

There were a number of questions that members of the Committee were not able to ask during the hearing because of time constraints. The following questions were therefore sent to the Federation of Parents and Citizens requesting a written response:

Questions

1. What additional approaches are required in relation to students who are truanting or suspended?
2. What do you consider should be the NSW government's priority strategies to improve outcomes for students in the middle years with disabilities?
3. Is there any other comment or recommendation that you would like to make to the Committee?
4. How would you describe the focus of discussions relating to 'full service' schools in NSW? What are your views about approaches to this issue?
5. Programs such as schools as community centres are available in some primary schools. Do you consider that this type of model might work in the early years of high school?
6. How accessible are tutoring and homework assistance programs? What additional programs might be required?

Responses

1. NSW DET policy requires that when students are suspended they are supposed to be provided with school work, this does not always happen.
2. As students who are suspended, far more frequently come from families and communities experiencing social and welfare problems, whole community interventions that can build the sense of belonging and engagement, as in the full service school model of intervention, are most important.
3. The suspension process shifts school problems to families who are least able to deal with the problems. In most cases these families are unable to support any school learning that might be provided by the school teachers.
4. Most often token school learning tasks are provided for these students who often have learning problems. Their families are unlikely to have the skills to support the students learning.
5. The provision of additional and highly supportive alternative special education centres so that students with behaviour and learning problems should be funded. Parents have pleaded that they want these facilities especially for their children 9-13, so that the students don't get picked on by mainstream school personnel who seem unwilling and /or unable to be flexible enough in their practices to meet these students' needs. Teachers working with 24-34 students do not have the personal and professional resources to be able to meet the needs of students with high learning and social needs.

6. Where students with high behaviour and other needs exist are included in mainstream classrooms and where schools are located in high need communities, class sizes must be small, i.e. 16 students. It is only in this way that the teachers can get to know each young person and their community and build both in the school but also in activities within the community the sorts of relationships that will make schools full service schools.
7. The inclusion of high needs students within mainstream schooling requires teachers to work on building and checking the relationship between mainstream students and the student with problems. Bullying is an indication of this underlying problem.
8. When there are many students with high social, welfare, and learning needs teachers need recognition in terms of their teaching load because of the additional difficulty of building relationships and of sustaining individualised and creative learning activities.
9. Schools have become increasingly competitive environments as the world of wider political agendas and the marketing of schools has been encouraged. Competition between schools does not lead to practices that ensure high quality education for all students. This is particularly so for those students who are disadvantaged. How schools are predominantly organised, and their curriculum contributes to this disadvantage.
10. Schools as community centres in a secondary context have a high potential for making a difference. Such programs must be inclusive of all in the community and should build teachers and school leaders' connection with the community.
11. Homework centres have a place but they are often a reflection of parent's recognition that their child needs more support. Schools must be organised supported and funded to provide an educative experience for students in the everyday life of schools. Otherwise homework centres are more of the same irrelevant school day tasks, practicing on tasks and activities that are meaningless.
12. The existing perceived content load of the NSW syllabus documents and external testing regimes contribute to the professional fear of teachers to take alternative pathways and student centred diversions in classroom learning in case they do not cover what is required.
13. A less prescriptive curriculum can provide a guarantee of learning without over-prescribing thus giving teachers the space to make professional decisions about how to support students' education.
14. Much of the curriculum is contextually structured from a dominant cultural framework that does not legitimate stepping outside and looking from alternative frames of reference. Cultural perspectives of disadvantaged Aboriginal and those in poverty communities must be part of the school experience.

Dianne Butland

On behalf of the NSW Federation of P and C's