

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

Organisation: Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta

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SUBMISSION OF BEHALF OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION, DIOCESE OF PARRAMATTA
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL INQUIRY INTO TRANSITION SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL
OR COMPLEX NEEDS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Submission addressing the Terms of Reference

That the Standing Committee on Social Issues inquire into and report on programs and services for children with additional and/or complex needs and their families during transitions between stages of education, and in particular:

1. The adequacy and accessibility of appropriate support for children and their families

Parramatta Diocese provides access to a range of support for students with additional and complex needs and their families. For example:

- Mainstream placement at their local Catholic primary or secondary school, with support. A small number of students (28) are enrolled in high support classes at Xavier College, Llandillo. We also host autism specific classes in 3 primary and 3 secondary schools in partnership with ASPECT which have a lower staff-student ratio
- Commonwealth Special Learning Needs funding allocated to students who meet Commonwealth funding guidelines
- Considerable additional system resources to schools, eg learning support teachers in all primary and secondary schools whose role it is to build teacher capacity to meet the diverse needs of all students; funding support for students with high needs, irrespective of a designated disability
- Support in VET (Vocational education and training) courses for high school students including: discrete classes for students with additional needs; school-based traineeships; and work preparation courses; support work placement
- Specialized support, eg: counselling support in all primary and secondary schools; itinerant support teachers vision, hearing and communication; a speech pathologist who advises teachers and families on speech, language and communication needs; Teaching Education who works with teachers in schools; Transition team of Advisers, Transition liaison officers and workplace mentoring program (Lighthouse) for at risk high school students
- Individual planning process for all students in receipt of funding support. This involves at least an annual meeting with families/caregivers about the adjustments in place for their child and tracking their child's progress
- Diocesan parent support network for parents of students with additional needs meets once per term and hosts informal gatherings and events on specific topics
- Transition planning from preschool to school, eg CEO officers attend school options meetings and meet prospective parents and early intervention providers; planning with schools and families in the year prior to starting school; early planning (18 months prior to starting school) for students with high physical needs and their families; putting parents in touch with other parents of children with additional needs
- The transition from primary to secondary schools is facilitated through the electronic transfer of Individual Plans; collaboration between primary and secondary Learning Support teachers as well as relevant system staff;

collaboration with outside agencies; and a continuity of resourcing between primary and secondary schools

- The Transition Team works with schools to facilitate the transition of students with additional and complex needs from high school to post school environments.

Despite the system providing significant supports for students with additional and complex needs, the following remain significant challenges for the system:

- The resources available to the system from State and Commonwealth Governments are insufficient to meet the ever increasing diversity and complexity of student need and place continued financial pressure on the system
- The development of teacher capacity to meet the increasing diversity of student needs within mainstream settings is an ongoing challenge. Teacher professional learning is the key to improved outcomes for all students, including those with additional and complex needs. The Diocese of Parramatta places great emphasis on this capacity building model.

2. Best practice approaches to ensure seamless and streamlined assistance during transitions

Parramatta Diocese has an exemplary Transition program that supports students with additional and complex needs in transitioning from high school to post-school environments. For example:

- Transition liaison officers plan with students, parents and school personnel and forge links with outside service providers to ensure smooth transitions
- All students have a formal exit plan before they leave school and all are linked with an appropriate agency
- From Year 9 students and their families have access to Parent forums/expos to explore post school options
- Workplace trainers support students in the workplace to gain employability skills. They offer students support work experience; participation in a business enterprise for those students who lack employability skills
- Workplace outcomes are currently credentialed toward Stage 5 outcomes
- All transition programs are credentialed in a Certificate I Workplace Preparation qualification. These include Fast Track, On Track, prevocational courses, workplace preparation, resume writing days
- Destination surveys are completed to follow up students and assess effectiveness of program

Parramatta Diocese also has a highly effective behaviour intervention service that works to support significant transitions for students with challenging behaviours. This service is focused on working collaboratively with schools and families and is non-categorical and solution focused.

3. Any other related matters

- The increase in school leaving age requires a radical rethinking of the nature of the senior curriculum so that students with additional and complex needs have relevant and engaging learning experiences
- The high stakes testing environment of NAPLAN and HSC can place significant pressures on students with additional and complex needs, their teachers and their families
- The shrinking employment market means there are fewer workplace experiences available for students with additional and complex needs. In particular, the downturn in the retail sector (previously a key employer of students with additional needs) means that there are fewer post-school employment opportunities for vulnerable students
- While many students with complex additional needs gain employment on leaving school, they often have difficulty maintaining their employment