

**The Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales Limited**

Level 12, 99 York Street, Sydney NSW 2000  
Phone (02) 9299 2845 Fax (02) 9290 2274  
Web [aisnsw.edu.au](http://aisnsw.edu.au) Email [ais@aisnsw.edu.au](mailto:ais@aisnsw.edu.au)  
ABN 96 003 509 073

2 June 2010

RECEIVED

02 JUN 2010

GPSC's

Hon Robyn Parker MLC  
Chair, General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2  
NSW Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Parker,

**Inquiry into the Provision of Education to Students with a Disability or Special Needs**

I write in response to the Committee's letter of 18<sup>th</sup> May 2010 requesting additional information in relation to the Inquiry, specifically on the claim made that students with a disability in non-government schools receive more government funding than is spent on a similar child in a government school.

The Association and the NSW independent schools sector reject this claim.

Claims that non-government school students receive more funding than government school students are regularly made by groups or individuals opposed to government funding of non-government schools. It is clear that such claims are usually based on either selective or partial evidence or on a complete lack of understanding of how Commonwealth and State grants for non-government schools are calculated and allocated, and are demonstrably incorrect.

Any valid analysis of schools funding, taking into account the relevant Commonwealth and State funding models and allocative processes, shows that students with disability and special needs in the non-government schools sector attract lower levels of funding than similar students in the government schools sector.

In relation to the specific claim made, it must be pointed out that recurrent Commonwealth and State funding is for general educational purposes for all students.

As stated in the *Schools Assistance Act 2008* Administrative Guidelines: Commonwealth Schools Programs for Non-government Schools for 2009 to 2012:

*58. The Recurrent Grants Program assists non-government schools with the re-current cost of providing school education.*

*65. Recurrent Funding is to be used for meeting operating expenditure incurred by approved non-government system and school authorities. Recurrent Funding can be applied to:*

- a. Teaching and ancillary staff salaries;*
- b. Professional development of teachers;*
- c. Curriculum development; and*
- d. Maintenance and general operation provisions.*

Further, with regard to NSW Government Funding the document, Non- Government Schools Existing Policies and Prevailing Practices July 2009 states:

*The policy provides that all students enrolled in a registered non-government school attract a per capita grant which is determined by the category of the school.*

This Funding does not take account of the additional costs of providing an education for a student with a disability or special needs. The claim, therefore, that general recurrent funds implicitly include a proportion of funds for these students is not correct.

Commonwealth and State governments provide some additional funding specifically targeted to students with a disability and special needs enrolled in independent schools. This funding is distributed to independent schools on the basis of the actual needs of the students enrolled and is usually in the order of several hundred dollars per year for the majority of students. As noted in the AISNSW submission, this funding is inadequate to properly address the educational needs of these students.

The calculations behind the claim made in the Committee's request make tenuous connections from a Table published in the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) submission from a Productivity Commission Report (2010) on defined Students with a Disability, to a much broader cohort of students cited by DET as "students with special needs" and a large number of undefined "students in mainstream classes experiencing difficulties in learning". As there is no clear and agreed definition of special needs or of students "experiencing difficulties" it is extremely difficult to make comparative per capita funding calculations across the school sectors.

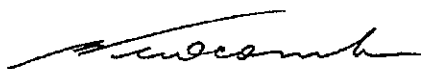
Further, the calculation used to indicate the number of students with special needs in non-government schools is incorrect. It states that there are 25,073 students with special needs in non-government schools. There are no agreed criteria applied across the schooling sectors in NSW for this group of students. However, the Catholic Education Commission alone indicates in their submission to the Inquiry that there are 24,000 students with special needs in NSW Catholic schools. Our estimates indicate that there are a similar number of students with special needs in the NSW independent sector.

It was made clear in our submission to the Inquiry that we referred only to the discrete subset of students who meet the NSW DET criteria for students with a disability. We did not refer to the significantly larger cohort of students who have special learning needs but are not covered by the SWD criteria.

In relation to the second request, the Association is not able to provide the data sought. Each independent school has a direct funding relationship with the Commonwealth and State governments with respect to recurrent funding. These funds are not directed through AISNSW therefore we cannot provide information on how much recurrent funding in individual independent schools is allocated specifically to students with disabilities or special needs.

I trust that the above information is sufficient to assist the Committee with its deliberations.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Newcombe', with a long horizontal flourish above the name.

Dr Geoff Newcombe  
Executive Director