the literacy instruction spot on, then they will be well set up for their future.

**Aiv Puglielli:** Thank you. With regard to reading, what kinds of books do you think schools should be giving either beginning readers or perhaps readers who are struggling to develop their reading skills?

**Amelia Matlock:** I can jump quickly in here.

**Heidi GREGORY:** Yes.

**Amelia Matlock:** I think decodable texts, which obviously everybody has heard of, definitely have a place to play in the early journey of kids who are developing their literacy skills. They enable them to have a chance of success in actually reading and learning good reading habits rather than guessing. Balanced literacy has multiple cueing options, including looking at the picture and what would fit there and lots of different things – which I might add are still given out to the prep parents. When your child starts prep, you are given a booklet about how to help your kids at home, and it says, 'Look at the picture. What word could fit there?' Nothing about actually –

**Heidi GREGORY:** It is entirely inappropriate. And in terms of resourcing for decodable books, decodable books are free, downloadable from the SPELD SA website, and there are a number of companies now that are making available free decodable books. It must come with some training, but it is certainly something that all schools should have in their libraries and that teachers should be exposed to.

**Amelia MATLOCK:** I think that advocates for balanced literacy really grab hold of this. They say, 'Decodable books are boring. Who wants to read "The cat sat on the mat and this did that"?' And they talk about authentic texts or rich texts, which are complex texts. We are not saying that there is not a role in education for these complex, rich authentic texts, but they are the ones that you might be read. The teacher might read that in story time, your parents might read that to you at home or you might be exposed to it through another means. But to give that book to a child who cannot read and to ask them to guess by looking at the pictures, 'What letter does it start with? What word would fit here? What could it sound like? Try another one. That's close enough,' is not going to help a child learn to read.

**Heidi GREGORY:** No, and it is actually teaching incredibly bad habits. When a child looks at a picture for cues and then moves potentially to a chapter book, they are still looking for picture cues.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Puglielli. Mr Welch.

**Richard WELCH:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you very much, Heidi. Thank you, Amelia. It is really, really interesting. I need no convincing at all on whether phonics is the appropriate way to learn language at all. Again I find myself in a point of absolute ignorance on a lot of these issues. I was under the false assumption that there were now routine tests for dyslexia, that the diagnosis has improved, but clearly not.

**Heidi GREGORY:** No. Parents are forced to independently pay for an assessment with a clinical psychologist. They have two routine tests that they use, and you can certainly go and get a language assessment from a speech pathologist. At the top end of getting a psychologist assessment from a private clinic, it can cost you upwards of \$3500.

**Richard WELCH:** So that technology and those methods have not cascaded down to any sort of mass application?

**Heidi GREGORY:** No, we do not do routine dyslexia screening in Australia.

**Richard WELCH:** Are you saying we could but we do not?

**Heidi GREGORY:** We need to do it from the beginning, which is a basic literacy assessment. We already have the federal screening check in Australia at the moment, but we have trouble –

**Amelia MATLOCK:** We are not using it.

**Heidi GREGORY:** No, the Department of Education have chosen their own English Online assessment, which does not meet any international norms.

**Richard WELCH:** Your evidence would be that we could do it if we chose to do it?

**Amelia MATLOCK:** The phonics screening check is not a diagnostic tool, but what it does is give you an indication of a child that is struggling with those basic phonics.

**Richard WELCH:** It is a good, reliable indicator.

**Amelia MATLOCK:** From that, anyone diagnosed with dyslexia requires six months of intervention anyway, so a child that is picked up through that phonics check should be put into an early intervention program for six months. If they are an instructional casualty, meaning they have not quite picked it up through the tier 1 school teaching, then that remediation will fix that. If they continue to struggle for the next six months with that intervention program, it would be at that point that the school would say, 'We need to go and investigate this further.'

**Heidi GREGORY:** What we are trying to do is improve the level of tier 1 instruction that is available for 80 per cent of the children in our schools at the moment. So if you look at it as a triangle, then the middle is

intervention, and the top tier, which is tier 3, is usually where parents step in. What we are trying to do is make sure that the whole of school is evidence based for all students and then hoping that there are no instructional casualties. But if children are identified going further up the chain, then it will be more intensive but more of the same.

**Richard WELCH:** Do you think that would be a particularly time-consuming process?

**Heidi GREGORY:** It currently is. Certainly pulling kids out of a classroom to put them into intervention is.

**Richard WELCH:** But under the program you would envision –

**Amelia MATLOCK:** It is no different to what happens now. It is just not done correctly.

**Richard WELCH:** It is just with a different methodology.

**Amelia MATLOCK:** So we have tier 1, and that is balanced literacy. We have tier 2. That is levelled literacy intervention or Reading Recovery – rubbish, does not fix the problem. Then the parents are stepping in with expensive tier 1. Some schools do provide tier 1, and it is dependent on whether it is evidence-based. Then we have other schools, as Heidi mentioned. Bentleigh West is a great example, where they have got tier 1, tier 2 and tier 3 working amazingly together.

**Richard WELCH:** I will move on, because I am just conscious of time and I want to get my other questions in. Given that balanced – I might need to drop that question. Can I sneak one extra one in?

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** You can sneak one in.

**Richard WELCH:** Thank you, Chair. Alongside explicit teaching do you think there also should be some emphasis on explicit marking? I find that educational attainment now is described in very general language: ‘You have learned these behaviours; you have a good learning attitude’ rather than ‘You got this right and you got this wrong’.

**Heidi GREGORY:** From an academic perspective rather than a behavioural focus?

**Richard WELCH:** Yes.

**Heidi GREGORY:** I think a good example of that is the outcome from Churchill Primary, where they introduced an explicit teaching model and their overt behaviour was reduced considerably. Is that the –

**Richard WELCH:** I am out of time.

**Heidi GREGORY:** Right. Okay.

**Richard WELCH:** But anyway, we will take it offline. Thank you, Chair.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Heidi and Amelia, thank you so much for coming in and giving us your evidence today, obviously both very heartfelt and informative for us. We very much appreciate that. That brings this session to a close, and we will suspend now for morning tea.

**Witnesses withdrew.**