

Submission  
No 33

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

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Date received: 5/02/2010

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Partially Confidential

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

### **1. The nature, level and adequacy of funding for the education of children with a disability.**

*The nature of funding for students with disabilities generally occurs in a range ways within NSW DET schools.*

- 1: Early School Support Program*
- 2: Funding Support for students with a disability in mainstream classrooms*
- 3: Language Class*
- 4: Intensive Reading Class*
- 5: Special Education Class or Unit*
- 6: Behaviour Support Program*
- 7: Significant Learning Difficulties Program*

### **LEVEL AND ADEQUACY SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSES**

*These programs all work to provide invaluable support to schools, students and staff. They are essential as part of a needed provision for students with disabilities and special needs. In no way should these programs disappear or be diminished. They all need to continue and BE EXPANDED in one form or another.*

*There are not enough special education classes to meet the need. Classes (IM) for students with mild intellectual disabilities have been systematically closed down across the state. These classes were most successful in being able to better cater for students who have a mild intellectual disability. Not only this, these students have now been dumped in mainstream classrooms and this has enormously increased the range of learning needs that teachers now must address. NOTE: teachers turn themselves inside-out to do so but lately it is the students who are on the more gifted and talented end of the spectrum, who pay the price.*

*The situation is the same for students in the moderate and severe intellectual disability range (IO / IS). Many of these students also present with physical and hygiene needs. Three years ago, the enrolments declined for a short time in our special education unit and the second class was disestablished. The single special education class has been full since then. Currently at our school we have three students who are eligible to access our special education unit but because another class has to close down across the state before our second class can be re-established, the three eligible students access the class with a Funding Support.*

*WASTE OF RESOURCES. At our school we have state-of-the-art special education facilities. We have one vacant special education classroom facility. Unfortunately, a year ago, a regional decision was made to establish a 'multi-categorical' class to prop up a local declining school. The environment and facilities for the children in this class are extremely poor compared to what our school can offer. Further, they do not have a special education trained teacher working with the students in this class. Regional consultants have commented that the situation for these students is appalling.*

*The need for specialised support for students who are presenting with behaviour issues is continuing to increase. This support needs to be in the form of behaviour classes, funding support, specialist teachers and ongoing provision of training for teachers. It appears that there is no whole-department approach for schools in terms of managing students with difficult behaviours. Schools have been relatively left to their own devices in terms of accessing private providers re autism, Asbergers, ODD etc. Behaviour teachers are too few and thin on the ground.*

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

### LEVEL AND ADEQUACY FUNDING SUPPORT

- *In the vast majority of cases in our school, we would say that the level and adequacy of funding for students with diagnosed disabilities in mainstream classrooms is well and truly **UNDER WHAT IS REQUIRED TO EFFECTIVELY MEET THE CHILD'S LEARNING NEEDS.***
- *Increasingly our school is finding that inordinate amounts of time are spent by teachers, school counsellors, parents, learning support teams etc, putting together funding support applications. Increasingly also is the greater amounts of additional time preparing APPEALS because the first application for funding falls enormously short of the need of the child.*
- *It is difficult to generalise because individual student needs are very different. Some students present with such a complex mix of disabilities, yet when the tedious process of profiling and meeting with DGOs, Regional Integration Teachers, the parents, school counsellors etc is complete, it is often the case that the funding is either not approved or so inadequate that the school then spends time going through some form of appeal process. This has certainly been our school's recent experience.*
- *The following are but four of many cases we could site in our school where the level and adequacy of funding of students with disabilities is inadequate*
  - *CASE A – Student with malignant tumors behind his eyes since birth (blind in one eye - prosthesis), language delays, autism, in most cases, lacking capacity to independently undertake tasks without one-to-one assistance. First round of funding – equivalent of half an hour teacher aide per day. Following appeal – now one hour teacher aide funding per day.*
  - *CASE B – Child with severe language disorder, autism and a recent school counsellor assessment that well and truly put him in the moderate intellectual delay range. Child goes into Year 2 2010 – has been on ESS program – but ESS and class teachers agree that the program is no longer meeting his needs. Because DGO will not sign off on the moderate intellectual delay – the school cannot even get to first base on accessing funding support. As well, the DGO has decided that the major disability is language and not autism so again, the child will not attract funding. The school has had the child's case up to Regional Placement Panel and been denied funding support. The principal rep on Placement Panel cannot understand why the child is not able to be supported. The disabilities consultant came and observed the child in the classroom during the literacy session (late 2009) and reported that in the 90 minute session, the only thing the child completed independently was to squiggle what may have been able to be interpreted as an upside-down 'e'. After two years at school, the child cannot in any way independently engage in classroom activity. He can barely speak in any way which is able to be interpreted. He cannot write his name and he is now going into Year 2 without any additional support.*
  - *CASE C – Child with SMA. Cannot independently toilet, move, stand, sit. There are real OH and S issues for child, teacher, teachers' aide. Child is in an electronic wheelchair. Initially in Kindergarten – Funding was about half-time – three hours per day (fortunately we were able to use a teachers' aide for a student that was receiving full-time funding for the first year of schooling). Following appeal at the end of 2008, the student's funding was increased to approximately 50 minutes short of the full-day. The school has had to combine resources so that a teachers' aide can be with the child for the entire day.*
  - *CASE D – At our school we have a Special Education Unit. The class is full and the children in the class require full-time support and supervision throughout the school day. Each year the school has to apply for additional funding to assist with playground duty otherwise the class teacher and teachers' aide would be doing lunch and recess duties five days per week. Our school is a highly inclusive school and the special ed unit students are fully included in all aspects of our school's life. Fortunately the good will of other mainstream staff teachers in taking additional duties ensures that our special ed staff do get a break each day.*

**2. Best Practice approaches in determining the allocation of funding to children with a disability, particularly whether allocation should be focused on a student's functioning capacity rather than their disability**

*At our school we believe that **BOTH THE DIAGNOSED DISABILITY AS WELL AS THE CHILD'S FUNCTIONING CAPACITY** should determine the allocation of funding for a student.*

*See CASE B. This little boy has been at school for two years. He has been in a classroom which has been highly supportive of him and responsive to his needs...within what can realistically be given by a non-special ed trained, mainstream classroom teacher. In 2009, the school insisted that the school counsellor reassess him because it was obvious that the gap was increasing significantly. The DGO was not happy that a) the results of this assessment were not consistent with her original assessment undertaken when the child was in the Early Intervention Program and b) that it was a year earlier than should be given that the child was accessing the Early School Support Program (1 to 2 hours of itinerant support per week – if that.)*

*In the meantime the child has no support because the Moderate Delay has not been approved. If the child's FUNCTIONING CAPACITY was also included in the mix, the child needs would be better serviced and the blocking mechanisms which seem to be increasingly in place may be overcome and the school trusted a little more in accurately determining the child's need.*

**3. The level and adequacy of current special education places within the education system**

*There is plenty to feedback here. Without a doubt, we have seen the systematic demise of provision of places for students with disabilities and special education needs. The level and adequacy of current education places within the education system is simply NOT ENOUGH.*

- *The NSW DET has done an excellent job of closing down all the classes for students with mild intellectual delays. (IM classes). This has increased the work load of:*
  - *mainstream class teachers in differentiating the curriculum and has made it increasingly difficult for them to meet the ever-growing range of learning needs of students in their classes;*
  - *school learning support teams which struggle to divvy up the ever –diminishing STLA allocations given to schools;*
  - *school counsellors – increasingly assessing and supporting teachers in classrooms with ideas and strategies to assist students;*
  - *school executive who spend hours of time endeavouring to maximise the diminishing array of services that should be provided for students with learning difficulties and mild intellectual delays.*
- *The NSW DET also has processes in place which make it nearly impossible to adequately provide places for students with more serious and severe disabilities.*
  - *Our school was originally an SSP that became a mainstream school with a special education unit. The school was built entirely with the needs of special education students in mind and the special education facility in the school is state of the art. Three years ago the numbers in the special education unit declined and the second class closed down. The second classroom remained vacant but the space was utilised for extra-curricula activities within the school.*
  - *Last year, a MULTI-CATEGORICAL class was established in a neighbouring school. This school did not have an established special education unit or staff. This school was taking on the town's Tutorial Centre and as a carrot, they were offered the MULTI-CATEGORICAL*

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

class so that they could have an AP position. Our school and School Council, strongly advocated for the second special education class to be re-established in our school because we had existing facilities, staff, culture of inclusion., programs and services. This did not occur.

- Commencing 2010, we now have three students, all eligible for a special education placement at our school but enrolled as mainstream students. Their parents DO NOT want their children to attend the MULTI-CATEGORICAL class as the school within in which is housed is unfortunately a declining school where public perception of it is not high. As well, the teacher of the multi-categorical class does not have a special education qualification.
- The processes in place in NSW DET schools are that a special education class elsewhere has to close down before another can be established where there is a need. This puts incredible pressure on mainstream classroom teachers where special education facilities do not exist.
- All students are the losers in this model (both mainstream and special needs).

### 4. The adequacy of integrated support services for children with a disability in mainstream settings, such as school classrooms.

The provision of integrated support services for children with a disability in mainstream settings is **TOTALLY INADEQUATE**.

This is why the NSW DET is trying to introduce a model of **robbing Peter to pay Paul** with the School Learning Support Teacher (SLST) proposal and touting it as an improvement. In this model, CASE A and CASE B from my school, would receive even less support than they do now as one is not funded at all and the other is funded less than \$6000, which somehow has become the magic cut-off for the RE-DISTRIBUTION of funding support moneys, so that other schools (small rural and isolated schools in particular), can be given **much needed support**. However, this will be funded by the redistribution of funds for all students funded less than \$6000.

As well, the SLST proposal is attempting to withdraw the current array of support services for students – ESS, Reading Class, Language Class, Significant Learning Difficulties Program, Behaviour Support Program etc and combine these into the new amazing position of School Learning Support Teacher who after 110 hours of ONLINE TRAINING will be able to go into a school and meet the array of student learning and behavioural needs across the enormous spectrum of need that currently exists.

The interesting and most significant fact with the SLST proposal is that **there will be no increase in the CURRENT amount of funding committed to the integrated support services** for children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

If the need is there is should be funded BUT NOT AT THE EXPENSE OF THE CHILDREN WHO ARE ALREADY INADEQUATELY SUPPORTED. Much more funding needs to be injected into the integrated support services. The service should be specialised – not based on 110 hours of online training. The service should be INCREASED rather than DIMINISHED for schools such as mine. Our school has crunched the numbers and we will be about \$4000 short of what we currently receive in funding support and we will be at least .4 short of teacher time in regarding to the services that we currently access – Reading Class, ESS, Significant Learning Difficulties, Behaviour Support etc.

The school learning support team will be beside itself, and again spending huge amounts of time trying to allocate and prioritise the **DIMINISHING RESOURCE** against the **GROWING NEED**.

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

### **5. The provision of a suitable curriculum for intellectually disabled and conduct disordered students**

*By all accounts, the curriculum for intellectually disabled students is totally unsuitable (even with the considerable adaptations and the development of individual learning programs. It is far more appropriate that students in the IO/IS range also have a curriculum which focuses on FUNCTIONAL LIVING SKILLS type program be provided for students.*

### **6. Student and family access to professional support and services such as speech therapy, physiotherapy and school counsellors**

*NO real comment to make re this at this stage...other than schools need to be able to access all of these services for students far more readily than they currently can...particularly in the case where parents find following up on these services quite challenging for them.*

### **7. The provision of adequate teacher training, both in terms of pre-service and ongoing professional learning**

*All pre-service teachers should undertake COMPULSORY special education training as part of the CORE COMPONENT on their degree. All teachers need to be aware of the range of student disabilities which they may be presented with in a mainstream classroom. They need to be able to differentiate and make adjustments to the curriculum, need to know how to support students who present with learning difficulties, they need to know about the array of support services and technologies that can be accessed and they need to understand and be able to implement strategies to support students with behaviour disorders. They need to develop their own philosophy around special needs education and inclusion. They need training in how to maximise the use of a teachers' aide and work with the parents of students with disabilities.*

*Post-service, the level and adequacy of professional learning for all school teachers again falls very much short of the mark. Unless it is a school priority, some teachers may not be accessing any appropriate training in the area of special education...not that there seems to be much in the offing anyway...and then it is usually by private providers. (The need is as outlined in the paragraph above). Beyond this, our public education system offers no incentives or support for teachers who take up post-graduate study.*

*Increasingly we are hearing of teachers without a special education qualification teaching special education classes – this has become a phenomenon with the introduction of the multi-categorical class. WHAT A DREADFUL TERM FOR A CLASS ANYWAY!*

### **8. Any other related matters**

*Having been a teacher in the public education system of NSW for nearly 25 years and principal of four schools I, and many of my colleagues, have observed the systematic increase in the number of students with learning difficulties, disabilities and other physical, behavioural and intellectual disabilities enrolling in our schools. Along with this increase, we have observed (particularly in recent years) the systematic decline of support for students with disabilities in our schools. This is now occurring at the cost of all students and staff who endeavour each day to provide a high quality of education for our children.*

*The NSW DET would be accurate in responding by saying that they have systematically increased in dollar terms the amount of funding to support this every-growing need. However the need is much greater than the current investment.*

*The NSW DET currently has an agenda of capping funding for the next three years and redistributing this funding across a wider arena. In the end, this will mean that some schools currently receiving no support will get some and some, such as mine will actually receive less so that these schools can get their much needed piece of the ever-diminishing pie.*

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

*This is not the answer. The answer is that more funding, training, provision, resourcing needs to be injected so that the demands of the special education agenda can be adequately met, so that mainstream students do not pay a price, so that students with disabilities do not pay a price, so that the good will and dedication of teachers is not milked dry and so that the parents of students with disabilities do not have to fight so hard to get what is for some but a trickle of support for their child.*

### **SECURITY OF WORK FOR TEACHERS' AIDES AND PROVISION OF TRAINING FOR TEACHERS' AIDES.**

*Most Teachers' Aides working in NSW Public Schools are employed on a temporary or casual basis. Generally they do not know from year to year whether or not they have work. Individual schools train them according to the nature of the children they are working with. Depending on the funding (minnum probably around 20 – 30 minute) a day can be very difficult to staff. Job security can be a huge issue for these very invaluable workers. They need better conditions and security of ongoing work. Not sure how this can be addressed however... given the complexity of each mainstream classroom these days, many of the above problems could well be addressed if each mainstream class was funded to have a full-time teachers aide as a standard allocation. HOW GREAT WOULD THAT BE!! (FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS).*