

Submission
No 318

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

Name: Ms Natalie Hood

Date received: 19/02/2010

To MP Robyn Parker,

I am the mother of a 9 year old daughter with Cerebral Palsy, Epilepsy, moderate learning difficulties and behavioural issues. My daughter attends a small Catholic school in the Hunter area consisting of about 150 students, with 17 children in her class. She currently receives 7.25 hours aide time per week, despite being classified as a Level 3 High.

My daughter is quite functional, but still needs one on one assistance for learning, personal skills and physical activity. The 7.25 hours is allocated to assist her with a one on one reading program. Through-out the remainder of the school day, the teachers and peers are required to assist her. As her parents we also need to be available to assist with sports days and excursions, otherwise she would not be able to be involved. This is one reason why I am unable to commit to working. Over the last couple of years several students have left the school including my daughter's class due to the lack of resources available to assist those with learning difficulties and special needs.

Since our daughter started school, I have endeavoured to ensure my daughter is receiving as much support at school as possible. I have advocated for her through the school and the Hunter Diocese, and became a parent representative of the Diocesan Special Needs Working Party. I am well aware of my daughter's entitlements and the allocation funding process from the government to schools.

I do not understand why private schools receive only a quarter of the special needs funding the public schools are allocated. Am I expected to pay higher school fees because my child has special needs and would like her to have a Christian education? Inclusion is about meeting needs, not just equality.

My daughter's Epilepsy is of great concern to us at school, as she can have a seizure at any time and usually does 2-3 times a day. If someone does not catch her when having a seizure she falls to the ground. Not having enough funding to have a carer with her all day, the students were educated about Epilepsy and it was the staff and students responsibility to keep her safe. It became clear that this was not a sufficient plan, as my daughter had a seizure at school during which she fell over and broke her arm requiring surgery. This possibly could have been avoided had she had a carer with her.

After much negotiation with the Diocese, the school was allocated 2 more hours per week to support her. Some of her intensive learning time was also re-allocated for lunch and recess supervision, and Yr 6 and her peers were called upon to also assist. Luckily, the students have a wonderful school spirit and were willing to do this. The school also required her to wear a helmet and at lunch, recess and any outdoor activities. For long distances she now needs to use a manual wheelchair, despite being very active and able to walk/run.

It was decided this year that an aide would not be required to be with her at lunch or recess as she is able to manoeuvre the wheelchair herself and other students are willing to assist her. This aide time was again reallocated to assist her with learning, though the hours have been cut back. My daughter is 12-18 months behind her peers and requires the teachers constant attention in class to assist her and keep her on task. If the teacher is unable to do this, then my daughter is given something else to do.

At great expense to ourselves, we have provided assessment reports of our daughter's special needs, yet the school is still unable to meet these needs. The reason being lack of funding. Due to her inability to write well, she requires a laptop for schoolwork for which there was no funding available. At our expense we provided this, so she would have the best chance possible for her education. We have also provided other resources to the school for her support when the school has been unable to fund it.

I agree that funding should be assessed on the functioning capacity of the child and not the disability. Every child's needs are different and despite having the same diagnosis, their needs will not be the same. My child's Cerebral Palsy is classed as mild to moderate, yet there are still so many areas that she requires assistance with all day, every day. Overall, resources and support for those with a disability are severely lacking, not just in the schools, but in general life. The government could do so much more to assist the aged and disabled like other countries such as the UK are doing. The aged and disabled are increasing in our population and the government needs to recognise this and provided more funding, resources and support.

Every child is entitled to a good education whether it be public, private or catholic, but still so many fall through the cracks

Thankyou for the opportunity to express our concerns and hope this inquiry brings about positive changes

Sincerely

Natalie Hood