

12 October 2017

Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham  
Minister for Education  
PO Box 6100  
Senate  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Education and Employment Legislation Committee

Tabled doc #: 3

Tabled by: Senator Jacinta Collins

Date: 26 October, 7, 23pm

Via email: senator.birmingham@aph.gov.au

Dear Minister

### **Open Letter: Concerns regarding *Leading Learning 4 All* resource**

We write to highlight serious flaws in the **Leading Learning 4 All (LL4All) resource**, which was funded by the Commonwealth Government and launched in February this year.

The resource is intended to support schools, school leaders and teachers in promoting inclusive education and meeting Commonwealth legislation and policy, namely the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) and particularly the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*.

We are concerned that this resource, while seeking to improve practitioner understanding, implementation and compliance, is of poor quality and provides contradictory information.

Signatories to this letter emphasise that these flaws need to be addressed prior to roll-out (scheduled for 16 October 2017). These concerns have been raised more than once with the developers and each time this feedback has been ignored.

For example, concerns relating to an **audit tool** were first raised during the website's development phase; however, the tool was not corrected until after the launch and only following strong public criticism of inherent bias in an attitudinal scale that did not include the option of 'always' in relation to the inclusion of students with disability in regular classrooms.

Further concerns were raised by three experts in inclusive education via the *Australian Association for Research in Education* (AARE) EduResearch Matters blog on 15 May 2017.

**This expert critique** noted four main issues:

- poor modelling of inclusive practice;
- inadequate provisions to enable accessibility;

- disrespectful representation of students with disability; and
- inaccurate interpretation of the DSE.

Their criticism of the resource resulted in a response by the Director of Leading Learning for All on 16 May 2017:

*“LL4All will continue to evolve and in so doing will take account of the accessibility issues raised in the blog in our next version of the website. Our ‘Practitioner in Action point videos’ for schools will be refreshed and added to with additional accessibility features. Where possible we will add transcripts to existing videos.”*

**However, almost five months later, there have been no changes to address any of the concerns raised.**

We are calling on the Commonwealth government to suspend distribution of the resource pending an independent review and the rectification of flaws, as these have the potential to reinforce poor practice in Australian schools. Some of the more noticeable flaws include:

- **Accessibility.** There are several instances where the website fails to meet the mandated WCAG 2.0 AA accessibility standards. One of the most obvious instances being the videos lacking closed captions or at least a transcript. Only auto-generated captions are provided and these are inaccurate. Some videos do not have captions at all, and two are in Dutch. Audio quality is poor and no transcripts are provided. Text-based material is not accessible to users with vision impairments.
- **Representation of students with disability.** Videos do not model appropriate use of language when referring to students with disability. The videos of students do not represent inclusive learning environments or arrangements but illustrate students learning in isolation, away from their classes. This is not consistent with **evidence** of effective practice in inclusive education.
- **Consultation with students and their parents/carers.** There is very limited information about the process of consulting with students and no in-text definition. This runs counter to the obligation of education providers under the DSE to consult with students with disability and their parents/carers as principal stakeholders in their own education.
- **Lack of engagement with parents/carers of students with disability and their representative organisations.** Parents/carers have not been involved in the creation of this resource and there is very limited information about their role or that of representative disability organisations in supporting inclusion.
- **Inconsistencies in the information presented about the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*.** There are instances where videos indicate that it is acceptable for students with disability to have access to some activities (but not all). Indicative quotes from videos are: *“We try to include him*

*on the same basis on most activities*” (Video: Adjustment in the organisation of the whole school); *“Liam is only here two-three days a week. So I often like to save the jobs on those days that Liam can participate in”* (Video: Adjustment in student-teacher interactions). These statements are inconsistent with the obligation of education providers to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that students with disability can participate on the same basis as other students and could normalise partial enrolment, itself a form of exclusion recognised in numerous inquiries.

- **Factual errors and poor evidence base.** There are a number of factual errors that are inconsistent with the quality expected from a government-endorsed website. In one of the videos a principal says that *“I looked at the disability standards that came out in 1992 [sic]”* (video: Adjustment in the organisation of the whole school) and the **Infographic** refers to *“United Nations Convention [sic] rights of persons with disabilities 1998 [sic]”*. This lack of attention to detail undermines the seriousness and professionalism with which teachers should regard their obligations towards students with disability. The resource is not well supported by evidence, with the **references** to “evidence-based reading material” indicating a reliance on weak studies and sources.
- **Discussion of safe spaces.** One proposed strategy promoted by the resource for mainstream schools to respond to potential lunch-time bullying and victimisation is the creation of ‘safe spaces’, with the question posed *“what are the advantages and disadvantages of ‘safe spaces’ as part of a school’s approach to harassment and victimisation?”* Given the extensive criticism of the use of withdrawal spaces to isolate students with disability, and the fact that this video places no focus on perpetrators, this video does not comply with the DSE and the obligations schools have to address victimisation and harassment.

We the undersigned respectfully request that the planned roll-out of the resource is suspended and the Leading Learning 4 All website undergoes rigorous independent review prior to any further development or action.

Yours faithfully,

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<http://www.allmeansall.org.au>

**Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE)**

<http://www.are.edu.au>

**Australian Association of Special Education (AASE) (NSW Chapter)**

<http://www.aase.edu.au/chapters/nsw>

**Autistic Families International**

<http://www.autisticfamilies.org>

**Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (UK)**

<http://www.csie.org.uk>

**Cerebral Palsy Education Centre**

<http://www.cpec.org.au>

**Children and Young People with Disability Australia**

<http://www.cyda.org.au>

**Disability Advocacy Network Australia**

<http://www.dana.org.au>

**Disabled People's Organisations Australia**

<http://www.dpoa.org.au/>

**Down Syndrome Australia**

<http://www.downsyndrome.org.au/>

**Family Advocacy**

<http://www.family-advocacy.com/>

**First Peoples Disability Network**

<http://www.fpdn.org.au>

**Imagine More**

<http://www.imaginemore.org.au>

**JFA Purple Orange**

<http://www.purpleorange.org.au/>

**National Ethnic Disability Alliance**

<http://www.neda.org.au>

**Neurodiversity Connect**

[neurodiversityconnect.org.au/](http://neurodiversityconnect.org.au/)

**People With Disabilities WA**

<http://www.pwdwa.org/>

**People With Disability Australia**

<http://www.pwd.org.au/>

**Starting With Julius**

<http://www.startingwithjulius.org.au>

**Tasmanian Disability Education Reform Lobby**

<http://www.tasmaniandisabilityeducationreformlobby.com>

**The Growing Space**

<http://www.thegrowingspace.com.au>

**Women with Disabilities Australia**

<http://www.wwda.org.au>

**World of Inclusion (UK)**

<http://worldofinclusion.com>

**Youth Disability Advocacy Network**

<http://www.ydan.com.au>

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