

**INQUIRY INTO TRANSITION SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS
WITH ADDITIONAL OR COMPLEX NEEDS AND THEIR
FAMILIES**

Organisation: Council of Catholic School Parents NSW/ACT

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Council of Catholic School Parents

*Level 11 Polding Centre, 133 Liverpool Street, Sydney NSW 2000
PO Box 960 Sydney South NSW 1235
Tel (02) 9390 5339 Fax (02) 9390 5299
ABN 31 821 542 696*

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The Director
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
Macquarie St
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir,

Re: Transition support for students with additional or complex needs and their families (Inquiry)

The Council of Catholic School Parents [CCSP] is an incorporated body officially recognised by the Catholic Bishops of NSW to represent the parents of children in all Catholic schools in NSW. Currently there are some 240,983 children enrolled in NSW Catholic schools.

The CCSP appreciates the inquiry conducted by the Social Issues Committee as we represent many parents in Catholic schools who care and provide for children with additional or complex special needs. Feedback from these parents across the 11 dioceses of NSW indicates that the following areas of concern remain as major issues that we hope may be taken into consideration by the inquiry.

Parents are articulate in their request for specialist services and staff for their child, proactive planning processes and targeted programs to meet the needs of the individual and the area of special need. They request therapies, access, early assessment and effective communication to support their child at all stages, and especially at points of transition.

Effective transitions are integrally linked to the effectiveness of home – school educational partnerships at each stage in the education system – from early childhood, to secondary to post school options. Parents request shared participation in planning processes and to be adequately informed of the current and future anticipated needs for their child. When effective partnerships are common practice in schools and systems, transition processes are enhanced.

Parents need support for the complex medical, educational, therapy and social needs that are integral to raising a child with additional special needs. The stress of coping leads to defeat and isolation of these parents and advocacy processes are inherently fearful or can become strident due to frustration and anxiety. Transition points are the nexus of complaint from parents as each new stage requires new processes or requirements and gaps in communication, understanding or consultation are accentuated. Effective and

clear guidelines for building positive relationships can provide collaborative transitions to assist both parent and teaching staff with best practice models and processes.

CCSP represents a large number of rural, remote and low SES parents and often the greatest area of need with respect to building and sustaining genuine family-school partnerships, transitions and learning outcomes is in low SES communities. Many children in our schools have complex special needs that include a combination of mental illness and developmental disability, and many others have complex physical, medical and cognitive health needs that require long periods of time in hospital and other healthcare settings.

Our educational systems and medical and social services may need to consider new modes of communication for these families. Reviewing (accessible) internet social communication networks eg blogs, skype may be a new mechanism for the support, education and networking between socially isolated parents and provide shared learning and practical assistance across communities and families juggling similar complex special need issues. At times of transition, when the social and geographic world widens considerably, this communication support network may be greatly valued.

As many Catholic parents choose to engage in a Catholic school education system for their children, it is imperative that choice in schooling is respected and valued. This is particularly relevant at times of transition, when new challenges surface requiring new schools, new transport and additional support for families with a child with complex special needs. It is imperative that transport needs and an acknowledgement for choice in schooling are taken into consideration as a matter of equity.

We look forward to positive outcomes from your inquiry and acknowledge the consultative processes and opportunities to provide input to the Committee.

Sue Bull
Communications and Development Officer
for
Ms Danielle Cronin
Executive Director CCSP- (currently on study leave overseas)