

Submission
No 43

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

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Position: Chair
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QUALITY EDUCATIONAL CHOICES FOR ALL

The ongoing demand for places in independent special schools highlights the need for a range of schooling options for students with special needs. No one option will satisfy the needs of all students with special needs and cater for them as they grow and develop.

At the recent Annual NISSA Forum, the most common issue raised by members was funding. "Our ongoing capacity to provide services for the increased demand with lack of government funding is the biggest issue. Government continues to hold on to theory of inclusion yet there is a constant stream of demand from teachers seeking support for children in their schools who they cannot manage."

At the Annual Forum, Robert Randall, General Manager Curriculum, Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), spoke to the NISSA members. NISSA members were very interested to hear that students with disabilities are being considered in the development of the National Curriculum.

However, we are still concerned that the needs of students with disabilities are in danger of being added on after the curriculum is developed rather than taking the opportunity to integrate their needs as the curriculum is developed.

NISSA would be happy to work with ACARA to investigate the feasibility of appropriate assessment tools for students with special needs that integrate with the current work on the national curriculum.

Independent special schools see it as vital to work together with families to support their child. Many schools offer programs to help families understand the needs of their child and understand the role various therapies can add to their child's life. The family is the most important person in the child's life.

NISSA believes that quality education can only be delivered by quality teachers. It is essential that the pre-service training of all teachers includes training in the area of special education, to equip them to effectively educate students with disabilities. We also support the provision of high quality programs of post-graduate education and continuing professional education for teachers of students with disabilities.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Gadek". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elizabeth Gadek
Chair
National Independent Special Schools Association



QUALITY EDUCATIONAL CHOICES FOR ALL

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Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs.

NISSA is the Australian association of the heads of independent special schools whose core purpose is the education of children and young people with disabilities.

Independent special schools in Australia were among the earliest providers of services to students with disabilities and include some of the first schools to offer Special Education Programs in this country.

For over one hundred years independent special schools have given leadership in the field of Special Education, often pioneering new service provision and introducing new methods and technology in the education of students with disabilities.

Today, independent special schools continue to conduct needed, high quality educational programs to students with disabilities. A combination of Government funding and individual fund raising has ensured that the important and vital services of independent special schools flourish as a substantial community resource and a viable alternative for the education of students who require their programs.

The presence of an independent Special Education sector is essential in the promotion of excellence in the education of students with disabilities and the provision of high quality alternatives to maintain freedom of choice. They are noted for innovation and for pioneering new services for students who require different approaches to meet their educational and other life preparation needs.

By their nature, independent special schools are individually relatively small and isolated operations, often dedicated to a specific area of Special Education such as intellectual impairment, physical impairment, sensory impairment or autism spectrum disorders.

Students with disabilities should have the same choice in education as any other student. The high cost of educating students with disabilities often prevents this.

Some independent special schools in NSW receive funding through the NSW DET Supervisors subsidy scheme. At present, independent special schools also receive funding from the Australian Government but this is calculated on the average rate of educating a student in a government mainstream school not the average rate of educating a student in a government special school. Educating a student in a government special school would be a much higher rate.

Funding needs to take into account the significant infrastructure costs for special schools for students with disabilities so that this choice is available. Families have a right to CHOICE in schooling.

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