

**Submission
No 693**

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

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Submission to the NSW Legislative Council General Purpose Committee No. 2

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

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

While it is easy to say that there is never enough money what money is available is disbursed without adequate input and agreement with all stakeholders.

Recommendation(s)

Models seen overseas such as the UK require individual learning plans are developed between School-Based Staff, Area Staff and Parents/Carer. These plans include specified learning goals, funding and levels of intervention and assistance. This model is effective as it assists in preventing special education in schools becoming a child minding enterprise.

An independent resource should be the holder of the individual education plan and provided a point for monitoring and review for the execution of the plan. This would also be a point where parents and carers can go to seek satisfaction when direct representations to the school based team are unsatisfactory.

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

Observation where special education is provided as a Regional Resources indicates that is ill-defined lines of authority and communication. Local Principals and executive staff have little control over the day to day activities of Special Education Staff placed in the school. There is not good communication between the Regional manager of the Special Education Function and the local schools. Within a region, especially where different disability and special needs are allocated according to needs categories such as behavioural, emotional and learning opportunities for sharing and learning between different unit is non-existent. Local school rivalries may also come into play.

Recommendation(s)

That the efficacy of the provision of Special Education as a regional resource be reviewed and alternatives that are more inclusive of Parents, Carers and Local School executives are implemented.

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

Nationally it is well documented that there are shortages of health professional services.

Recommendation(s)

The individual learning plans discussed above need to consult and involve these services. Prescribed minimum levels of these interventions should be described in the individual learning plan.

7. The provision of adequate teaching training, both in terms of pre-service and ongoing professional training

Anecdotal evidence supports the notion that there are a great number of Special Education Positions fill by staff with no formal qualifications. Another observation is that often teachers, snowed under with curriculum preparation and marking in mainstream education often consider special education as an easier alternative.

School staff seeking to work in special education can given flag status as being willing to teach and approved by a school principal, who is not necessarily a qualified special education professional, after 12 months of experience. On the other hand the NSW Department of Education does not always accept the advice of Tertiary Training Institutions and nor does the Department seem either willing or capable of recognising research degrees such as PhDs or post Doctorate work.

There is no requirement for unqualified staff to undergo formal training once appointed to positions.

At present there seems to be very easy mobility between Primary and Secondary schools for special education teachers. The movement Secondary Special Education Teachers to work in the Primary sector is however not possible without specific primary school curriculum studies. This is despite the fact that Secondary students with special needs or disability are functioning at primary school levels.

Recommendation(s)

Where teachers are provided flag status to teach by a School Principal the flag status should be considered provisional until an independent external and suitably qualified professional undertakes review and observation to confirm the status. The confirmation process should also include the development of an individual learning plan to ensure that formal qualifications are obtained within the specified period.

Where teachers are appointed to special education positions, either temporary or permanent, there should be a requirement that formal qualifications are obtained within a set period to remain in those positions. Head teachers of school units with greater than 10 FTE staff should be required to have Master's Level qualifications relevant to Special education. The Department should support staff in gaining qualifications and consider increased rates of pay for these positions as master teachers.

The Department should review the current staffing and qualification of staff performing special education duties in both Primary and Secondary Schools. Goals should be set to improve the levels of qualified staff over time.

That career paths to transition Secondary staff to primary special education be formalised and better accessed.

Flocken Grob