



**Senator Jacinta Collins**  
**Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations**

Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

MC12-008222

Mr Denis Moriarty and Mr Gautam Raju  
c/o Our Community  
PO Box 354  
NORTH MELBOURNE VIC 3051

Dear Mr Moriarty and Mr Raju

Thank you for your letter of 18 July 2012 to the Hon Peter Garrett AM MP, Minister for School Education Early Childhood and Youth, seeking a response to the following question asked at the Communities in Control Conference held at Moonee Valley in May 2012:

*"One in fourteen children in Australia is born without the capacity to gain, understand or use language. Without intervention they face a drastic future, so much so that 50% of youth offenders in this country have a serious oral language deficiency. Why, as a nation, are we not tackling the challenges that these children present us with?"*

As matters relating to school students with disability fall within my portfolio responsibilities, as Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations, your letter was forwarded to me for reply. I apologise for the delay in responding.

Let me first say that OurSay and Our Community are both fantastic organisations promoting community participation. The Oursay concept is an innovative approach to connecting community and government, and I congratulate you on your efforts to help the community focus and consider important issues in depth.

I appreciate the importance which the questioner places on the development of children with oral language disorders. Without early intervention and positive education opportunities, many of these students face a future with higher unemployment rates, lower incomes, reduced educational attainment and as the questioner acknowledges, an overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. The Government recognises this as an important public policy issue and is undertaking a range of initiatives and actions to improve the lifelong outcomes of students with disability and learning difficulties. The education of all children, including those with disability such as oral language disorders, is central to the Australian Government's priorities for school education.

To improve the educational opportunities of all Australian students, and help them reach their full potential, the Government is providing an estimated \$65.4 billion for schooling over the 2009–2012 funding period. Since 1 January 2009, Government funding for schooling has been delivered through the intergovernmental funding framework under a National Education Agreement with 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.


In addition to this, the Government is currently implementing the *More Support for Students with Disabilities* initiative. This initiative is providing \$200 million in additional funding to government and non-government education authorities, to support their work with students with disability and/or learning difficulties. Education authorities are using this funding to increase support for students with disability by building the capacity of schools and teachers to better meet their individual needs. Services are being delivered in the 2012 and 2013 school years. Further information is available at [www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/Programs/Pages/MoreSupportforSWD.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/Programs/Pages/MoreSupportforSWD.aspx)

The Government fully supports and protects the rights of children with disability and learning difficulties to participate in education on the same basis as other students. The Disability Standards of Education 2005 describe the obligations of schools to providing the necessary adjustments to support students with additional needs. This support may be in the form of healthcare support, learning support or a combination of both. The Standards were recently reviewed and the Review found that although the Standards provide a good framework for enabling students to access and participate in education, more work needs to be done to ensure they are implemented effectively. That is why the Government will be working in partnership with state and territory education authorities, and the non-government sector, to follow up on these recommendations. Further information can be found here [www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/Programs/Pages/disabilitystandardsforeducation.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/Programs/Pages/disabilitystandardsforeducation.aspx)

Of course, the effectiveness of disability support and legislation is underpinned by the quality of teaching, and the Government is taking steps to ensure teaching across Australia meets a quality standard. Under the *Smarter Schools Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership*, the states and territories agreed to implement a set of National Professional Standards for Teachers to underpin important reforms for the teaching profession. The professional standards were officially launched by Education Ministers in February 2011 for implementation from 2013. The professional standards specify the skills and knowledge that teachers need, including skills to identify and assist students with special learning needs. Further information can be found here [www.aitsl.edu.au/](http://www.aitsl.edu.au/)

Thank you again for writing to me regarding this important issue. I wish you all the best with the ongoing success of Oursay, Our Community, and the Communities in Control program.

Yours sincerely



**Senator Jacinta Collins**

**7 September 2012**