

I am happy for you to take this on notice. Could you put forward recommendations how the system could be streamlined and where improvements can be made, apart from the IT one, which has been raised?

In our setting, we find that most parents are able to complete the process with little difficulty. Some families from low SES or EALD backgrounds find dealing with various agencies, e.g. doctors and specialists, to be an obstacle. Often, the students' disabilities have been identified in Primary school, and the relevant documentation has been obtained then.

The request process could be streamlined by making sure that the Access Request form is more user friendly. It is also difficult because the students are competing for limited placements in each region, and more placements are necessary. In the case of RHHS, we also work with the private system to find placements for at need students, particularly those with behaviour difficulties that impact on their learning and that of others. These private colleges provide an alternative for students who don't fit into mainstream DOE settings. If the government cannot afford to offer more places for students with complex needs and should continue to be funded at an appropriate level.

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The problem is we will have to get specific recommendations from you about the funding formula so the Government cannot see a gap to go through so that nothing happens, and they say, "Yes, we will increase funding", in some vague way. You need to pin them down specifically as to what increases should be in the various categories, whether it is transport, staffing and so on

In our context, a mainstream high school of 1150 students, we have the equivalent of 6.0FTE learning support staff, and 3.0FTE SLSO staff. Our equity funding covers 4 teachers. We cover the rest with RAM equity (gonski) funding. These extra staff are used to create and maintain a system of personalised learning, supporting the inclusion of every student in a mainstream environment. This is not sustainable without further funding- funding the employment and professional development of support staff must be a priority to create an inclusive environment.

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Ms WILKINS: Can I just mention counsellors in 30 seconds more? Ms McBRIDE: Go for it. Ms WILKINS: Yes. We have just this year got almost a counsellor there every day— Ms McBRIDE: It is shameful. Ms WILKINS: —but we have nearly 1,200 kids. Mental health issues are exponentially increasing in the whole population and that includes schoolkids who are— Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Can you give us these details on notice rather than try to rush it now?

Mental health is an increasing issue amongst the young people in our schools. Ten years ago, we would have less than five students presenting with severe anxiety and mental health issues. Now, we have at least 20 students in each year group who experience mental health issues- approximately 120 students school wide. This term, for the first time, our high school of 1150 students received a counsellor allocation of 1.0. This leaves one counsellor to accommodate at least 120 students. We have this allocation because we are classified as a 'large high school'. However, in our largest feeder primary school of approximately 650 students, the counsellor allocation is 0.5. However, so far this year, they have only had half of this allocation actually supplied. This is nowhere near enough to deal with the rising mental health issues surfacing at an increasingly early age.

Receiving psychological support is vital for at risk students, and early intervention is crucial in ensuring successful outcomes. Without this support, students with mental health issues cannot survive in mainstream schools, and their condition often becomes more severe, and the student becomes self destructive, affecting their own learning and the learning of their peers.

We ask that the inquiry investigate the current counsellor allocation formula, and ensure that all students have sufficient access to adequate support.

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[please tell us all suggestions as to best practice that you have come across and adopted yourself that you think are worth studying.](#)

We would recommend the report “Schools for all children and young people”, by Professor Anthony Shaddock, Dr. Sue Packer and Mr Alasdair Roy, which was published in November 2015. This report discusses the merits of inclusive education, with as many students as possible participating in mainstream classrooms. The report also recommends several strategies that are necessary for this to occur.

At RHHS, we have adopted a personalised learning approach. This means that all students receive support according to their needs, in their learning and well being. The school allocates funding to universal, targeted and intensive programs. Each of the 1150 students has a personalised learning plan, and those with more complex needs have further individualised plans. This has come about as a result of a whole school commitment. Teachers and Executive staff have undertaken significant professional learning to ensure that all students have access to learning that supports their needs.

We are a fully mainstreamed high school, with no support units or support classes. However, we have significant numbers of students with complex needs. We have 68 students on health plans, 197 students with asthma and allergies, 150 students who are significantly funded by the school as a result of their complex needs, as well as 45 students living out of home, 20 of whom are in an official placement, and 300 young people who come to us from vulnerable families.

Adopting the personalised learning approach has given these students access to a mainstreamed education. For some students, it has meant the successful completion of the HSC. For other students, it has meant successful transition into the workforce. Because all students have a personalised plan, the school has been able to support all students to achieve their personal best.

In this way, we fulfil our moral contract with parents, giving all students access to a quality education. We are able to accommodate for those who have additional needs, without compromising the needs of the wider school population. Having a positive and personalised environment is instrumental in engaging and educating students with complex needs. In the report, Shaddock, Packer and Roy note that *“Positive school cultures that are child centred and inclusive improve engagement and learning outcomes for all students, and are particularly important for students with complex needs and challenging behaviours.”* (74)

To implement and maintain this culture requires significant funding, and we recommend that the inquiry ensure all mainstream schools have access to needs based Gonski funding.

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[Ms McBRIDE: You want that quantified in dollars? Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Yes, dollars, hours and places.](#)

In our context, the most crucial aspect of funding that must be urgently reviewed is that under the Federal Government's school funding policy, RHHS stands to lose over \$1,000,000. Public schools will only receive 20% of the schools resource standard (SRS) from the commonwealth- as opposed to private schools, which will receive 80%. To ensure equity in funding, and to provide quality education to students with increasingly complex learning needs, this 20% resource standard must be lifted.