

**Submission
No 270**

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

Name: Ms Naomi Clarke

Date received: 19/02/2010

SUBMISSION

NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into the Provision of Education to Students with a Disability or Special Needs

I am extremely concerned about the proposed changes to the way funding and teacher allocation for the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs, is implemented.

These changes would have serious consequences for the specialized support that each child, with special needs, is able to procure through their schools.

The range of disabilities and special needs of students in a particular school and the number of students with special needs in each school, varies greatly. These needs also fluctuate. Under these changes, schools that attract children with special needs in higher numbers, because they display a culture of tolerance and are good at providing educational support and care for them, will not be able continue providing targeted, individually addressed support for each student. Funding based on needs within an area (ie prevalence-based funding), rather than on an individual school basis (ie diagnosis-based funding) will be disastrous – schools with higher levels of students with special needs will fall short on funding desperately needed to support all of these students adequately. There is little enough funding as the system stands, without making these negative changes that will result in a school not being able to fully meet the funding needs of its students with special needs.

Schools know their students and therefore they know their needs best; this means that the schools are in the most informed position to make submissions for necessary government funding and to select appropriate support staff, to most meet the needs of each child.

Schools need to have the power to select support staff and change staff as is deemed most appropriate for each student. Children are individuals, with greatly differing needs and personalities. There is no way that a “one size fits all” approach will work – we are dealing with the lives and educations of young, individual human beings. Any system that does not allow schools to assign or dismiss individual, specialist support staff to each child with their funding, is not going to work – it will not benefit the child.

Therefore, it is imperative that the system for funding remains as ‘individual needs/ diagnosis-based’ rather than ‘prevalence-based’ and that individual, specialist support staff be employed or dismissed as the school deems most appropriate to meet each student’s needs.

It distresses me that the government is looking to make decisions that will detrimentally affect the lives of some of our country's most vulnerable citizens – our young people, with special needs that require specialized support for each of them to grow into happy, educated young adult Australians.

I do not have children, but not children with a disability or with special needs. I do, however, feel exceptionally strongly about these changes; it is most important that we advocate for the rights of children and their families to have access to the best education and support within our system. I do not believe that these changes are, in any way, in the best interest of students with a disability or special needs.

If you do not have to worry about how these changes will affect you personally, then you are fortunate but the reality is for many, many families in our society, these changes will have huge implications on their lives and impact them negatively. These students and their families are our friends, our neighbours and are part of our community. As a society and Government, we should not allow these proposed changes to funding and education to be implemented – these changes are of no benefit to anyone and will in fact be very detrimental to the very people that I would expect this Government to be using their powers to assist and support.

Naomi Clarke

