# INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION TO STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR SPECIAL NEEDS

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**Submission to the NSW Government Parliamentary Inquiry:**
**The provision of education to students with a disability or special needs.**

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**Term of Reference 7:** The provision of adequate teaching training, both in terms of pre-service and ongoing professional training:

**Purpose of this Submission:** To assist the Inquiry to focus on recommendations that drive results-oriented policy for accrediting and supporting the professional training for teachers of students with disabilities.

**Context:**

Teacher education is experiencing a crisis of relevance and effect. Meta-analyses of the effects of teacher preparation on student achievement show effects of 0.1 (Hattie, 2009), a level that is best described as negligible in terms of its effect on student achievement.

Pre and in-service educators consistently report a combination of fear, trepidation and a lack of adequate background in meeting the needs of students with disabilities, especially those teachers with general education backgrounds in inclusive settings (Alexander,2001; Darling-Hammond,2006). The latter is especially problematic given that so many students with disabilities now have their educational needs met in inclusive settings(Ashman & Elkins,2009; Foreman,2008; Moran, 2007; Top of the class,2007).

While we know a lot about what constitutes successful in-service professional development the effects are not sustained and scaled in schools (Bain, 2007).

The self-study and self- reform of teacher education has been largely unproductive to the extent that it has not produced sustainable and scalable improvement in the quality of teacher education graduates (Evans, 2002; Swanson, 2006).

Reforms undertaken to date have focused predominantly on large-scale initiatives including teacher testing, certification and accreditation requirements, graduation standards, and entry and exit requirements for teacher preparation programs. Studies have shown that these broad-based summative reform initiatives exert only a limited effect on the structural reform of teacher preparation— the way courses are designed, implemented and evaluated (Bates,2002; Borko, Liston & Whitcomb,2006; National Statement, 2003 ). The latter is what ultimately influences what teachers do day-to-day in classrooms (Darling-Hammond,2006). These initiatives have not produced the desired changes in the readiness of students to make a difference in classroom settings at scale (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner,2005; Goldhaber & Brewer,2000).

Universities can successfully meet a host of these big picture re-accreditation requirements without actually changing practice in their lecture theatres and tutorial rooms.

## Our Contention:

The field of Education, children with disabilities, their parents, and teachers do not need more of the same. Education needs new focused and dynamic policy that drives fundamental structural change in the way teachers are prepared at pre-and in-service levels.

The implications for the inquiry are twofold: First, to ensure that the recommendations produced by the Inquiry do not replicate or drive approaches that have been tried, tested and failed in the past in Australia or elsewhere. Second, to build a framework of recommendations that are likely to promote innovation and drive fundamental structural reform in the following areas of teacher preparation:

      a. The quality of course and subject design in pre and in-service teacher preparation.
      b. The clinical competence of faculty
      c. The quality of practicum experiences and supervision
      d. Course coherence
      e. Faculty collaboration
      f. Authentic assessment
      g. The demonstration of authentic student outcomes in practicum settings
      h. The linkage between demonstrable authentic performance and teacher reward, recognition and advancement.
      i. School level performance expectations in the area of inclusion that are linked to the demonstrable outcomes of pre and in-service education.

We are happy to lend additional empirical support or additional detail to the key points made in this submission.

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