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NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Children and young people with disability in New South Wales educational settings

Response to Questions on Notice

May 2024

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

QUESTION ONE: NSW'S AUSLAN SYLLABUS

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I have a question about the curriculum. Is that a year 11 or year 12 stage 6 curriculum, or is it all stages? ...And it's offered as a HSC subject?

In response to the Hon. Anthony D'Adam's question about NSW's Auslan Syllabus, Deaf Connect confirms the announcement of the new curriculum on 22 August 2024 was designed as a K-10 curriculum. As HSC VET course, Auslan is offered in a Stage 6 Curriculum through the Deaf Connect's Certificate II in Auslan as a registered training provider. Therefore, this course counts as a Board Endorsed unit credit for the HSC but does not contribute towards an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).

Deaf Connect notes that the announcement of the K-12 syllabus does not outline the level of Auslan language qualifications will be expected of teachers to deliver the subject nor is it accompanied with any government investment to address the issue of the national Auslan skills workforce shortage – including Auslan teachers - which is crucial for the successful delivery of the Auslan syllabus.

QUESTION TWO: BARRIERS TO THE REGISTRATION OF DEAF TEACHERS

The CHAIR: I was wondering if I could ask a bit more about the barrier to deaf teachers being registered. Could you explain what's happening in New South Wales in relation to that, and how it differs from other States?

Deaf Connect notes this question was asked by Deaf Australia and refers the Committee to their response.

QUESTION THREE: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR DEAF STUDENTS

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: We've heard evidence today from various different groups. Representatives for autism and different disabilities and their respective associations have given us a range of views as to how they think we should proceed in including people with a disability in the current education system. I understand from what you've said earlier, Ms Liu and Brent,

that all three of you are indicating that perhaps it's better not to have an individual deaf child turn up to one school and be there on their own, but rather to have a specific school that might be allocated per region. How would you suggest?

I'm just trying to understand, because we're getting different views. Autism Awareness Australia have the view that every mainstream school should accommodate children with autism. We're seeing a different view from what you said earlier—that perhaps it's much better for a child not to be isolated but rather to be with a group of friends or their peers and to learn together. Can I understand that a little bit? I also don't know much about the statistics in New South Wales, either, on what schools are available. It would be good to have that available. I don't think you've made a submission. We can make those inquiries as well, but perhaps that could be made available.

In response to the question of what inclusive education looks like for deaf students, Deaf Connect strongly advocates for a bilingual-bimodal approach which is crucial for deaf students' language development, academic achievement, and cultural identity. Deaf Connect notes the Department of Education's response to bilingual education during the public hearing on Tuesday 23 April 2024 outlined:

- their recently announced K-10 Auslan curriculum
- absence of deaf SSP (Schools for specific purposes), and
- teachers across the state using Auslan informally.

Deaf Connect refers the Committee to the World Federation of the Deaf's Position Paper on Inclusive Education in 2018 which outlines two main concerns of relevance: (1) Concerns of the model of inclusive education is not truly inclusive for deaf learners and does not meet deaf learners' needs. (2) Concerned how Article 24 (Education) of the CRPD has been interpreted by state parties.

“The WFD is specifically troubled by the current trend in following an operational definition of inclusion for deaf learners as placement in mainstream schools, as these are environments that often do not provide adequate access to and direct instruction in sign language, including instruction from deaf teachers. For many deaf learners, this type of placement does not support inclusion. This operational definition of inclusion as placement in mainstream schools is contrary to the legislative history of Article 24, where WFD advocated for a broad definition of inclusion where bilingual education for deaf learners is a form of inclusive education. The WFD recognizes that inclusive education for deaf learners can take the form of various models and occur in a range of settings.”

Deaf Connect posits that bilingual education approach is where the Committee should be aiming towards to achieve true inclusive education for deaf students for academic and social development outcomes. The Disability Royal Commission’s Final Report identified “‘hybrid options’, or schools that incorporate strategies to deliver education in both Auslan and English” as clear examples of inclusive education environments for deaf students.

Deaf Connect refers the Committee to consider the success that the Toowong State School has achieved as a bilingual (Auslan-English) co-enrollment primary school and the Toowong Kindergarten and Childcare Centre’s bilingual pilot program, both of which have garnered international attention. Baker et al (2019) provides an insight into the program’s success outlined below in Table 3.1 – Guiding Principles for Toowong State School’s Bilingual Bicultural Co-Enrollment Program.

Table 3.1. Guiding Principles for Toowong State School’s Bilingual Bicultural Co-Enrollment Program

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1. A child’s need for early exposure to an accessible first language is of the utmost importance. For some deaf children, visual communication is the most accessible communication system and Auslan is a first language option.
 2. Auslan and English are equally valued within the program. Fluency in both Auslan and English is a desired outcome of the program. Students will have the opportunity to learn in Auslan and in English.
 3. Individual communication needs are valued and catered for in the program. Communication modes available in both Deaf and hearing cultures are available to students in the program (e.g., signing, speaking, listening, reading, writing).
 4. Contributions from all stakeholders (including parents and the Deaf community) are valued and considered important in the functioning of the program.
 5. Deaf and hearing cultures are equally valued within the program. Deaf and hearing role models are an integral part of the program, assisting in the development of children’s healthy identity and helping them establish their place in both Deaf and hearing cultures.
 6. The role of parents as caregivers and as important language models for their child is critical for the success of the program.
 7. The inclusion of Deaf and hearing staff who have or are aiming toward fluency in Auslan and English is critical for the success of the program.
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Baker et al (2019) posits that “The bilingual bicultural co-enrollment program caters successfully to a very diverse group of DHH and hearing students and to more DHH students than any other model of operation.” The key benefits of the program include:

- **Employment and further studies:** students experienced success in employment, with many having completed tertiary studies.
- **Increased Auslan interpreter workforce and Deaf community involvement:** a significant number of hearing students undertook interpreter studies or are in some way connected to the deaf community.
- **School alumni engagement:** many past students return to visit their primary school that so strongly shaped them as young people, and increasing numbers of past students are returning to work as TA: ALMS or TA: EIs.
- **Inclusive education:** providing rich social, academic, and identity-shaping experiences for the entire school community.
- **Lasting connections:** students remain connected through their secondary years and into adulthood.

REFERENCE LIST

1. Michelle Baker, Cameron Miller, Elizabeth Fletcher, Caroline Gamin and Breda Carty, *Co-Enrollment in Toowong, Australia*. In: *Co-Enrollment in Deaf Education*. Edited by Marc Marschark, Shirin Antia and Harry Knoors, Oxford University Press (2019). © Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780190912994.003.0003