



House of Assembly

Extract from Hansard

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Dyslexia Action Group

Mr PICCOLO (Light) (16:09): Today, I would like to bring to the house's attention a public meeting which took place last week in my electorate. The public meeting was organised by the Dyslexia Action Group, Barossa, Gawler and surrounds. At the outset I would like to acknowledge the wonderful work undertaken by Dr Sandra Marshall and Ophie Renner. Ophie was the Gawler Citizen of the Year this year and also the South Australian Citizen of the Year. These two people, with a small group of volunteers, have been very active in bringing the issue of dyslexia to the attention of the local community and also ensuring that particular children with dyslexia are given a fair go in the education system.

I had the honour and the privilege to be asked to chair the forum, both last week and an earlier forum late last

year. The forum was attended by a number of parents, teachers and other community members and both forums have had capacity crowds, so there are a lot of children in our community, and obviously families who are concerned about their children's development because they have the disability of dyslexia.

The forum, apart from myself who actually chaired the session, was also attended by the local mayor, mayor Brian Sambell, who spoke about some of the positive outcomes for young people in addressing the issue of dyslexia. Ms Angela Weeks, the Clinical Director of Specific Learning Difficulties of South Australia (SPELD), gave a presentation on the importance of goal setting for students with dyslexia and also provided some explicit strategies that teachers could implement to support those students. Ms Sandy Russo, a teacher at SPELD, presented information about assistive learning technologies that were available to assist students with dyslexia to access and participate successfully at school and also in the home environment. She talked about the use of MP3 players, digital recording devices, computers, software, etc., which actually help students learn.

The local Barossa regional director for education, Kathryn Bruggemann, talked about the need for teachers to have an understanding of dyslexia and the impact of the condition on their self-esteem and learning outcomes for young people diagnosed with dyslexia. She spoke from personal experience. She has a child who actually suffers from dyslexia, so she has quite a

passion to address this issue. Julie Aschberger, who works in the department, talked about some new initiatives that the department was introducing to roll out a greater awareness of dyslexia in the classroom and also how teachers can actually support students and how they can just change their teaching style, which not only helps students with dyslexia but the mainstream class as well because those styles are adaptable for both.

Ingrid Alderton, again another person from the department, spoke about dyslexia-friendly school packs, which is a UK initiative to support students with dyslexia in the classroom. The point was made that education is actually managed differently in the UK, where local authorities have a lot more say. Therefore, there is actually a different approach to students with disabilities. Mr Dave Pisoni, the opposition spokesperson, also attended the meeting. He provided, if you like, a Liberal Party's opinion on where education is in this state, and I will let him talk about that more. I do not need to use my time to discuss it here.

At the end of the meeting, as chair of the session, I was asked to have a discussion with the people present and talk about what sort of things they wanted at future meetings. The people who attended indicated they wanted more information about other learning difficulties, ways of supporting students with dyslexia and special provisions particularly around the SACE program to ensure that their children have the best opportunities through not only education but also

training. There were suggestions about some smaller specific interest groups being formed to explore and address issues and to build the knowledge of attendees. There were a number of parents who would like to know what they can do to support their child in the home.

There was a really positive mood in the forum; in other words, a focus on what we can do to help our young children, particularly with early intervention, how to support them and how to help them maintain their self-esteem so they do not actually lose interest in their education, which has been a problem in the past. Kids who have not coped with the mainstream program have actually opted out, which is unfortunate because, obviously, those children would have had a lot of potential which has not been realised.

The students also talked about how we actually help with transition because, in private schools, children often have one teacher and, in secondary education, they might have multiple teachers. A whole range of issues was raised but it was a very well-attended forum. I also indicate the government's support to help these children.

TIME EXPIRED