

**Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace  
Relations**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE  
Additional Estimates 2012-2013**

**Outcome 2 - Schools and Youth**

**DEEWR Question No.** EW0861\_13

**Senator Nash provided in writing.**

**Question**

**Students with Disability - Speech and Language difficulties**

1. Research by the Murdoch Children's Institute which found one in five children starting prep in Victoria has poor language skills. Is this study indicative of poor language skills in children across Australia?
2. Is this an area that the Federal Government is currently addressing with funding or research given the long term impact of speech problems such ongoing learning difficulties and bullying?
3. Is there any available data on the prevalence of speech and language difficulties in school aged children in regional and remote Australia?
4. How many speech pathologists are currently working at schools in NSW?
5. How many of these speech pathologists are based in regional and remote NSW?
6. Is the Government assisting States to work toward ensuring there are more speech therapists in our schools?
7. Is there currently a shortage of speech pathologists in rural New South Wales?
8. If yes, what is being done to address this shortage?
9. Speech Pathology Australia are calling on the Government to provide more support for student placements in rural and remote areas, introduced bonded rural/remote HECS scholarships for speech pathology students and the provide re-entry training scholarships for speech pathologists in rural and remote areas. Are the solutions being suggested by Speech Pathology Australia?
10. Please clarify whether the Better Start for Children with Disability initiative now includes speech impairment?
11. If not, please explain why speech impairment was not included as a disability under the initiative?

## Answer

### **1. Research by the Murdoch Children's Institute which found one in five children starting prep in Victoria has poor language skills. Is this study indicative of poor language skills in children across Australia?**

Limited data is available to the Australian Government as this is a responsibility of states and territories. Information that is available nationally is from the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) a population based measure of how children have developed by the time they start school. Five areas (or domains) of early childhood development are measured:

- physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills (school based); and communication skills and general knowledge.

The 2009 AEDI data shows that 8.9 per cent (about one in 11) of Australian children were reported as developmentally vulnerable on the language and cognitive skills (school based) domain and the corresponding figure for Victoria was 6.1 per cent (about one in 16).

#### Background

The AEDI has been endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) as a national progress measure of early childhood development. The first national implementation of the AEDI was conducted in 2009 and the second in 2012. The results of the 2012 implementation are expected to be released shortly.

State and territory education authorities use this information as one of the inputs in planning for students' needs.

### **2. Is this an area that the Federal Government is currently addressing with funding or research given the long term impact of speech problems such ongoing learning difficulties and bullying?**

The Australian Government has invested almost \$65 billion over 2009-12 for Australian schools through payments to states and territories. State and territory governments and non-government education authorities have primary responsibility for the delivery of school education and can utilise this funding flexibly to provide programs and services for schools and their students.

The Australian Government is also providing \$200 million through the More Support for Students with Disabilities initiative. This additional funding is being provided to government and non-government education authorities to support their work with students with disability and/or learning difficulties during the 2012 and 2013 school years. Education authorities are using this funding to build the capacity of schools and teachers to better meet these students' individual needs.

In addition, targeted funding for students with additional learning needs in non-government schools is provided through the Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs program (LNSLN). This calendar year based program provided an estimated \$811.2 million over 2009-12 to provide additional support to help students who are educationally disadvantaged. The program has been funded to \$218.6 million for 2013.

### **3. Is there any available data on the prevalence of speech and language difficulties in school aged children in regional and remote Australia?**

Assessment of school students is the responsibility of the states and territories and so limited data is available to the Australian Government, including in regional and remote areas.

Information that is collected and available nationally is about students with a disability. According to the 2009 Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers:

- There were 313,124 school aged children across Australia with a disability (aged 5-19), and
- Of these, 122,029 experienced communication difficulties ranging from mild to profound.

The following table presents data on school aged children with a disability and communication difficulties in major cities, inner regional, and outer regional and remote categories.

	School aged children with communication difficulties.	As a % of all school aged children
Major Cities	77791	2.92%
Inner Regional	29432	3.22%
Outer Regional and Remote	14806	3.61%
Total	122029	3.06%

**Please note the following caveats when using this data:**

- Communication difficulties under this survey refer to a broader group than those with speech and language difficulties (e.g. communication difficulties can apply to people with a hearing impairment).
- The survey includes a broader definition of disability than those applied by state and territory education authorities. This results in the identification of greater number of school aged children with disability compared with data provided by state and territory education authorities.

### **4. How many speech pathologists are currently working at schools in NSW?**

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations does not collect this data. The NSW Department of Education and Community Services is responsible for recording and collating this information.

### **5. How many of these speech pathologists are based in regional and remote NSW?**

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations does not collect this data. The NSW Department of Education and Community Services is responsible for recording and collating this information.

**6. Is the Government assisting States to work toward ensuring there are more speech therapists in our schools?**

State and territory governments and non-government education authorities have primary responsibility for the delivery of school education and they determine the support required in schools.

As outlined in question one, the Australian Government provides funding that can be used flexibly by education authorities to provide programs and services appropriate for schools and their students.

**7. Is there currently a shortage of speech pathologists in rural New South Wales?**

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations does not collect this data. The NSW Government is responsible for recording and collating this information.

**8. If yes, what is being done to address this shortage?**

N/A

**9. Speech Pathology Australia are calling on the Government to provide more support for student placements in rural and remote areas, introduced bonded rural/remote HECS scholarships for speech pathology students and the provide re-entry training scholarships for speech pathologists in rural and remote areas. Are the solutions being suggested by Speech Pathology Australia?**

The Department of Innovation, Industry, Science, Research and Tertiary Education is responsible for issues relating to bonded rural/remote HECS scholarships for speech pathology students.

**10. Please clarify whether the Better Start for Children with Disability initiative now includes speech impairment?**

The Better Start for Children with Disability initiative is administered by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. This query should be directed to that Department.

**11. If not, please explain why speech impairment was not included as a disability under the initiative?**

The Better Start for Children with Disability initiative is administered by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. This query should be directed to that Department.