

INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR SPECIAL NEEDS IN GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

QUESTION (page 43 – transcript)

Response to a teacher's claim that Wyong High School went from 8.5 to 2.5 teachers' aide (school learning support officer) positions as result of the introduction of the Every Student, Every School strategy in 2012.

ANSWER

Prior to the implementation of Every Student, Every School in 2012, Wyong High School had an annual allocation of 1.3 FTE Support Teacher Learning Assistance (STLA) positions, \$5,164 Learning Assistance Program funding and \$98,907 Integration funding providing additional support for targeted students with disability.

Given the funding available to the school through Integration funding and Learning Assistance funding as detailed above, the claim that there were 8.5 teachers' aides employed at that time could not have referred to full time equivalent (FTE) positions and, like many of these positions, they may have been fractional (part time). Alternatively, if they were full time positions, they could not have been funded solely through these resources.

As a result of the Every Student, Every School strategy, in 2012 Wyong High School was provided with more than \$225,000 in Learning and Support resource allocations to support students with additional learning needs. This was comprised of an increase in the Learning and Support Teacher position (formerly STLA) by 0.5 FTE from 1.3 FTE to 1.8 FTE and an annual allocation of \$45,142 in flexible funding.

In 2017 the annual allocation to Wyong High School of Integration funding providing additional support for students with moderate to high level support needs is more than \$120,000; and the annual Learning and Support resource allocation (Low level adjustment for disability) is \$211,295. The change in the Learning and Support resource allocation reflects the change in the profile of students enrolled at the school.

Principals are responsible for the allocation of school resources and for the employment of staff.

**INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR
SPECIAL NEEDS IN GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS
IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

QUESTION (page 44 – transcript)

The number of complaints received by the Director, Public School NSW, Lake Macquarie East Network in relation to students with special needs.

ANSWER

The Director Public Schools NSW, Lake Macquarie East Network has received one complaint relating to a student with disability in this role, which was successfully resolved.

INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR SPECIAL NEEDS IN GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

QUESTION (page 50 transcript)

Request for information about advice available about the enrolment of a student disability and additional learning and support needs.

ANSWER

The department has Educational Services teams across NSW consisting of Learning and Wellbeing Coordinators, Advisors and Officers who are available to support principals, schools and parents or carers who seek information about enrolling and supporting students with disability and additional learning and support needs in NSW public schools.

The information below is from the department's website and provides advice about starting school. Information is also available on the same website for students and parents or carers for the various transition points for a student at school.

Planning ahead helps every child enjoy a smooth transition to school.

For a child with disability and additional learning and support needs parents or carers should meet with their local school principal and the school learning and support team well ahead of time.

Every school has a learning and support team of education professionals. The team works collaboratively with students, parents and carers, and other agencies where appropriate to meet the learning and support needs of each student.

When to start

It is recommended that parents and carers contact their local school to discuss their child's needs by:

- term 2 of the year before starting school for a child with disability and additional learning and support needs
- term 2 of two years before starting school for a child needing help with access or mobility, e.g. for wheelchair access or if other significant changes to the school environment may be required.

Transition to school

For the first meeting at the school, parents or carers should take:

- any relevant information – medical reports, any reports provided by therapists or other agencies, organisations or health personnel
- details of any resources or equipment that are used or required for day to day activities.

By taking into account the insights and information parents and carers can offer, schools can make well informed decisions about each child's individual learning and support needs. Schools work with parents and carers to develop a set of planned activities to help make starting school a success.

Local Educational Services teams are available to provide advice about the transition to school for children with disability and additional learning and support needs. Local teams can be contacted on 131 536 and calls can be made from anywhere in NSW.

Schools work in close consultation with a range of early childhood services that can provide valuable information. Parent and carers may also be referred to our schools via other organisations.

This information can be accessed at:

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/disability-learning-and-support/primary/getting-started>

**INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR
SPECIAL NEEDS IN GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS
IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

QUESTION (page 50 transcript)

Request for information for Lake Macquarie East and Callaghan and Port Stephens network of schools about:

1. the number of principals in the network and how many of them have undertaken training on the Disability Discrimination Act.
2. the number of teachers and other staff in the network and how many have participated in training through the blended learning modules.

ANSWER

1. Disability Discrimination: Disability Standards for Education training data as at 3 May 2017:

There are 35 principals in the Lake Macquarie East network. Across this network of schools, 987 staff have completed the training including 95 staff who are recorded as school executive (including principals, deputy principals and assistant principals).

There are 38 principals in the Callaghan and Port Stephens network. Across this network of schools, 1,134 staff have completed the training including 100 staff who are recorded as school executive (including principals, deputy principals and assistant principals).

2. Supported online learning (blended learning) course participation data as at 3 May 2017:

Staffing entitlement in schools in the Lake Macquarie East network is 1,024 full time equivalent positions. A total of 624 courses have been completed by 428 individual staff in this network.

Staffing entitlement in schools in the Callaghan and Port Stephens network totals is 1,093 full time equivalent positions. A total of 964 courses have been completed by 643 individual staff in this network.

INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR SPECIAL NEEDS IN GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1

In evidence at the hearing, witnesses discussed different processes when an access request is submitted. For example one witness spoke of a “review panel” while another spoke of a “placement panel”. Please outline the process in place for how different types of access requests are prepared, submitted, considered and approved, including the membership of the panels which consider them, the scoring methodology and the timeframes involved.

ANSWER

When additional support beyond what is available at the school is required for a particular student with disability, the online Access Request process is used by the school to apply for targeted specialist support provisions for the student. This process requires consultation and agreement by the student and/or their parents or carers. It facilitates access to the provision of:

- additional funding to schools supporting eligible students in regular classes through the Integration funding support program
- placement in a specialist support class in a regular school or special school
- specialist itinerant teacher support in hearing and vision.

An Access Request is developed by a school’s learning and support team in consultation with school staff, specialist support teachers and school psychology and counselling services as well as parents or carers. The process ensures that comprehensive information and perspectives of the student’s abilities and additional needs is provided. Where access to Integration funding support is requested, this includes a profile of the student’s individual needs across learning domains, scored by the school from levels 1 to 4 based on the provided descriptors provided through the program.

Once submitted by the school principal, the Local Educational Services team manages the Access Request process.

Access Requests for specialist support class placement are considered by local placement panels. These panels comprise representative principals nominated by the Primary Principals’ Association (PPA) and the Secondary Principals’ Council (SPC), local Educational Services staff, school counselling representatives and other representatives with specialist knowledge as required.

Placement panels consider access requests for placement in a specialist support class in a regular or special school, in the main, twice in the school term. However when an urgent placement is sought, an additional panel meeting is arranged.

In their decision making, placement panels are informed by evidence of assessed educational and access needs of students provided through the Access Request, as well as evidence of the impact of support or interventions, and an understanding of the range of specialist support options and available vacancies. Consideration is also given to travel distance and time for students to access a specialist support class placement to ensure optimal student health, wellbeing, safety and independence.

Access Requests for Integration funding support and for the provision of itinerant teacher support for vision and hearing are considered and approved by local Educational Services panels, in consultation with schools, as needed, as part of an ongoing process to ensure timely support. These panels are comprised of Educational Services staff (and other representatives with specialist knowledge as required) and there is no requirement for a full placement panel as for specialist support classes.

All targeted specialist support provisions for individual students are reviewed at the school level in collaboration with Educational Services staff. This review may result in a request from the school to change the type and/or level of support for a student. Some schools may refer this process as a 'review panel'.

INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR SPECIAL NEEDS IN GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

QUESTION 2

Please identify the different types of specialist itinerant support teacher positions that have merged to form the Learning and Support Teacher position under the current framework. How and why is teaching support for hearing and vision managed differently?

ANSWER

After extensive stakeholder consultation, more than 1,800 Learning and Support Teacher positions were established in 2012 through the re-organisation of a number of programs that provided additional support for student learning needs that were not available in every school.

This included:

- support teacher positions in the Learning Assistance Program (learning assistance and reading and language teachers)
- itinerant and outreach teachers in early school support, behaviour, integration, and special education (including autism and emotional disturbance)
- school learning support coordinators, and
- integrated classes for students with mild intellectual disability.

In addition, 96 Assistant Principal Learning and Support positions were established as a result of a re-organisation of assistant principal positions in the Learning Assistance Program and Assistant Principals in the itinerant behaviour service.

Itinerant support teachers with expertise in hearing and vision provide a highly specialised service to students with sensory impairment and their teachers. These positions require specialised post graduate qualifications in hearing or vision to be employed by the department and are not a role that could be undertaken by learning and support teachers.

INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR SPECIAL NEEDS IN GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

QUESTION 3

The committee received evidence at the hearing that access request for additional support and funding can no longer be made for certain disability classifications (for example mental health (MH1 and MH2) autism and mild intellectual disability). Is this the case, and if so, please outline the how the learning needs of students with these disability classifications are being supported.

ANSWER

The department provides a range of support options for students with disability in regular classes at their local school or in specialist support classes. The majority of students with disability with low level support needs are supported in regular classes through Learning and Support resources allocated to all regular schools (known as Low level adjustment for disability equity loading in the Resource Allocation Model). Those with moderate to high support needs are supported through Integration funding.

The broad approach of supporting students with low level additional learning needs in regular classes has been in place for many years. In 2004, the Learning Assistance Program was implemented to support students with low level additional learning needs in regular classes. This program provided support teachers and assistant principals and refocused support for students with mild intellectual disability, language disorders and learning difficulties. Additional funding to increase the level of support in this program was partly sourced from Integration funding that had previously supported students with mild intellectual disability and language disorder.

In 2012, after extensive consultation and trial, the evidence based Every Student, Every School strategy was implemented in NSW public schools.

Every Student, Every School incorporated a range of existing resources to provide a Learning and Support Teacher and annual flexible funding in every regular school. This included:

- specialist teacher positions including those from the Learning Assistance Program (see response to Supplementary Question 2) and related funding and
- a portion of the Integration funding support program that had previously supported students with autism or mental health issues who had low level support needs.

This reduced red tape for parents and schools by increasing the number of students able to access additional support directly in their school through these resources

without requiring a formal diagnosis or disability confirmation and without requiring an Access Request.

Students with autism or mental health issues with moderate to high support needs in regular classes continue to be supported through the Integration Funding Support program.

Specialist support classes for students with mild intellectual disability (IM), autism and mental health disorders continue to provide an option for students whose parents are seeking support class placement.

INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR SPECIAL NEEDS IN GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

QUESTION 4

In evidence at the hearing, one witness advised that Apert Syndrome was not listed as a disability for the purposes of accessing additional learning support and funding at the time of her child's enrolment, despite the syndrome resulting in significant learning needs. Is Apert Syndrome now recognised?

ANSWER

All students with disability are able to be supported at their local school through Learning and Support resource allocations (Low level adjustment for disability equity loading) without the need for a diagnosis or disability confirmation.

School students with disability may also be provided with targeted specialist support in accordance with the department's [Disability Criteria](#).

The disability criteria cover the broad range of impairments resulting from disability (physical, intellectual and sensory disability, autism and mental health problems) and do not refer to specific conditions or syndromes such as Apert Syndrome.

This approach is consistent with that taken by other Australian education jurisdictions.

In NSW public schools, for students with specific conditions, consideration is given to the condition and the impact of the resulting impairment upon the student's learning. For example, a student with Apert Syndrome may have learning needs that are impacted by physical disability, intellectual disability and or hearing impairment and may therefore be assessed as meeting any of these criteria.

Where the student does not meet the department's disability criteria and there is evidence that the student has a significant condition that is not adequately described by one or more of the criteria and the condition is impacting greatly on their educational outcomes, the school psychology and counselling service will consider all available documentation and make a determination on a case by case basis.

**INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR
SPECIAL NEEDS IN GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS
IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

QUESTION 5

Under the current disability criteria employed by the Department:

- a. Is there a comprehensive list of conditions that qualify for additional learning support and funding?
- b. How are parents made aware of whether or not their child's condition is on that list?
- c. What is the process for having conditions recognised and added to the list so that additional learning support and funding can be provided?

ANSWER

- a. No, there is no list of conditions that qualify for additional learning support and funding. See the response to question 4.
- b. While there is no published list of conditions that qualify for additional learning support and funding outside of the department's [Disability Criteria](#), if parents or carers believe that their child has special learning needs that require additional assistance they are able to discuss this with the principal of the local school.

The principal will consider the child's needs in consultation with the school's learning and support team. Parents or carers have a vital role to play in the work of the learning and support team through discussing and planning for their child's needs. The department's enrolment procedures also provide opportunity for parents to provide information about their child's condition and for school principals to initiate planning to meet a student's needs associated with that condition.

- c. There are no plans to develop a list of conditions that qualify for additional learning support and funding.

INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR SPECIAL NEEDS IN GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

QUESTION 6

Please provide more detail about the blended learning modules currently available and how these have enhanced teacher capacity.

ANSWER

The department provides teachers with access to a suite of seven professional learning courses that are delivered through a blended learning model of face to face learning time and individual study completed online at the participant's own pace, supported by a trained course tutor. These courses are often referred to as supported online learning courses.

The department licenses the courses from a specialist provider, Online Training Australia, and works closely with the provider to review, develop and tailor course content to meet the needs of teachers in NSW public schools. Other states and territories and education sectors across Australia also utilise these courses.

Each of the seven courses is registered through the NSW Educational Standards Authority (NESA) to provide accredited training for department teachers at the Proficient stage of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. Each course requires 20 to 40 hours of study, depending on the course, taken over 10 to 12 weeks.

Courses offered by the department in NSW public schools are as follows:

- Understanding personalised learning and support
- Understanding autism spectrum disorder
- Understanding and supporting behaviour
- Understanding motor coordination difficulties
- Inclusion for learners with speech, language and communication needs
- Understanding hearing loss
- Understanding dyslexia and significant reading difficulties.

Courses are taken in learning cohorts of up to 12 participants, allowing sharing of professional knowledge and expertise between participants and the tutor. Learning cohorts may be comprised of staff from one school or groups of staff from across different schools.

Content of each of the courses includes accessible information about the disability or focus area of need, strategies for assessing student's needs for learning and information about a wide range of interventions or approaches to planning and programming. Each course includes a variety of engaging and interactive multi-media content including video case studies highlighting school and classroom practice, animations, self-assessment exercises and quizzes, online forums, extensive

printable practical resources for teachers to use, links to related websites and further readings or research. A focus of each course is the development and implementation of SMART goals (specific, measurable, agreed, realistic and time-related) for a focus student as a practical way to consolidate learning.

The courses have been progressively introduced in NSW public schools since 2009 following a trial of the autism course in 2008. As at 31 May 2017, there have been more than 32,000 course registrations across the seven courses. This represents more than 21,000 individual staff in NSW public schools who have taken one or more course, including classroom teachers, specialist teachers, principals and school executive, school learning support officers and local Educational Services staff.

The department gathers a range of data and information on the usage and impact of these courses on an ongoing basis. Since 2013, the department has published a six-monthly summary of quantitative and qualitative data on its website. These data summaries demonstrate an ongoing positive impact of this professional learning on the knowledge, skills and confidence of teachers in personalising learning and support for students with a range of disabilities and additional learning needs.

Evaluative data collected from course participants includes the following:

- Consistently high course completion rates, with on average 95% of course enrolments leading to completion.
- Increase in participants self-rated knowledge and understanding, skills in assessing student learning need and in planning and implementing interventions for students, and confidence in meeting student's needs.
- Between 97%-99% of respondents report that they would recommend the course to a colleague.
- Approximately 90% of course participants report they are still referring back to the course content or using the course material 90 days after completing a course.

Participants also comment on the extent to which the SMART goals they set for their focus student during each course have been achieved and outline their future plans. This qualitative data provides extensive evidence of the practical ways in which teachers and other education staff apply their learning from each course as well as areas for updating course content and support materials.

Further information about the impact of these supported online learning courses is available on the department's website in the most recent data summary at the following link: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/disability-learning-and-support/personalised-support-for-learning/professional-learning>.

In addition, an independent evaluation of the supported online learning courses in NSW public schools completed in 2015 is available on the Australian Government Department of Education website at the following link: <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/38325>.

**INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR
SPECIAL NEEDS IN GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS
IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

QUESTION 7

With the range of online learning courses available for teachers to complete, are teachers expected to complete these courses within school hours, and if so, how much funding is provided for teacher release?

ANSWER

The supported online learning courses described in the answer to Supplementary Question 6 take place at a range of times in different schools. All of the courses include at least three group sessions with the trained course tutor in addition to individual study of the course content online at a participant's own pace.

In the majority of circumstances, school staff will typically complete some individual study in their own time and some during non-teaching periods during the school day.

Group sessions for courses that are open to participants from any NSW public school take place during school time, either for half a day or across a whole school day. Many courses are also offered at the end of the school day and after school hours, depending on demand.

Courses for a specific school staff group are arranged between the school principal and the tutor. Group sessions may take place during staff meetings, on school development days, after school or during school time.

The department does not provide specific funds for teacher release where required for participation in these courses. However, funding is provided to all NSW public schools to support the professional learning needs of staff as part of the base funding component in the department's Resource Allocation Model (RAM). Professional learning funding is allocated based on the number of teaching and non-teaching permanent staff at the school.

The methodology is based on two factors; one provides base funding determined by school type, and the other is based on remoteness, distributed on a per capita basis.

The allocation for each teacher ranges from \$815 to \$1,350 depending on the location of the school. The allocation for non-teaching staff (including SLSOs) ranges from \$191 to \$318 depending on the location of the school. Smaller schools and most specialised settings also receive a base allocation that ranges from \$1,005 to \$2,010.

Principals determine how best to use their school budget to meet the needs of students, including staff professional learning needs.

INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR SPECIAL NEEDS IN GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

QUESTION 8

The committee received evidence at the hearing from Speech Pathology Australia that, in other Australian jurisdictions, the Department of Education directly employs speech pathologists while New South Wales does not. Is this the case, and if so, please outline why? How are speech pathology services provided to students under the current framework.

ANSWER

The NSW Department of Education does not directly employ allied health staff, including speech pathologists, in NSW government schools.

In NSW, allied health services including speech pathology are provided by other government departments, non-government agencies and private providers. These departments and agencies have the infrastructure to provide clinical supervision of specialist allied health staff like speech pathologists.

Local Schools, Local Decisions gives school principals in NSW government schools authority to engage a range of services to meet the education needs of students enrolled in the school, including speech pathology services, in consultation with parents and carers. This includes seeking services available from other agencies as well as the flexibility to purchase services through the school budget.

Access to specialist speech pathology services for people with disability in NSW is changing with the transition the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Where specialist speech pathology is required to meet the functional needs associated with a child's disability, this may be included as part of the child's NDIS support package and their parents and carers are able to determine their preferred provider. Where funded through an NDIS support package, specialist speech pathology services may be delivered at school where requested by parents and carers, in agreement with the school principal, where the service is consistent or aligned with the school's personalised learning and support provision for the student.

The department has engaged Speech Pathology Australia in a project that is currently developing materials to support effective professional collaboration and practice between teachers and speech pathologists, to achieve positive education outcomes for students.