



## COVID-19: Victoria Remote Learning Term 3, 2020

### Parent Survey Summary Report

17<sup>th</sup> August 2020

SPELD Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation whose mission is to assist all Victorians with Specific Learning Disorders to achieve their full learning potential. We achieve this through the provision of direct service delivery (including diagnostic assessments, professional learning), information, advocacy and awareness raising amongst the wider Victorian community.

In an effort to better understand the experiences of students with learning disorders and their parents during the Term 2, 2020 COVID-19 Stage 3 Remote Learning, the team at SPELD Victoria invited our community to participate in a survey launched on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020. The results were collated and feedback from this survey was provided direct to Government ([SPELD Victoria submission to the Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)).

SPELD Victoria was then invited to bring the Victorian perspective on Specific Learning Disorders direct to the Inquiry into the Victorian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. With Victoria again participating in remote learning in Term 3, 2020 SPELD Victoria launched another survey on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2020 to further understand the experiences of those with Specific Learning Disorders and remote learning.

#### Who responded to the SPELD Victoria COVID-19 Term 3 survey?

The survey was completed by 212 Victorian parents and guardians with children in kindergarten (3%), primary school (70%), secondary school (36%) or post-school TAFE or University (1%). The majority of children attended a government school (57%), with 23% attending Catholic schools, 19% attending Independent schools, and 1% attending Special School. Parents

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reported that 65% of their children had been diagnosed with dyslexia (Specific Learning Disorder in Reading or Spelling), 16% had been diagnosed with dyscalculia (Specific Learning Disorder in Mathematics) and 28% had a diagnosis of Dysgraphia (Specific Learning Disorder in Written Expression). A further 20% suspected their child has a Specific Learning Disorder.

97% of the parents reported that their child was participating in remote learning.

**What were the formats of remote learning used to support students? And what did parents want to see more of to support students?**

For the majority of the parents surveyed, their child's remote learning consisted of live online learning (68%), being sent links or emails (66%), or pre-recorded videos (46%). Some parents reported the learning involved paper worksheets and resources from the school (35%).

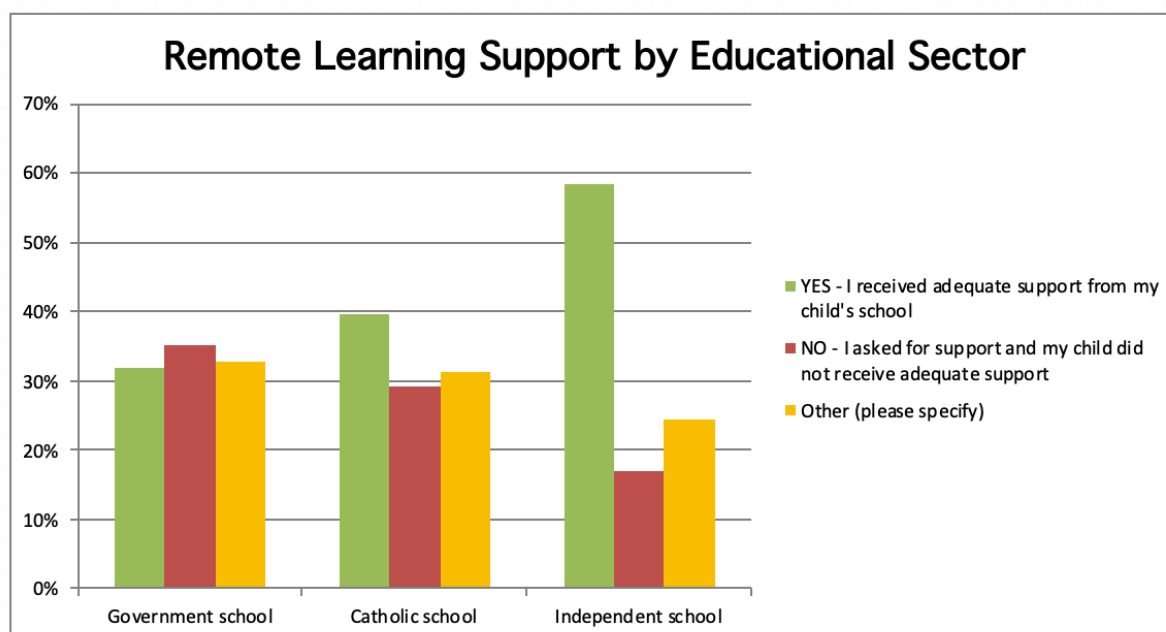
Parents indicated that to support their child they wanted to see more check-ins with teachers (62%), feedback on progress (57%), live online learning (56%) and recorded videos (29%).

**Did parents feel supported by their child's school during the Term 3 period of remote learning?**

Although 40% of our parents felt adequately supported by their child's school during the Term 3 remote learning, 30% of our parents did not feel adequately supported by their child's school. When comparing feelings of support across government, catholic and independent schools (Figure 1) parents with children in an independent school were more likely to report feeling supported (59%).

Sadly, 46% of parents reported that they believed their child with a Specific Learning Disorder will fall further behind due to remote learning, while 21% believed it was unchanged and 24% believed their child would do better after remote learning.

Figure 1: Remote Learning Support across Educational Sectors



**Were there any changes between the Term 2 remote learning and Term 3 remote learning?**

Parents reported that 62% of schools sought feedback following the Term 2 remote learning and 61% noticed improvements to their child's school's approach to remote learning between Term 2 and Term 3. Nevertheless, 39% of parents noted that the school did not seek feedback and 40% reported that they had not noticed improvements to the school's approach.

48% of parents reported that teachers were better prepared for the Term 3 remote learning while 19% described there was no change to the teacher's preparedness.

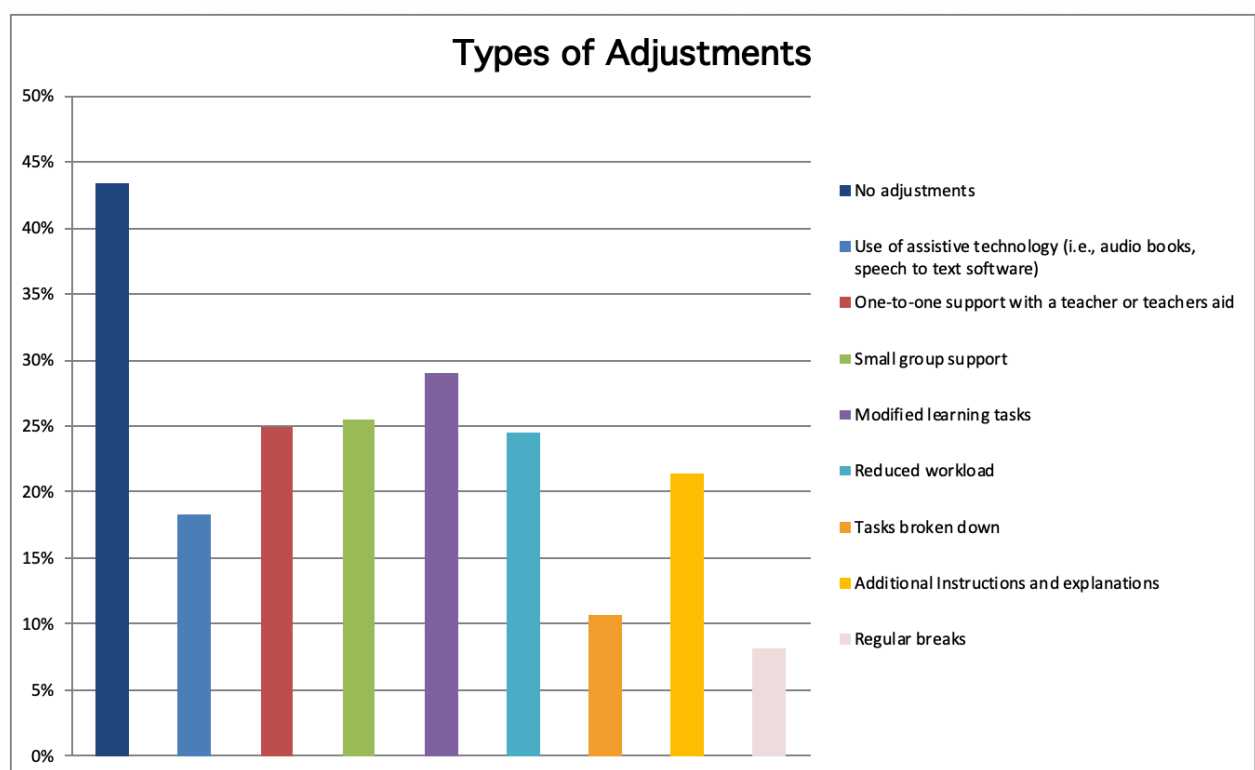
When comparing the Term 2 and Term 3 remote learning, 34% of parents reported there were improvements to the adjustments provided by the school to support their child, however, 47% reported there were no improvements to the adjustments.

The particular improvements noted by parents included: increased use of online learning (17%), increased regularity of contact and check-ins with the teacher or school (16%), reduced expectations and workload (10%), and better scheduling (8%).

## What types of adjustments are children receiving to support their learning during the Term 3 Remote Learning?

Figure 2 summarises the types of adjustments parents reported that their children have received to support them during remote learning. While the majority reported that they received no adjustments (43%), 29% received modified learning tasks, 25% received small group support, 25% received one-to-one support with a teacher or teacher's aide, 24% had a reduced workload and 21% received additional instructions and explanations.

Figure 2: Remote Learning Adjustments



Parents reported that only 24% of their children with a Specific Learning Disorder were offered to attend face-to-face learning during the period of remote learning.

## **What types of adjustments would parents like to see to support their child?**

Parents would like to see the following adjustments implemented to support their child:

- Modified learning tasks tailored to their child's individual needs (i.e., extra time, reduced workload) with the inclusion of different types of learning modalities (i.e., live online videos, hands on, paper/print based).
- Teacher and parent training on supporting students with Specific Learning Disorders
- Use of evidence-based intervention, including the use of systematic synthetic phonics.
- Assistive technology (including audio books, speech to text).
- Regular contact, check-in's, feedback and reinforcement from the teachers with the child and the parent.
- One-on-one or small group support with a teacher or teacher's aide.
- Live online learning during remote learning.
- Explicit and scaffolded instructions.
- Support for peer interaction and mental health during remote learning.

## **What was the hardest part of remote learning for children and their families during remote learning?**

Figure 3 provides a summary of the aspects parents reported were the hardest part of remote learning. Social isolation (70%), getting started on activities (52%) and the demands on parents also working from home (55%) were noted as the most challenging aspects of remote learning.

## **Were there changes to children's mental health and functioning during the remote learning?**

Figure 4 provides a summary of parent reported increases or concerns regarding their child's mental health and functioning. It is concerning to note that 60% reported disengagement from school, 59% noted increased anxiety, 47% noted increased challenging behaviour and 58% noted lowered mood.

Figure 3: Hardest Aspects of Remote Learning

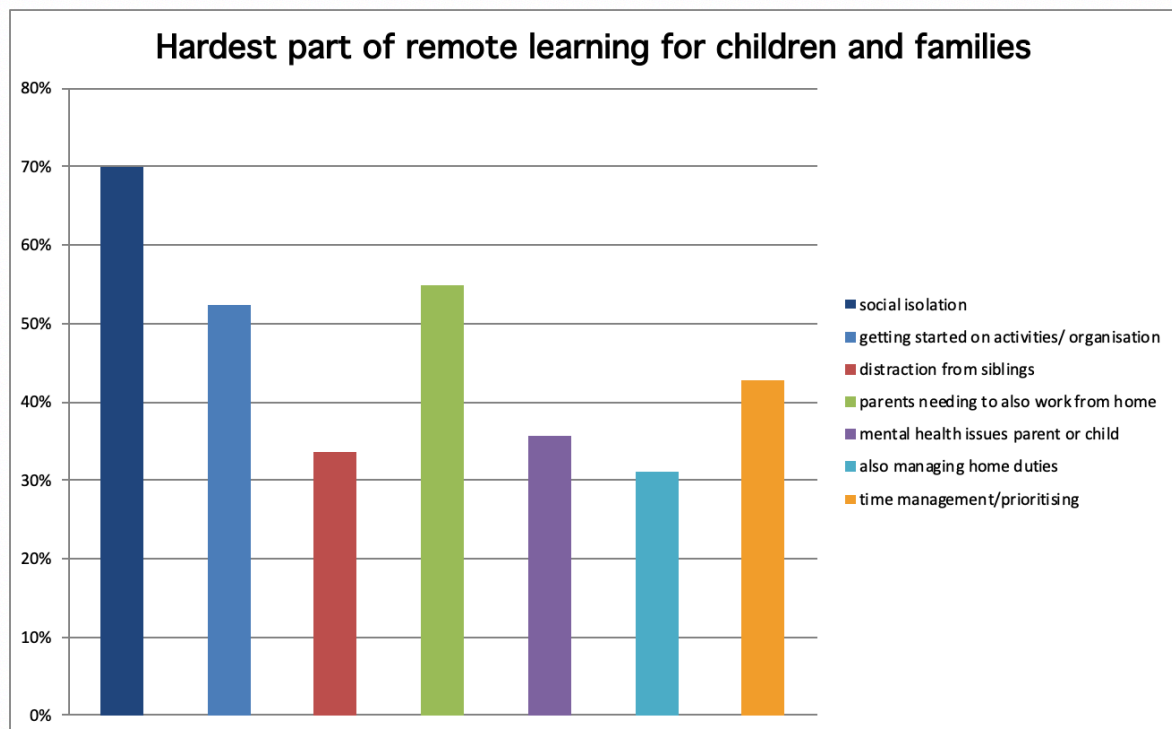
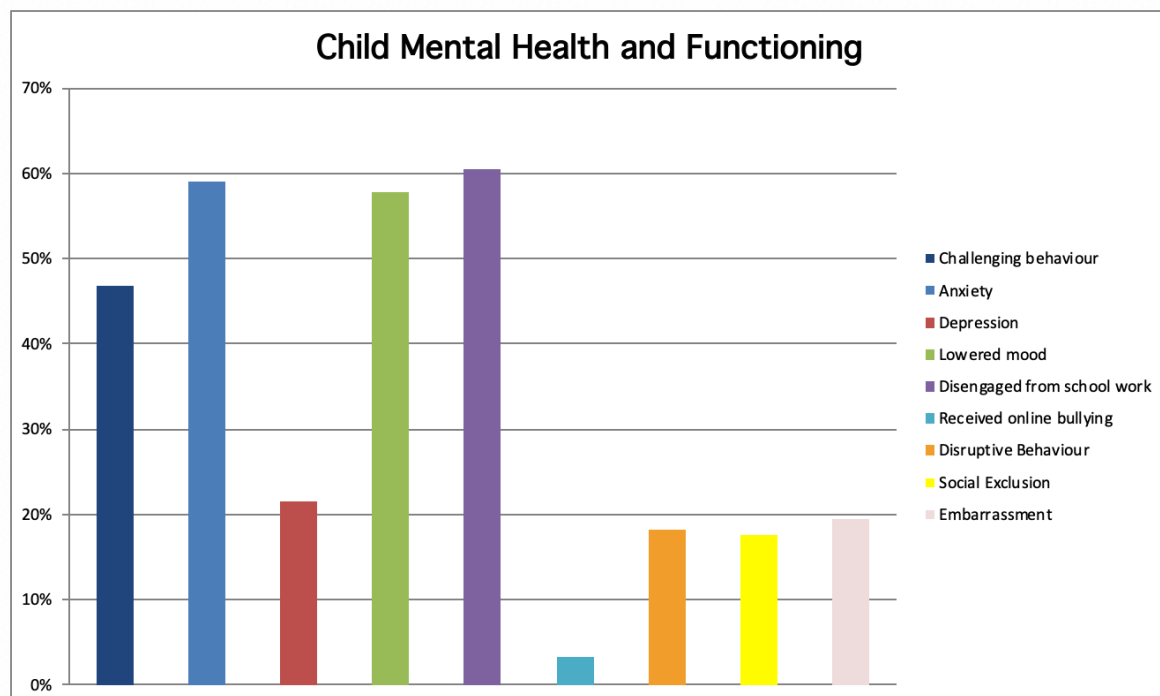


Figure 4: Mental Health and Functioning



## **How did parents rate their school and teachers during remote learning?**

Figure 5 shows parent ratings of the school and teachers regarding many aspects of remote learning. Concerningly, 46% described the use of assistive technology as “poor” and 40% also described the provision of adjustments to support child learning as “poor”. The majority of parents also reported that initiatives to support the child to maintain relationships with peers has been “poor” (36%).

Positively, the majority of parents described that communication with the parent (29%) was “excellent” and communication with the child (35%), communication of instructions and expectations (35%), and consistency between teachers (32%) was “good”. Although the majority of parents described the provision feedback to the child regarding their performance as “good” (28%) there were a significant number of parents noting it was “adequate” (27%) or “poor” (25%).

## **What changes would parent’s like to see implemented the Victorian Government and Department of Education to support students with Specific Learning Disorders?**

Figure 6 provides a range of suggestions endorsed by parents to support students with Specific Learning Disorders.

Figure 5: Parent rating for schools and teachers during the Term 3 Remote Learning

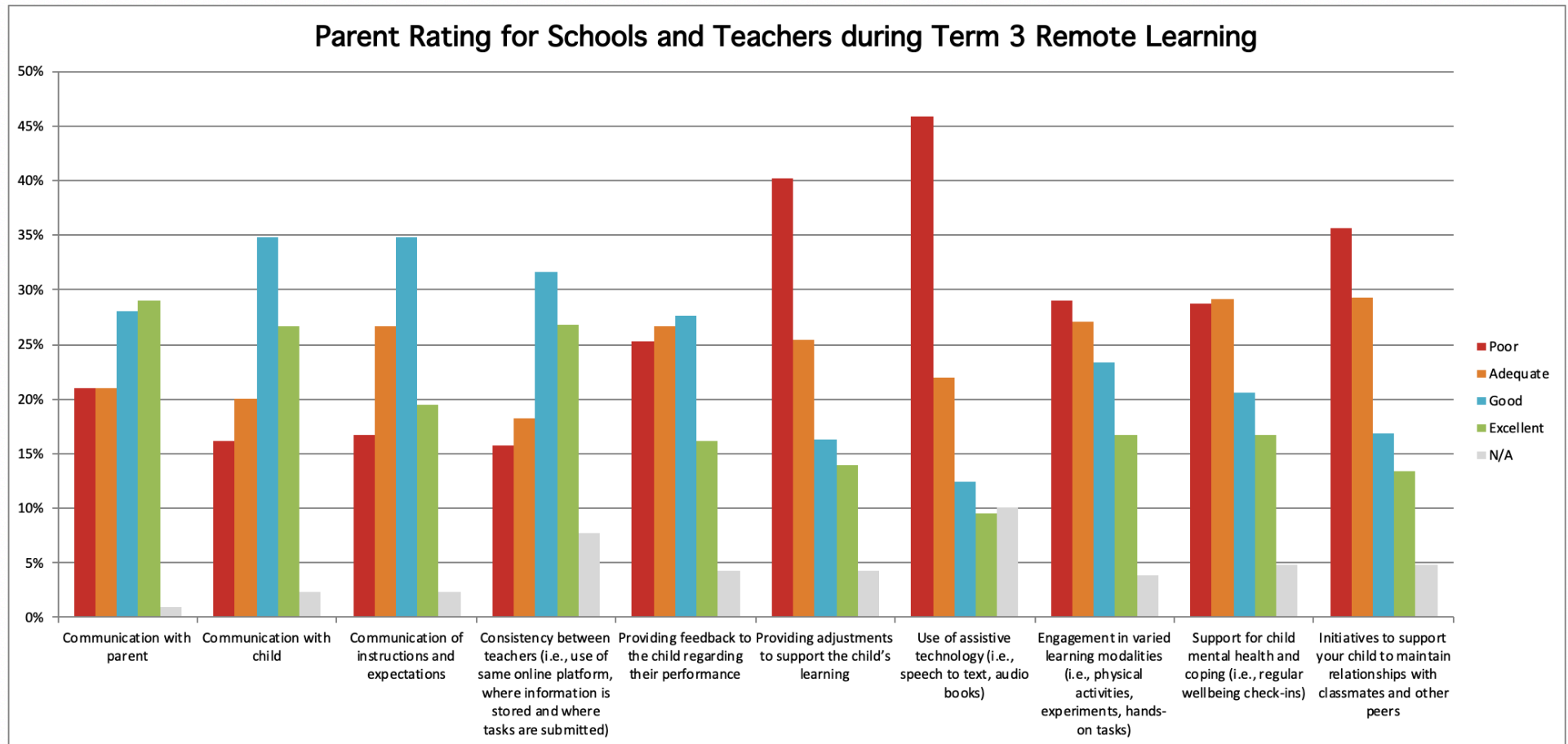
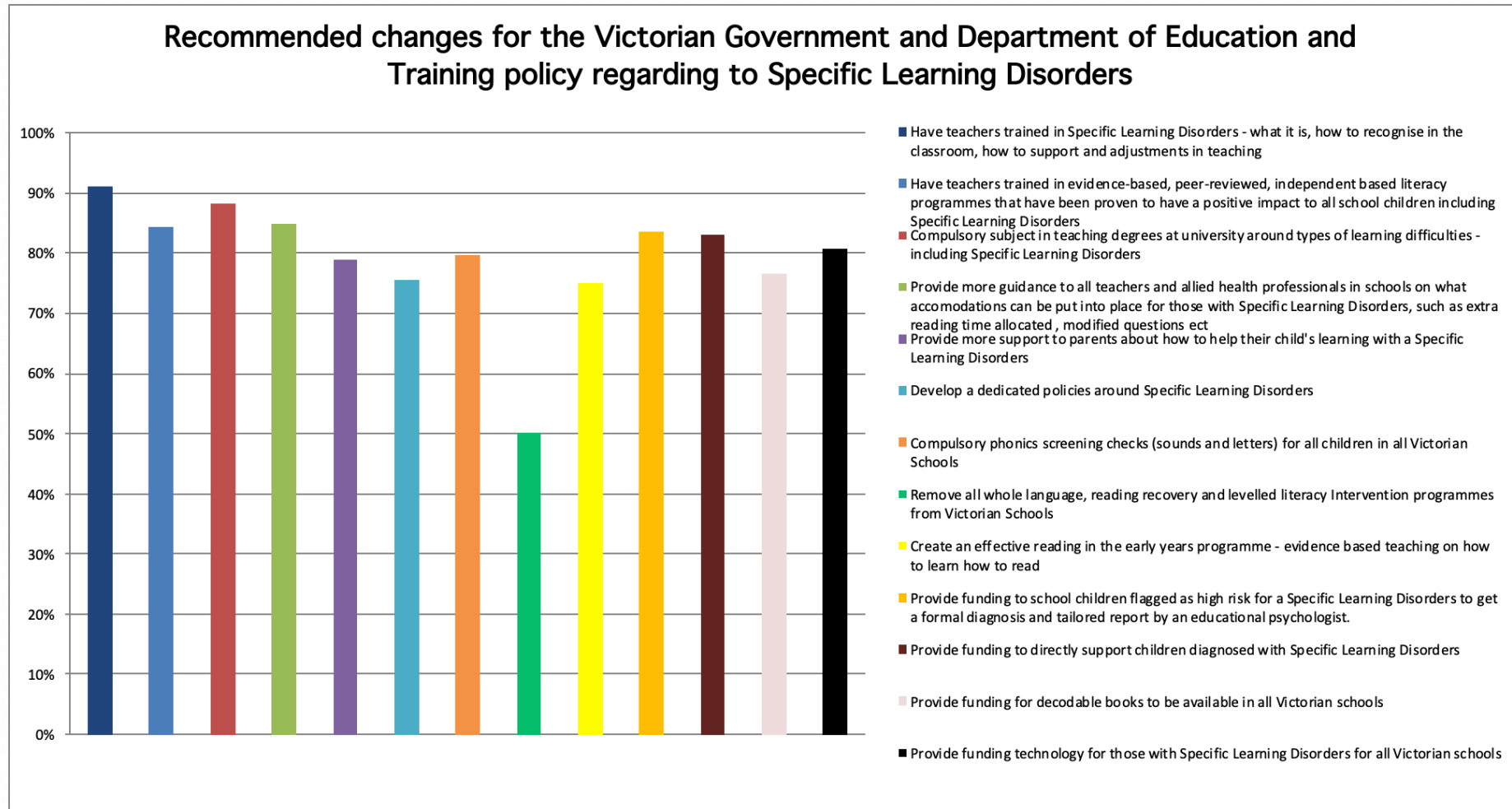




Figure 6: Recommendations to support students with Specific Learning Disorders



## Recommendations

### 1. Remote Learning and Disability Discrimination

Whilst “invisible” in nature, a Specific Learning Disorder is a disability with a lifelong impact. Section 32 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, states that education providers must comply with the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (the Standards). To comply with the Standards, education and training providers must make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to accommodate a student with a disability.

During the Term 2 Remote Learning the parents surveyed reported that 41% of their children with a diagnosed Specific Learning Disorder did not receive adjustments to their learning from the school as they were entitled to under the Disability Discrimination Act.

The Term 3 Remote Learning Survey found that parents reported that 47% of students with a Specific Learning Disorder were not receiving adjustments to support their learning during the Term 3 Remote Learning.

SPELD Victoria advocates that school leadership be reminded of their obligations under the Act and the Standards towards students with Specific Learning Disorders; and that these students must continue to receive ‘reasonable adjustments’ as stipulated in the Standards even when learning modalities are altered (i.e., changed from face-to-face to online or remote learning).

### 2. Specific Learning Disorders and Mental Health

With parents reporting increases in students with Specific Learning Disorders disengagement from school, anxiety, challenging behaviour and changes in mood during remote learning, SPELD Victoria is concerned about the ongoing mental health and functioning of those with a Specific Learning Disorder. At SPELD Victoria we advocate for the strengthening of mental health support during and post remote learning for students with learning difficulties. This may include mentoring programs and access to mental health clinicians.

### 3. Remote Learning

From the SPELD Victoria Term 2 Remote Learning Survey, as reported in the SPELD Victoria submission to the Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, a range of “*elements that resulted in greater success in their experiences of remote learning*” were recognised. The Term 3 survey highlights the need for schools to continue to improve their communication with parents and students, adjustments to support learning, use of varied learning modalities, use of assistive technology, provision of feedback, support for mental health and support for peer interaction.

### 4. Post Remote Learning Intervention Support

With 46% of parents reporting that they believed their child with a Specific Learning Disorder will fall further behind due to remote learning, SPELD Victoria recommends greater focus and resources be given during and post-remote learning to students receiving evidence-based intervention support. School personnel will likely require further training to be able to implement the required interventions. SPELD Victoria offers a range of professional learning programs, including training in evidence-based reading, spelling and writing interventions (Sounds-Write and Talk4Writing).

### 5. Teacher and Parent Professional Development

At SPELD Victoria we advocate for the professional development of teachers and parents regarding Specific Learning Disorders and the necessary adjustments required to support students. The current survey highlights the need for further professional learning within this area. With 46% of parents describing the use of assistive technology as poor and a further 40% noting the provision of adjustments during remote learning as poor, SPELD Victoria highlights these two areas as key training areas for teachers.

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