Background
Dyslexia, as with other learning disabilities, is recognised under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) as a disability.

Under the DDA and its subordinate legislation, Disability Standards for Education 2005, state schools are required to identify barriers to student learning, including dyslexia, and make educational responses to ensure the student can access and participate at school on the same basis as other students.

How state schools are supporting students with dyslexia

1. Support for students with dyslexia in Queensland state schools is available through a range of student support services allocated to regions and schools. Each principal is responsible for the effective use of resources provided to support the educational programs for all students in their school.

2. Support for students with dyslexia is available through a range of student support services allocated to regions and schools which may include support teachers (literacy and numeracy), guidance officers, assistive technology, special considerations for assessments and speech-language therapy.

3. The Support Teacher (Literacy and Numeracy) works within school teams, and with classroom teachers, providing advice and co-teaching. They also provide intensive literacy and numeracy teaching to students where appropriate.

4. Under the Great Results Guarantee, schools are required to enter into an agreement that commits them to guarantee that every student will either achieve the National Minimum Standard for literacy and numeracy for their year level or have an evidence-based plan, developed by the school, in place to address their specific learning needs.

5. With this initiative, the Government is investing an additional $131 million into Queensland schools in 2014. Student performance will be measured throughout the year and schools are required to demonstrate how the extra funding is helping to maximise learning for all students.

6. Under this agreement, schools have the flexibility and autonomy to decide how the funding should be spent to improve student performance. For example, schools may hire specialist educators to provide additional support, use targeted professional development for teachers, or buy additional learning tools such as specialised literacy or numeracy programs.

Early Identification
The Department is developing the Early Start suite of materials for monitoring and assessment during the early phase of learning to support improvement and achievement for all students.

Teachers are able to use Early Start materials to generate student literacy and numeracy data in the early years, which can be used to inform curriculum planning and more effectively differentiate teaching for students in Prep - Year 2.

Teacher Professional Development
Through the More Support for Students with Disabilities National Partnership, my Department is providing professional development for teachers through the Online Training Australia course Understanding Dyslexia and Significant Difficulties in Reading. It is my understanding that as of 30 June 2014, more than 2,489 teachers in Queensland state schools have participated in this course.
Dyslexia Friendly Schools

While Queensland is not implementing the formal British Dyslexia Association “Dyslexia Friendly Schools” program, the principles which underpin it are expected of all Queensland state schools and are reflected in the whole-school approach to supporting student learning used in Queensland state schools. Across Queensland state schools, principals provide leadership in ensuring every student, including students with dyslexia, can access and participate in quality learning.

The whole school approach offers a continuum of support of increasing intensity based on the identified needs of students. This approach has been informed by the Response to Intervention model advocated by the Rose Report (2009) and the International Dyslexia Association (2008).

Assessments and Examinations

Students with dyslexia are entitled to special considerations in assessment tasks including examinations. Specific adjustments made to assessments are delivered in consultation with the student (and/or their parents) whilst maintaining the academic integrity of the assessment. This may include the use of assistive technology where appropriate.

The Explicit Teaching of Reading

In 2012 Robina State School became the first Australian Dyslexia Association Dyslexia Friendly School. While this was a significant achievement in reality it could be seen as easier to achieve than a schoolwide model to explicitly teach reading using scientifically-based reading research methods. Why? Because teaching reading is rocket science and there is significant deep pedagogical content knowledge that expert teachers of reading should know and be able to do. Why? Because for more than three decades, advocates of “whole-language” instruction have argued that learning to read is a “natural” process for children.

While it is the strong and sustained advocacy of caring parents that encouraged Robina State School to seek Australian Dyslexia Association Dyslexia Friendly School accreditation it is the business of every school to be on a trajectory of sustained improvement resulting in all students being able to read at or above grade level by the end of grade 3 through the explicit teaching of reading.

To become an ADA approved Dyslexia Friendly School Robina State School has undertaken ADA accredited Multi-Sensory Learning Teacher Training and ADA Professional Development for Differentiation in the Classroom. Since 2012 Robina State School has continued to reflect on what it means to be a dyslexia friendly school. Robina State School staff now understand Dyslexia as a learning disability that is neurologically based, genetic in nature and lifelong. Teachers also understand that Dyslexia learning difficulties are frequently resistant to change and that most dyslexic children have normal intelligence and some gifted children may have dyslexia.

Robina State School is implementing the following 9 actions in 2014 to support students with dyslexia and to build an even more ‘dyslexia friendly’ school environment:

1. Identify students with dyslexia
2. Explicit instruction as central to our Pedagogical Framework
3. Setting S.M.A.R.T. learning goals for monitoring progress in the classroom Years 4-6
4. Classroom accommodations
5. Reasonable adjustments for assessment
6. Participation in intensive reading intervention Years 3-6
7. Professional development for teachers
8. Assistive Technology for Years 5 & 6
9. Social Emotional Program for Years 5 & 6

1. IDENTIFY - Current students and new enrolments are identified early with all available information, in particular a diagnosis of dyslexia, stored centrally on the student’s OneSchool profile and is accessible by all relevant staff.
2. EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION - All lessons are supported by clear learning intentions (WALT - what am I learning today?) and success criteria (WILF - what I am looking for?). The learning and how to be successful is explicit and differentiated for students, with a lesson model that moves from teacher modeling to independent learning used. Students receive immediate feedback in the classroom as well as written feedback on written assessment.

3. LEARNING GOALS - Students with dyslexia in Year 3 are closely monitored and supported by classroom teachers and learning support staff. Students with dyslexia in Years 4 to 6 have SMART learning goals for literacy to inform the instruction in the classroom and monitor progress over a five week cycle, from Week 1 of each term (starting Term 2) and reviewed in Week 5 of each term. SMART goals are:

• Specific (or significant),
• Measurable (or meaningful),
• Attainable (or action-oriented),
• Relevant (or rewarding) and
• Time-bound (or trackable).

4. CLASSROOM ACCOMMODATIONS - Teachers use the Information Statement from the Gold Coast Dyslexia Support Group to guide them in creating dyslexia friendly classrooms. This is achieved through giving consideration to classroom instruction, classroom management and classroom strategies.

5. REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS FOR ASSESSMENT - All students are entitled to show their knowledge, understanding and skills in response to assessments. Accordingly teachers ensure that all students are able to participate in assessment and demonstrate the full extent and depth of their learning.

• Special provisions in the conditions of assessment reflect differentiation, or adjustments, made in teaching and learning. Special provisions are not adjustments to the standards on which student work is judged. They do not involve compensating for what the student does not know or cannot do.
• Any student who has a specific educational need should be considered for special provision.
• Special provisions in the conditions of assessment are applied consistently across the school.
• Special provisions in assessment are made through the way the assessment is presented, the way students are allowed to respond, the physical conditions and/or the time allocated for the assessment tasks.

6. INTERVENTION - The Reading Intervention program is called Project X CODE - an evidenced based program based on a systematic, synthetic phonics program using supporting texts and a multi-sensory approach. The program provides 4x30 minutes per week for up to a period of 20 weeks. Student progress is monitored and decisions ranging effectiveness of the program are made.

7. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT - Teachers at Robina State School are completing online professional development in a course for “Dyslexia and Significant Reading Difficulties”. Twelve teachers at a time are involved and the school is currently in its second rotation of this course. Selected teachers will also be trained in Multi-Sensory Learning.

8. TECHNOLOGY - Access to technology or the option to BYO device is available with assistive technologies to support student learning and assessment.

9. SOCIAL EMOTIONAL PROGRAM - In Term 2, students will be involved in a new program “Success and Dyslexia” aimed to teach better coping strategies to young people with dyslexia. The program teaches coping strategies and positive assertiveness, promotes positive thinking and builds resilience.
The journey of implementing a school wide model to explicitly teach reading using scientifically-based reading research methods in its second year at Robina State School and the pace of change has been increased due to the Queensland Government Great Results Guarantee funding. This funding has been used to provide instructional coaching to build teacher capacity, teacher release to invest time in collaborative learning, up to date evidenced based reference material and resources and increased teacher aide time to support response to intervention.

The goal of a schoolwide model is to build the school’s capacity, communication, and commitment to support the adoption and sustained use of research validated practices while still acknowledging and honoring our unique and characteristic differences. Scientifically based reading research informs us that:

- Teaching reading is both essential and urgent.
- Teaching reading is complex.
- Teaching reading requires expertise.
- Teaching reading should be guided by a scientific knowledge base.

The essential components of scientifically-based reading research methods are:

1. Phonemic awareness: the ability to distinguish, produce, remember, and manipulate the individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. Phonemic awareness is the understanding that phonemes are blended in spoken words and can be broken apart (segmented). It constitutes a necessary underlying skill for mapping alphabetic symbols to spoken words and can be developed through instruction.

2. Phonics: Knowledge of the predictable correspondences between phonemes and graphemes (the letters and letter combinations that represent phonemes). Readers use phonics as they learn to decode unfamiliar words, to recognize familiar words accurately and automatically, and to spell. Explicit, systematic instruction in phonics helps average children learn to read and spell more accurately and fluently than those who don’t receive phonics instruction. More important, phonics is critical for preventing reading failure in children at risk.

3. Reading fluency: reading text with sufficient speed and accuracy to support comprehension. Fluency can be enhanced with various instructional techniques and with reading practice. To comprehend well, students must achieve adequate oral reading fluency rates. Thresholds for adequate oral reading from first to fifth grade are well established by research.

4. Vocabulary development: best achieved by reading itself, oral language practice, and instruction in a wide range of topics. Reading comprehension depends heavily on knowledge of the individual word meanings in a text, and those meanings are learned by repeated exposure to a word’s use in context and by explicit, direct instruction in word meaning.

5. Reading comprehension: Requires comprehension skills and strategies, background knowledge, and verbal reasoning. All are employed by good readers – who read with purpose and flexibility – to understand, remember, and communicate what has been read. Teachers can be instrumental in imparting to children the skills and strategies necessary to navigate narrative and expository texts.

In addition to these five elements oral language has been added to create the “big six” that teachers must integrate and teach explicitly at all year levels and levels of complexity. Because classroom instruction, more than any other factor, is crucial in preventing reading problems, it is a primary focus for effecting change. All teachers need the knowledge and skills necessary for effective practice to ensure they are able to improve classroom instruction. However, many have not received the necessary training and therefore a vast number need ongoing professional development in this research-based knowledge.

We are now flush with information about teaching students to read and write well. The challenge, is putting all of this information into practice at the whole school level. While there are exceptional and highly skilled teachers at every school, as principals we are less sure about what it takes to ensure that all teachers have the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to ensure that their students develop increasingly sophisticated understandings of literacy. As a school my teachers need precision in their teaching. This precision comes when teachers have an extensive knowledge base and make expert decisions, based on data, about the instructional needs of their students.
Teaching reading is a complex problem; therefore there is no simple solution. Complex problems often require complex but systematic, reliable, and valid responses as a solution. The schoolwide model is designed to take what we know from scientifically based reading research and translate it into effective reading practices. The overall goal is to build the capacity, communication and commitment to ensure that all children are readers by grade 3.

- Building capacity means creating the infrastructure and systems schoolwide that can support and sustain effective reading practices for all students.
- Building communication means developing a common language surrounding beginning reading and establishing channels of communication schoolwide, among teachers and administrators and across classrooms and grades.
- Building commitment means developing consensus that beginning reading is the top priority and dedicating the resources necessary to meet the goal of ensuring all children are readers by grade 3.

There are six critical components of the schoolwide model:

1. Goals – Goals for reading achievement are clearly defined, anchored in research, prioritized in terms of importance to student learning, commonly understood by users, and consistently employed as instructional guides by all teachers of reading
2. Assessment – Instruments and procedures for assessing reading achievement are clearly specified, measure essential skills, provide reliable and valid information about student performance, and inform instruction in important, meaningful, and maintainable ways.
3. Instruction – The instructional programs and materials have documented efficacy, are drawn from research-based findings and practices, align with state standards and benchmarks, and support the full range of learners. A sufficient amount of time is allocated for instruction and the time allocated is used effectively. Instruction optimizes learning for all students by tailoring instruction to meet current levels of knowledge and prerequisite skills and organizing instruction to enhance student learning.
4. Professional Development – Adequate and ongoing professional development is determined and available to support reading instruction.
5. Leadership – Strong instructional leadership maintains a focus on high-quality instruction, organizes and allocates resources to support reading, and establishes mechanisms to communicate reading progress and practices.
6. Commitment – Commitment to the schoolwide model and scientifically-based reading research methods

Implementing a schoolwide model is achieved through:

- developing with teachers core beliefs about literacy
- developing an instructional framework
- providing focused professional development
- professional learning communities
- peer coaching
- instructional coaching.

Robina State School has achieved the Australian Dyslexia Association Dyslexia Friendly School accreditation. Ten actions are in place to continue to develop as a dyslexia friendly school. More importantly the school has embarked on implementing a school wide model to explicitly teach reading using scientifically-based reading research with the goal that all students will be able to read at or above the grade level standard by the end of year 3. Teaching reading is rocket science and Robina State School is building the capacity to have expert teachers of reading who know what to do to reach reading systematically and explicitly as teaching reading is both essential and urgent.