



Submission for the 2020 Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005

25th September 2020

SPELD Victoria

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, information, advocacy and awareness raising amongst the wider Victorian community.

Specific Learning Disorders

Within each and every classroom across Australia there are students struggling to develop their reading, writing, spelling, and maths skills (AUSPELD, 2018)¹. More specifically, it is estimated that 15-20% of Australian students experience learning difficulties and 3-5% have a Specific Learning Disorder (AUSPELD, 2018)¹. Without the appropriate supports these difficulties will disadvantage these students in their school years and beyond. Research has shown that early intervention, including remediation and accommodation, is the key to success for these students (AUSPELD, 2018)¹.

¹ Australian Federation of SPELD Associations [AUSPELD] 2018, Understanding Learning Difficulties, <<http://auspeld.org.au/>>.

2020 Review of the Standards

The Disability Standards for Education 2005 (the Standards) seek to ensure all students with a disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as students without disability. The Standards set out the rights of students with disability and the responsibilities of education providers in relation to: enrolment; participation; curriculum development, accreditation and delivery; student support services; and elimination of harassment and victimisation.

As part of the 2020 Review of the Standards AUSPELD launched a survey requesting teachers, parents and students' thoughts and experiences of the Standards². SPELD Victoria is one of five state members of AUSPELD. The recommendations provided in this report reflect these survey results from the Victorian perspective and the experiences of the team at SPELD Victoria.

Key Findings and Recommendations

1. Specific Learning Disorders and the Standards

A Specific Learning Disorder is a disability that is “invisible” in nature but has a lifelong impact. Our team of psychologists and educational consultants at SPELD Victoria often hear parents describe that their child with a diagnosed Specific Learning Disorder is denied or receives limited access to adjustments, supports and intervention as they do not receive additional “funding” (i.e., Program for Students with Disabilities funding within Victorian Government Schools).

Recommendation: SPELD Victoria advocates for greater clarity and awareness of what is termed a disability so that all those entitled are accessing the supports as stipulated in the Standards.

² For the purposes of the following report “parent” will be used to refer to any parent, carer, or guardian and “teacher” will be used to refer to any education provider, principal or teacher.

2. Parent Knowledge and Understanding of the Standards

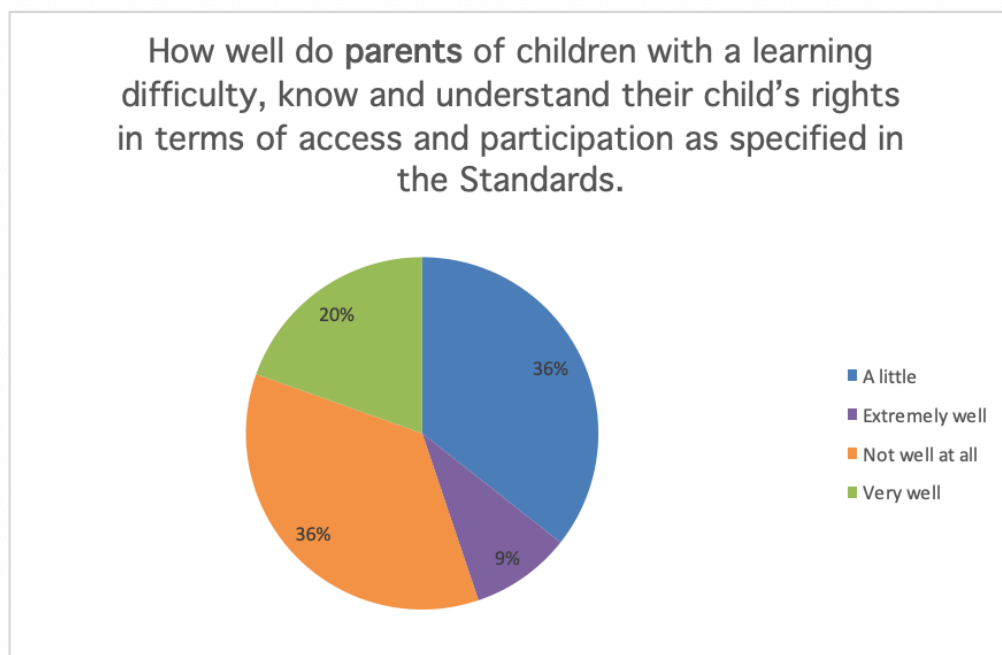
The survey results indicated that the majority of parents have poor knowledge and understanding of the Standards (

Recommendation: **SPELD Victoria recommends increased training opportunities for parents regarding the Standards.**

Figure 1). In order for parents to adequately know and understand the rights of their child they require training opportunities regarding the Standards. This will support parents to be advocates for their children with a disability and increase the accountability of education providers.

Recommendation: **SPELD Victoria recommends increased training opportunities for parents regarding the Standards.**

Figure 1: Parent Knowledge



3. Teacher Knowledge and Understanding of the Standards

The majority of teachers surveyed believed they had good knowledge and understanding of their obligations as specified in the Standards (Figure 2).

Nevertheless, these same teachers reported that they believed 30% of other school staff knew the Standards “not very well at all” or 36% knew it “a little” (Figure 3). This has concerning ramifications for individuals with a disability in accessing the reasonable adjustments that they are entitled to under the Standards. To ensure all teachers understand their obligations, SPELD Victoria recommends all educators receive mandatory training on the Standards. Within schools this may involve annual staff training to ensure all staff have current knowledge of the Standards.

Recommendation: That all Australian educators receive annual mandatory training on the Standards to ensure they understand their obligations.

Figure 2: Teacher Self-Knowledge

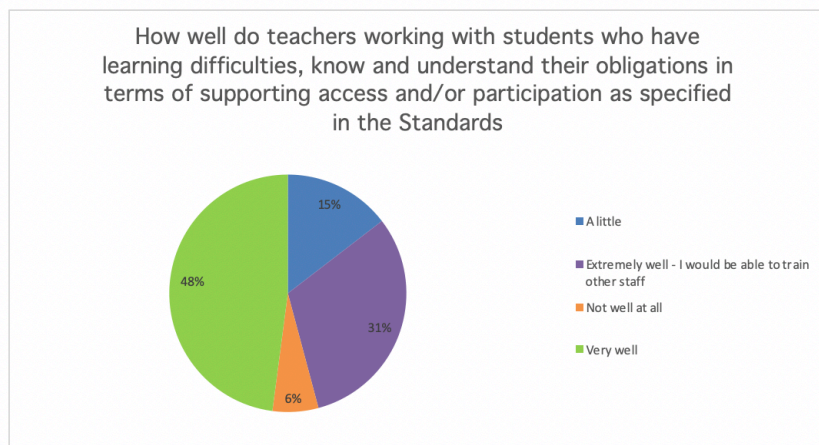
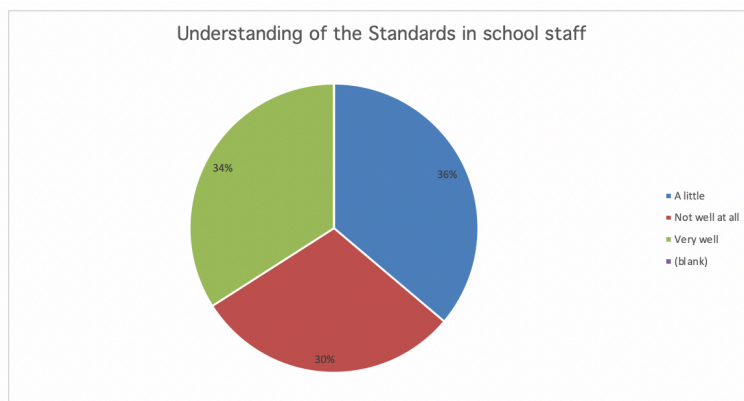


Figure 3: Knowledge of other Teachers



4. Reasonable Adjustment Obligations

90% of parents reported that there has been a time when they felt their child's school was not meeting their obligations in terms of implementing reasonable adjustments for their learning difficulties.

This was particularly evident during the recent COVID-19 remote learning experiences of those within Victoria. Findings from separate surveys conducted by SPELD Victoria indicated that during the Term 2 Remote Learning parents reported that 41% of their children with a diagnosed Specific Learning Disorder did not receive adjustments to their learning from the school to which they were entitled³. 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 Learning⁴.

In addition, parents report to SPELD Victoria that adjustments recommended as part of SPELD Victoria diagnostic assessments are not fully implemented or only variably.

Implementation of reasonable adjustments work to ensure greater student achievement. The concern is the variable and inconsistent way schools do this. The way to ensure recommended adjustments are more consistently implemented is to improve the level of school accountability.

Recommendation: SPELD Victoria calls for greater accountability in the implementation of reasonable adjustments. Furthermore, the Standards must stipulate that students continue to receive 'reasonable adjustments' even when learning modalities are altered (i.e., changed from face-to-face to online or remote learning).

³ https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/paec/COVID-19_Inquiry/Submissions/16a_SPELD_Victoria.pdf

⁴ <http://www.speldvic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/SPELD-VIC-T3-Remote-Learning-DET-Government-Report-August-2020.pdf>

5. Implementation of Reasonable Adjustments and Intervention

Students with Specific Learning Disorders need both adjustments/accommodations (to ensure access to the curriculum) and intervention with specialised support services (to improve their academic achievement). Without the appropriate supports these difficulties will disadvantage these students in their school years and beyond.

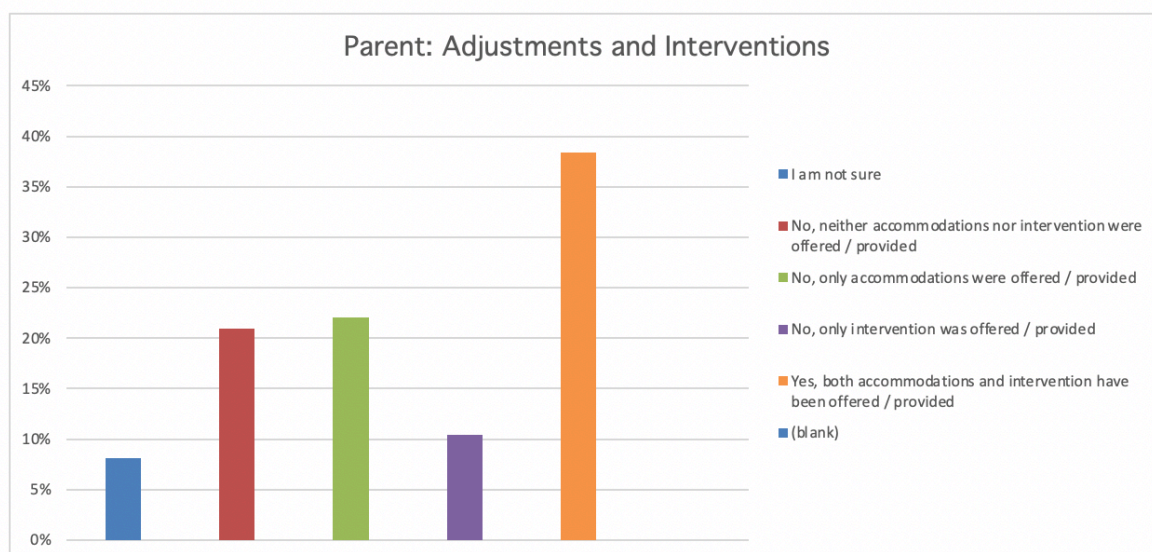
Although the majority of parents surveyed indicated that their child was offered or provided with both accommodations and intervention, a substantial portion noted that accommodations or intervention was not offered or implemented (

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SPELD Victoria advocates for greater accountability in the implementation of the Standards to ensure the required reasonable adjustments and intervention are implemented. Greater accountability may be achieved through requirements for documentation, auditing of documentation, and communication with the student or parent.

Recommendation: SPELD Victoria advocates for greater accountability in the implementation of the Standards to ensure the required reasonable adjustments and intervention with specialised support services are implemented.

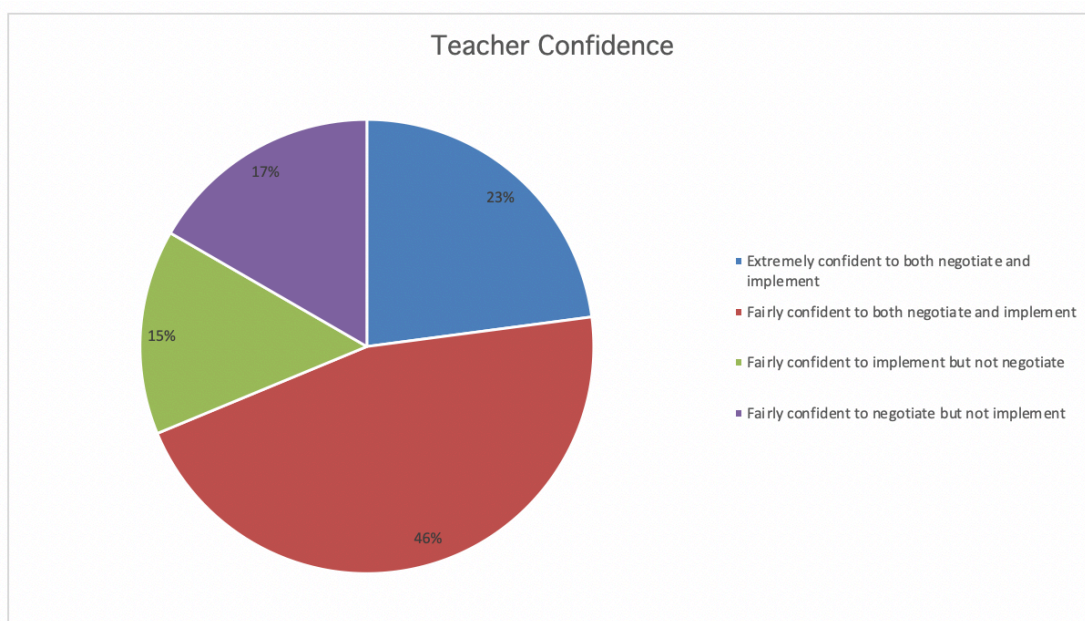
Figure 4: Parent perception of provision of adjustments and intervention



SPELD Victoria, however, also recognises that the implementation of adjustments and intervention requires a high level of teacher knowledge and confidence. We are concerned that 17% of teachers surveyed were not confident in implementing reasonable adjustments and 15% were not confident in negotiating reasonable adjustments (Figure 5). Furthermore, where there were adjustments made to support their child to participate in curriculum tasks and assessments, 58% of parents surveyed believed the adjustments were not sufficient.

Recommendation: SPELD Victoria advocates for greater training for student teachers and ongoing professional development for education providers by specialist personnel of reasonable adjustments and evidence-based intervention. This is essential to build teacher and parent confidence and ensure the quality of the implemented adjustments and interventions.

Figure 5: Teacher confidence in negotiating and implementing reasonable adjustments



6. Reasonable Adjustment Implementation Frequency

Variable and inconsistent implementation of recommended adjustments is not supportive of optimal student learning. Both the parents (Figure 6) and teachers (Figure 7) indicated insufficiency in the frequency of reasonable adjustment implementation. Greater clarity in the Standards with regards to the frequency of implementing reasonable adjustments would be helpful for parents and educators alike.

Recommendation: That the Standards clarify the requirements around reasonable adjustment implementation frequency.

Figure 6: Parents perception of frequency of adjustments in classroom

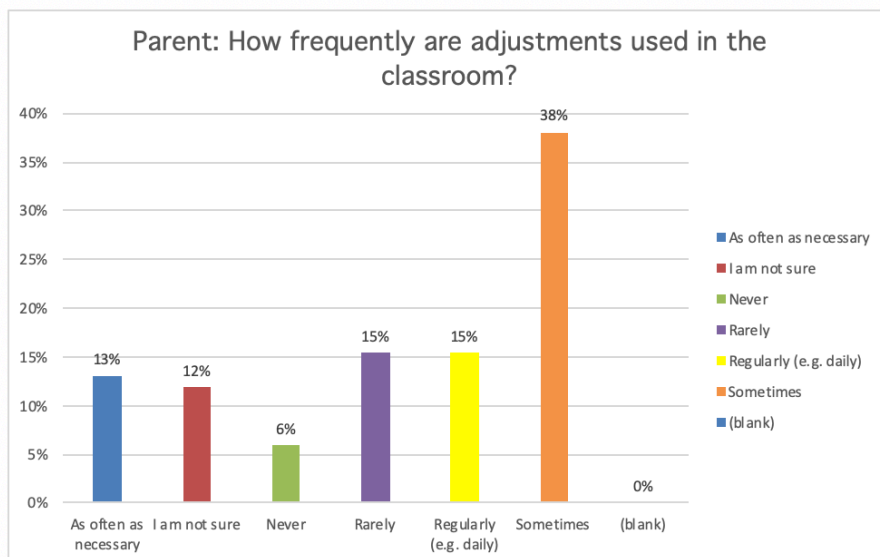
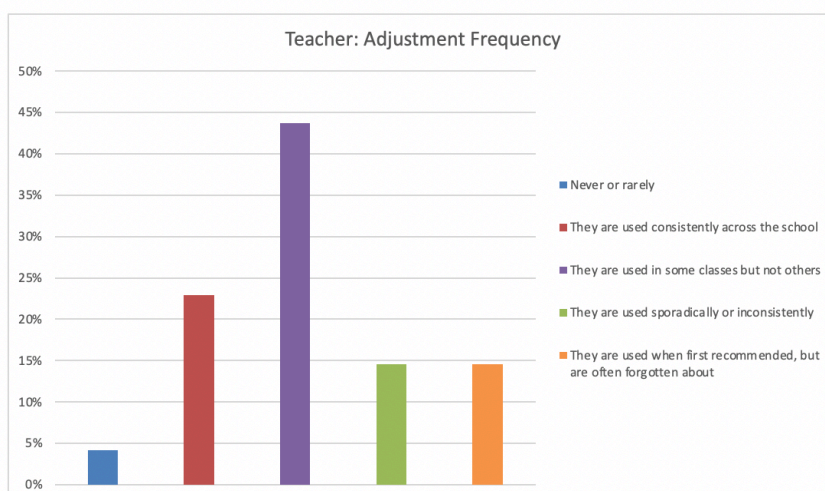


Figure 7: Teachers perception of frequency of adjustments in classroom

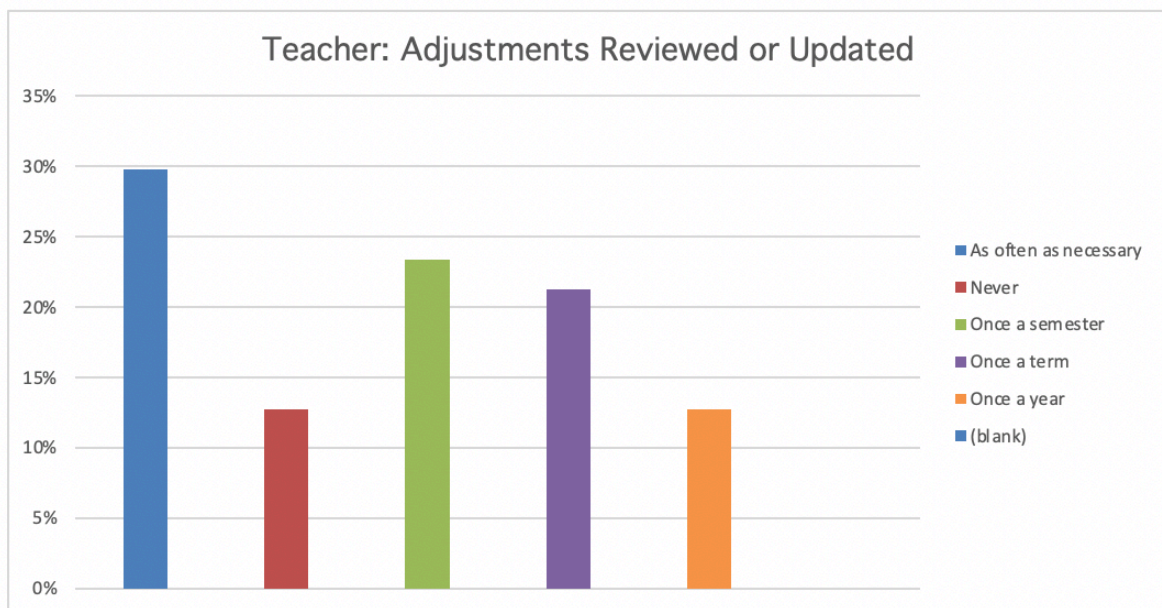


7. Reasonable Adjustments Review and Update

While the majority of Teachers surveyed indicated that the reasonable adjustments are reviewed or updated “as often as necessary” some indicated that reasonable adjustments are “never” reviewed or updated or this may occur once a term, semester, or year (Figure 8). SPELD Victoria is concerned that as adjustments are not being reviewed, students with a disability are not accessing the correct adjustments with impacts to their ability to access the curriculum over time.

Recommendation: That the Standards clarify the requirements around the review and updating of reasonable adjustments, so that all education providers are clear about their obligations.

Figure 8: Frequency Adjustments are Reviewed or Updated



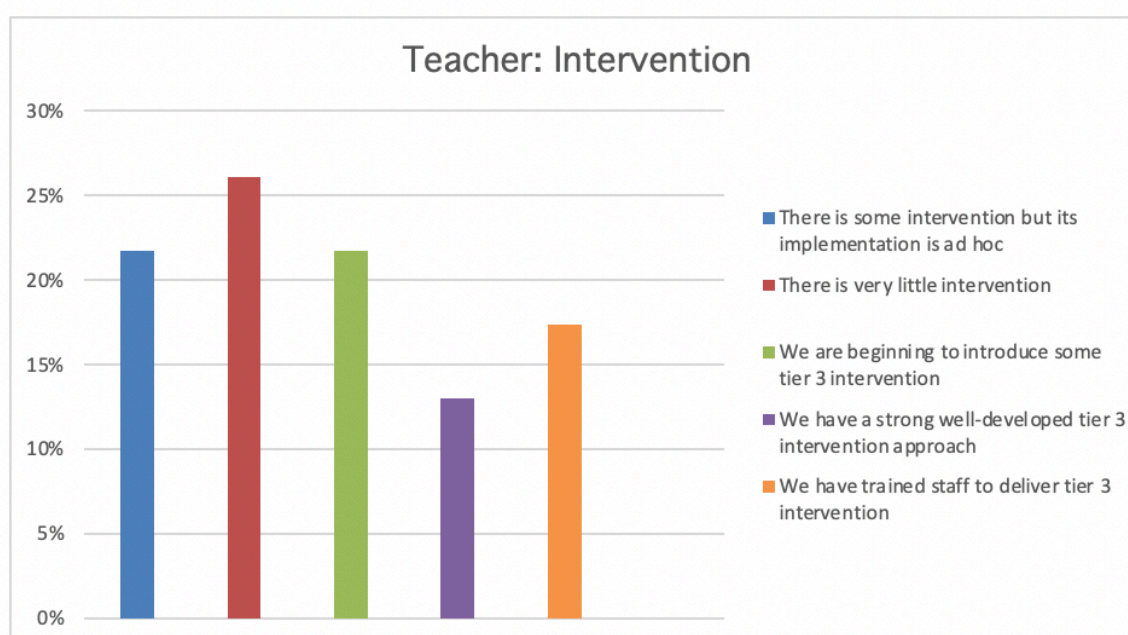
8. Intervention by specialised support services

Teachers indicated that there is significant variability in the types and quality of intervention implemented to support students with a disability (

Figure 9). The main focus of The Standards has previously been on “reasonable adjustments”. However, the correct intervention for students with learning disabilities is critical for student success. SPELD Victoria is concerned that students with a disability are not receiving the required evidence-based interventions to set them up for learning success. The minimal focus on Interventions in the Standards is also of great concern.

Recommendation: That the Standards provide greater clarity and guidance for education providers on their obligations to provide evidence-based interventions for students with a disability. Further, that mandatory training for educational providers on identifying and implementing evidence-based interventions be required.

Figure 9: Intervention Implementation



9. Assistive Technology

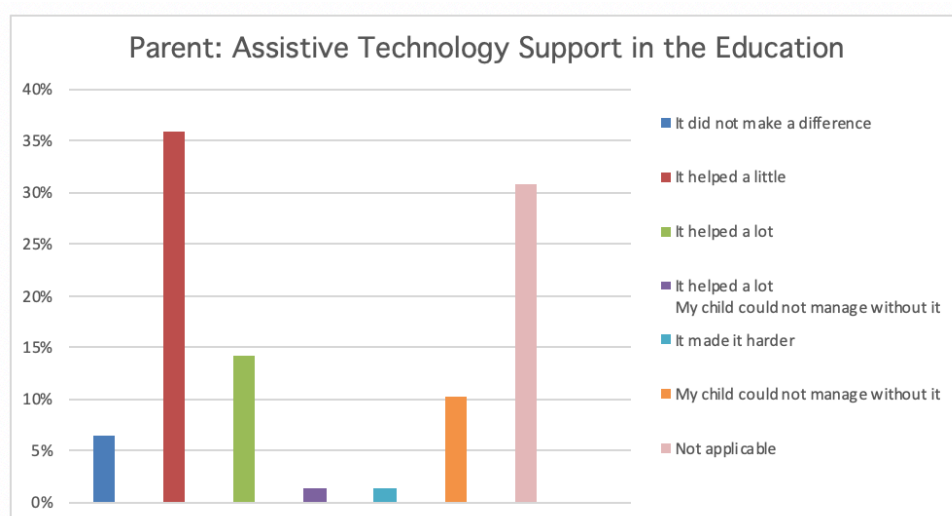
The majority of parents indicated that assistive technology supported their child’s education (Figure 10). Nevertheless, the SPELD Victoria team often hears of school and teacher reluctance to support or allow the use of assistive technology.

The SPELD Victoria COVID-19 Term 3 Remote Learning Survey also highlighted that 46% of parents described the use of assistive technology as “poor”.

Furthermore, the SPELD Victoria team observes inconsistent access to recommended assistive technology across classes and/or between schools and VCAA.

Recommendation: That assistive technology be recognised in the Standards as a form of reasonable adjustment that can be used to support students with a disability to access the curriculum on an equitable basis.

Figure 10: Parent perception of use of Assistive Technology



10. Individual Learning Plans

Individual Learning Plans⁵ help to communicate and document a student's individual needs and the adjustments and intervention they require. 41% of parents surveyed reported that their child does not have a documented plan (e.g. Individual Education or Learning Plan) that is closely adhered to at their school. Furthermore, the SPELD Victoria psychologists and educational consultants often hear that only “funded” students consistently have an Individual Learning Plan.

Recommendation: That the Standards recognise that all students with a disability must have a documented Learning Plan regarding the intervention and adjustments required regardless of funding. Guidelines on what is included within the Plan and how it is monitored must also be developed and implemented universally across all educational settings.

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⁵ Individual Learning Plans have many names including Individual Education Plans, Personalised Learning Plans or Learner Profiles.