

A letter to the Shadow Minister for Education, Tanya Plibersek

**Coral
Kemp**



Dear Ms Plibersek,

Until the recent boundary changes, you were my local member and someone I thought could well be a future leader of the Labor Party. I was moved to contact you after hearing your response to the recent NAPLAN scores. As a traditional Labor voter, I was appalled to hear your response to these results. Throwing more money at the problem simply will not change things. I am a former primary school teacher, special educator and academic. I have been reading the research relating to the teaching of literacy and numeracy for more than 40 years, something that I was not taught to do as a trainee teacher. I have three grandchildren in kindergarten and one in Year 1 in reasonably affluent NSW schools. I was horrified when I learned of the approach to teaching literacy in those schools.

The program that is being used (L3) has no research to support it and does not include the systematic teaching of phonics, which we know is absolutely essential if all children are to become fluent readers. One of my grandchildren, who is of average intelligence, is struggling with both literacy and numeracy and, in Year 1, is losing confidence in her ability. She needs an evidence-based program but is not getting one. She is one of those children who would not have a learning difficulty if provided with the right program but is headed for failure without it. Unfortunately because she lives a long way from me, I am not able to give her the support that she absolutely needs.

A fortune is being spent on the L3 program, mainly in professional development to the staff delivering it. At the state school where my daughter's children (twins) attend kindergarten, parents are having their children tutored outside school or are withdrawing their children and enrolling them in private schools. These parents have the resources to do this. My concern is for the children in disadvantaged areas where parents do not have the same options and do not have the confidence to challenge the program adopted by the school.

You can double the amount of money spent on education and provide more to disadvantaged schools but this will not change the literacy and numeracy skills of our children unless the right content is taught using the right approach. My daughter was told that she should not use a different approach to teaching reading to her children as it would confuse them. I would have laughed at this if it hadn't been so disturbing. I have the skills and live close enough to work with these grandchildren and have no doubt that they will be fine in the long term. I weep for other children, in particular disadvantaged children and the children with significant learning difficulties.

Please stop playing party politics and think about our children, who after all are our future. If you are interested in having a comprehensive briefing on the research behind the teaching of literacy and numeracy, I would be happy to provide this for you.

Regards,

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