

10 October 2011

Inquiry into transition support for students with additional or complex needs and their families

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE:

- 1. Are you familiar with another state or even an overseas jurisdiction that actually has a model that you think we could use here in NSW?**

Education Queensland provides the following programs, which Northcott believes illustrates good models to support transitions for students with a disability:

- Early Childhood Development Program
- Education Adjustment Program
- Special Education Services

Northcott recommends the system in Queensland as an example of good practice in this area particularly because of the use of multidisciplinary teams (including allied health therapists) which are based at schools, operating at the sites of transitions. Northcott also believes the Queensland system is modelled on universal allocation of student support resources, rather than a system focussing on individual funding support attached to a student, and sees this as an effective way of ensuring more equitable access to transition support. More information about the Education Queensland model can be found here: <http://education.qld.gov.au/studentservices/learning/disability/programs.html>

Northcott is also aware of a pilot project in Victoria which the committee might find relevant to this inquiry: *Linking Schools & Early Years Project (LSEY)*, has been led by the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH), Murdoch Children's Research Institute at the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne and funded by The R. E. Ross Trust. It is being implemented in three sites in Victoria and being evaluated by Social Policy Research Centre – University of NSW. Northcott believes a good aspect of this transition support model is its focus on partnerships (between schools, early education providers, therapists, and families) and sharing learnings between professionals (for example, the project incorporates peer swaps between teachers and early educators, to better understand how each profession teaches, the issues they address, and fosters better co-operation between primary schools and early childhood education providers). More information about this project can be found here: <http://www.rch.org.au/lsey/>

2. Without mentioning any particular schools, can you give one or examples of the types of things that schools have said would be “unjustifiable hardship” in terms of modifications?

Northcott’s experience is that the types of modifications which a school might deem as an ‘unjustifiable hardship’ in terms of the financial cost of making these adjustments, generally include expensive capital modifications, including:

- Installation of lifts for access to second (and subsequent) floors
- Ramps – particularly when more than one ramp is required for a student to adequately access all the school grounds. For example, for schools that are built on a hill, a series of ramps might be required to ensure access to the whole school grounds and playground. Some schools might find the cost of this an “unjustifiable hardship” and be unable to accept the child at the school, whereas other schools might only install one or two ramps, or timetable the child in classrooms on the ground floor only, so the child is then only able access certain areas of the school grounds.

Modifications which are not clearly seen as ‘required’ for the student, or where there is an inadequate understanding of child’s needs and why these modifications are essential, is also an area where a school might decline to make modifications for a particular student. For example, for a student who uses a power wheelchair and requires a covered path from the school gate to the school buildings; a school might be unwilling to make this modification as they do not understand why this student needs the covered path when all other students can make this same journey under any weather conditions. Another example is a student with Osteogenesis Imperfecta (OI), a condition involving brittle bones that are very easily broken. The school may not agree to install a concrete path over an uneven walkway area, as they do not fully see the implications that such an uneven surface could have in terms of the increased risk for the child to fall and break bones.