

**Submission
No 671**

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

Organisation: Catholic Education Commission NSW

Date received: 8/03/2010



Catholic Education Commission NSW

NSW Special Needs Inquiry Submission to the NSW Legislative Council

March 2010

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of their educational and pastoral mission, Catholic schools in NSW have been educating students with disabilities since the 1870s, long before comparable provision was made in Government schools. Since the early 1990s the number of students with disabilities in NSW Catholic schools has grown significantly and annually. In 2009 NSW Catholic schools were catering for 10,357 students defined as Students with Disabilities (SWD) including 483 students in Catholic Special schools. There are also 54 satellite classes in NSW Catholic schools for children with Autism. In addition to defined Students with Disabilities, there are approximately 24,000 students enrolled in NSW Catholic schools who require learning support but who are not classified as Students with Disabilities under the current NSW Disability Criteria.

The cost of providing for all these students is substantial, increasing rapidly and constitutes a major financial pressure point for Catholic school authorities and parents. The latest available data shows that in 2009 a total of \$100.5 million was spent on these students including \$16m of private income (school fees, plus school, parent and other diocesan contributions) but the majority was Commonwealth and State grants (Recurrent and Targeted program grants). CEC NSW estimates that, given the best technical advice available, a Student with Disability support needs requires between \$3,000 to \$57,000 in additional funding support to that provided for a student without any disability. However, the available grant funding for Students with Disabilities in Australia in 2010 is significantly less than that required for the provision of necessary educational adjustments. As two recent Government-commissioned reports (2007, 2009) have demonstrated, the persistent and fundamental problem with education of Students with Disabilities is a shortfall in Government funding. It needs urgent attention by Commonwealth and State Governments.

Ensuring the highest quality education for all students with special needs is a particular challenge for Catholic schools. Accordingly, the CEC brings to the attention of the NSW Legislative Council Inquiry a range of recommendations (pp 30–1 below) covering current issues which need to be addressed by governments and the community in conjunction with schools, parents and teachers. They cover the broad areas of:

- Student Recognition and Resourcing Needs;
- Accessible Curriculum and Assessment;
- Early Childhood;
- Teacher Quality and Learning Support;
- Access to VET courses.

The particular issues addressed in this submission are:

- The urgency of determining a national definition of Students with a Disability;
- Advocating increased financial support by Commonwealth and State governments in line with their national (1991, 2005) and international (2009) obligations and their commitment to the agreed Declaration on *Education Goals for Young Australians* (2008);
- Promoting a more sophisticated approach to educational adjustments and resource allocation which assesses student needs in relation to required adjustments for learning;
- Recognising and providing more effectively for the increasing incidence of Students with extremes of challenging behaviour;
- Advocating that the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) adopt the NSW standards for curriculum and assessment accessibility;
- Improved co-ordination and supply of essential services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy especially for rural and remotes areas of NSW;
- Defining teacher standards relevant to the needs of special needs students.

In summary, Students with Disabilities and other students with special needs in all schools require a significant increase in government financial support, better targeted financial support according to individual student need, and more appropriate curriculum and teacher support.

1. CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL NEEDS

- 1.1. The Catholic Education Commission (CEC NSW) is the body responsible to the Catholic Bishops of NSW/ACT for both the coordination and representation of NSW Catholic schools at the state level. The Commission also provides leadership in Catholic education, through service to dioceses, religious congregations and parents. It functions through consultation with Diocesan Directors, Religious Institutes, and Principal and parent associations.
- 1.2. However, the Commission has no role in the day to day management of NSW Catholic Schools. Responsibility for the direct management of Catholic schools in New South Wales rests with a range of Catholic Schools Authorities. There are 11 separate diocesan school systems, each with a Catholic Education Office/Catholic Schools Office. There are also 50 independent Catholic schools owned and operated by Religious Congregations.
- 1.3. Catholic schools in their mission have always endeavoured to welcome and show a special care not only for the financially poor or marginalised but a larger group of students disadvantaged in various ways. Catholic schools seek to uphold the wellbeing and dignity of each child.
- 1.4. In NSW there are currently (2009) 583 Catholic schools, including 7 Special Schools, enrolling a total of 239,274 students. Of these students 10,357 are Students with Disabilities (SWDs). Catholic Special Schools currently enrol 483 students. In addition to Students with Disabilities there are approximately another 24,000 students enrolled in NSW Catholic schools who require learning support but who are not classified as Students with a Disability under NSW Disability Criteria.
- 1.5. Catholic Religious Orders have a long history in Special Education in New South Wales. Whilst the first NSW Departmental Special School was established in 1927, the Dominican sisters founded schools for girls who were deaf at Maitland and then Waratah in 1872. Saint Lucy's Special School, Wahroonga, opened in the 1940's as a school for blind students, originally located at Homebush.

St Edmund's Special School, Wahroonga, operated by the Christian Brothers, opened in 1951.

- 1.6. The Catholic sector remains committed to the provision of a continuum of education service options for Students with Disabilities, in accordance with their obligations under the Commonwealth *DDA* (1992) of the *Disability Standards for Education* (2005), as well as the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for all Young Australians (2008).

2. THE NATURE LEVEL AND ADEQUACY OF FUNDING FOR THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH A DISABILITY

- 2.1. Funded Students with a Disability are only a subset of all those students with special needs. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, some form of disability affects about one in five Australians.¹ Currently, DEEWR census level statistical data is only collected for school students who are recognised as “Students with Disabilities”. These are those students who satisfy the NSW DET Criteria for enrolment in special education services or programs provided by State service providers.
- 2.2. In addition there are students who currently fall outside the State criteria for recognition as “Students with Disability” funding but who have significant learning and behavioural difficulties. Students with learning difficulties alone may represent an additional 12% of enrolments²
- 2.3. The current NSW funding criteria for Students with a Disability are limited to the eight categories of Language, Physical Disability, Intellectual Disability, Hearing Impairment, Vision Impairment, Deaf/Blind, Mental Health and Autism. These State Criteria then determine eligibility for both State and Commonwealth funding (refer *Australian Government Administrative Guidelines: Commonwealth Programs for Non-Government Schools 2009–2012* at paragraph 213). Currently COAG is developing a national definition of Students with Disabilities in conjunction with the Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA). The latter is also developing a new measure for the assessment of the average cost of educating Students with Disabilities in Australian schools.
- 2.4. The National *Disability Strategy Consultation report 2009- “SHUT OUT: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia”* published by The Australian Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), documents a pressing need to provide more

¹ ABS, *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers* (2003).

² cf. Australian Government, *Disability Standards for Education 2005 Regulatory Impact Statement*, page 11 and refer Australian Productivity Commission, *Review of the DDA* (2003) at Appendix B *Education*.

extensive resources to support the learning needs of children with a disability. It concludes that the existing special learning needs support system is characterised by 'chronic underfunding'³. This evidence supports the Catholic sector contention that available funding falls short of that required to support Students with Disabilities.

2.5. The existence of the funding gap for disability for Catholic schools is corroborated in the Monash University Report, *Investigating the Feasibility of Portable Funding for Students with Disabilities* (2007). This report investigated Commonwealth funding for school Students with Disabilities in the context of complementary funding from State and Territory governments and from other sources⁴. Key findings of this research are:

- a) Insufficient funds are available to meet the needs of all Students with Disabilities, but especially those with higher level disabilities.
- b) The lack of adequate funding is becoming more critical as the number of students identified as having a disability grows.
- c) This enrolment growth in Students with Disability means that already inadequate resources are being spread more thinly.
- d) Students with Disabilities attending non-government Regular schools receive substantially less government disability funding than Students with Disabilities with similar needs attending government regular schools.
- e) Students with Disabilities attending non-government Special Schools receive substantially less government disability funding than Students with Disabilities with similar needs attending government Special Schools.
- f) This resource gap experienced by non-government Special Schools is met through private income (including from charitable trusts).

³ National People with Disabilities and Carer Council *SHUT OUT: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia National Disability Strategy Consultation Report- 2009*
http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/disability/pubs/policy/community_consult/Pages/executive_summary.aspx

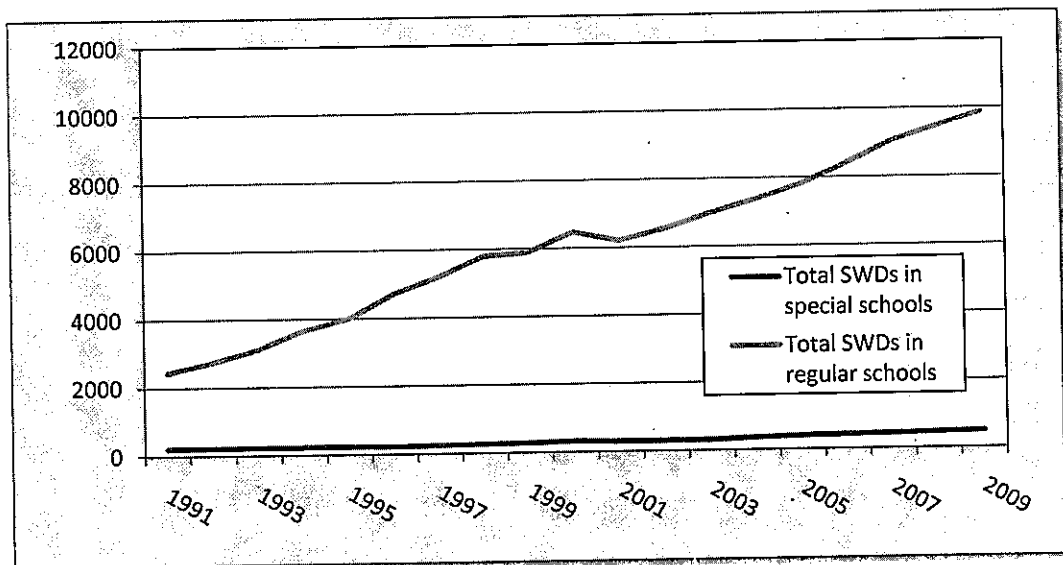
⁴ Monash University, *Investigating the Feasibility of Partial Funding for Students with Disabilities, Final Report*, Melbourne (2007).

Another finding of the Monash report relevant to the current inquiry is that where students move from one school to another there can be some uncertainty as to whether the same or a lesser level of support will be available to them at their new location.

- 2.6. In this context the Monash report also argues that reforms are needed to:
- Reduce the stigmatisation of Students with Disability by providing them with greater access to the mainstream curricula through a stronger emphasis on inclusivity.
 - Provide certainty about levels of support to Students with Disabilities who move to a different school.
 - Provide funds to expand resources and programs that can deliver a range of benefits to all students with special needs.
- 2.7. In summary, the Monash report categorically recommends an increase in the overall level of funding available for Students with Disabilities. It states that there is a clear and substantial case for reforms to current resourcing arrangements and in particular for changes that will:
- Increase the overall pool of funding available to support Students with Disabilities in all schools.
 - Increase the parity of funding across education sectors.
 - Standardise across Australia definitions of disability and associated funding across State/Territory boundaries.
 - Empower parents, so that they feel they have a greater say in educational decisions concerning their child with a disability.
- 2.8. The increasing enrolment of Students with Disabilities and specific learning difficulties is a reality across all NSW Schools, Government and Non-Government. In 2009, the number of students officially recognised for funding purposes as “Students with Disability” (therefore excluding students with medical, behavioural and learning difficulties) in Catholic Schools, including the seven Catholic Special schools (483 students), was 10,357. This number represents 4.3% of all students in NSW Catholic schools. The number of students

with recognised disabilities has increased from 2,650 students (1.1% of total enrolments) in 1991 (Diagram 1).

Diagram 1: Catholic Sector Students with Disabilities Enrolment Trends for the Period 1991 to 2009



2.9. There are however many more students who have learning difficulties, requiring specialist intervention programs in literacy and numeracy but who are not recognised as Students with Disabilities for the annual DEEWR census. All require some adjustments to curriculum and degrees of special provisions to ensure access to assessment tasks including external examinations.

2.10 Catholic schools with students recognised as having a disability attract a special additional recurrent per capita grant of \$893 from the Commonwealth Government and approximately \$335 in additional per capita recurrent support from the NSW Government. In addition, Commonwealth Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs Funding provide grants averaging:

- \$1,131 for each Student with Disability enrolled in a Regular Catholic School; and
- \$6,912 for each Student with Disability enrolled in a Special Catholic School.

- 2.11. The rapidly increasing enrolment of students recognised as having a disability is increasing the financial pressures in Catholic schools. The additional funding from the State and Commonwealth Government for such students over what is available for regular students does not meet the difference in per student costs.
- 2.12. In regular Catholic systemic schools, for example, while Students with a Disability constitute 4.1% of the total student population, around 6.7% of the total government funding to the Catholic schools for all students and all purposes is allocated to Students with a Disability.
- 2.13. The total expenditure in regular Catholic systemic schools in 2009 on Students with a Disability was \$100.5 million as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sources of Funding for Students with a Disability, Regular Catholic Schools, 2009

Funding Source	C'wealth Targeted Programs	C'wealth Recurrent Grants	State Recurrent Grants	Private Income	Total
\$ million	21.17	51.29	11.63	16.41	100.5
Percentage	21.1	51.0	11.6	16.3	100

At \$16.4 million the amount of private income contributed by Catholic education authorities from their own sources (fees, levies, fund raising) tests the ability of the Catholic system to enrol more Students with a Disability, especially those students with high needs.

- 2.14. There is a wide range of costs for Students with a Disability, reflecting the reality that students have 'low', 'medium' and 'high needs' levels of support. In contrast, Students with a Disability attract a common level of grant irrespective of need. The total in extra grant income per Student with a Disability in a regular school from all State and Commonwealth sources is less than the median extra cost for a 'low needs' student. The total income of \$2,359 per student in 2009 is 71% of the median 'low needs' additional cost of \$3,300. It therefore falls far

short of the median amounts for 'medium' and 'high' needs students as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Median Additional Costs per Student with a Disability by 'Needs' Category, Catholic Regular Schools 2009

'Needs' Level	Median Cost per Student	Additional Government Grant Income (\$2,359) as % of Median Cost
Low Needs	\$3,300	71.5%
Medium Needs	\$10,500	22.5%
High Needs	\$35,000	6.6%

The median costs in the table have been standardised to accommodate atypical costs in the needs categories ranging up to \$8,000 for 'low', \$24,000 for 'medium' and \$57,000 for 'high'. Even with conservative estimates, the additional grant income only meets 22% of the real additional cost for Students with a Disability of 'medium needs' and 6% of the additional costs for 'high needs' students.

2.15. The standardised nature of the above figures is illustrated by reference to the 1994 report prepared by the Australian Council for Educational Research (M de Lemos) for the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. This is one of the few reports to address the differential needs and costs of Students with a Disability. In 1994 the estimated average expenditure per student in Special Schools was \$14,000 with costs across the spectrum of needs ranging from \$5,900 to \$34,700 in 1994 prices⁵. While the report used total expenditure, the additional costs estimates in 2009 prices present a valid comparison.

2.16. Three of the seven NSW Catholic Special schools access the NSW Supervisor Subsidy for students assessed to have moderate to severe intellectual disability or

⁵ M de Lemos, *Schooling for students with Disabilities* Australian Council for Educational Research (1994), pp 87 and 89.

Autism. CEC NSW believes that this subsidy should be available to all students with moderate to severe disability, whether attending a Special or Regular school. Currently this particular subsidy provides additional funding equivalent to the cost of providing a teacher for every nine eligible students

- Recommendation 1** The resourcing implications for all schools arising from the Australian Government's recent adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) need to be addressed in the context of modern cooperative Federalism as managed through COAG.
- Recommendation 2** The NSW definitions of Students with Disabilities should be reviewed in the light of the forthcoming national definition so as to render them consistent with the requirements of the Standards for Education under the Commonwealth's Disability Discrimination Act.
- Recommendation 3** The resourcing needs of all Students with Disabilities and Special Learning Needs, irrespective of School sector, need to be addressed so as to ensure that each student can achieve the agreed National Goals for Schooling as expressed in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians.
- Recommendation 4** The existing NSW Supervisor Subsidy Grant should be made available to all students with moderate to severe disability, whether attending a special or regular school.

3. BEST PRACTICE APPROACH IN DETERMINING THE ALLOCATION OF FUNDING TO CHILDREN WITH A DISABILITY

- 3.1. CEC NSW is currently progressing the development of an improved process for allocating resources for students who have a recognised disability. This approach assesses student needs in relation to required adjustments for Learning. It is known as the CEC NSW “Individual Student Planning and Profiling” process.
- 3.2. This process involves collaboration among students, families, teachers and other support persons. It involves completion of an online individual plan which identifies the level of a student’s support needs (high, moderate, low) irrespective of educational setting or medical condition.
- 3.3. After completion of the online individual plan a student profile is developed across six focus areas: curriculum participation, communication, mobility, personal care, safety and social skills. This is done by identifying the adjustments that are currently in place to support the student and then using the descriptors to assist with the identification of that additional support required for each child in each focus area. The purpose is to better match available resources to students.
- 3.4. The rationale behind the development of the online individual profiling process is to move beyond a resource model based upon categories of disability to one that assesses the support needs of each student irrespective of medical diagnosis. The aim is to achieve a set of educational adjustments based on functional criteria rather than on categorical, medical, criteria.
- 3.5. Findings from the initial Catholic school trialling of the CEC online Individual Profile indicates that it has the capacity to identify those students who have high support needs, irrespective of educational setting. Currently no NSW School authority is able to achieve this level of student identification.
- 3.6. The primary purpose of the CEC NSW project is to develop an instrument which can target those students with identified high needs, whilst still addressing the needs of all students who have a disability or a special learning need.
- 3.7. Independent evaluation of the CEC Profiling process has determined that:

- The process is a robust instrument, which has the capacity to identify the level of support needed by each Student with a Disability, irrespective of education setting, through an assessment of need across the six domains of curriculum, communication, personal care, mobility, safety and social skills.
- A set of characteristics for each level of need (low, moderate, high) can be produced, based upon the clustering of variables across six focus areas, being: curriculum participation, communication, social skills, safety and communication.
- The process is collaborative and provides the opportunity for a meaningful dialogue between school and parents so as to gain a better understanding of the supports and adjustments required by each student.
- The process has been found to be a valuable educative process which assists schools to clarify compliance requirements under the *Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1992* and the *Education Standards 2005*.

4. THE LEVEL AND ADEQUACY OF CURRENT SPECIAL EDUCATION PLACES WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

- 4.1. In accord with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, all Australian parents “have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children”. NSW Catholic families currently exercise this right through the enrolment of over 10,300 students recognised as Students with Disabilities in their local Catholic schools. Each year, more and more parents are enrolling their child with a disability in a Catholic school, such that these enrolments involve students with a broad range of impairment and related support needs and represent 4.3% of total NSW Catholic sector enrolments. Catholic schools strive to embrace the belief that students and their parents /carers should be able to access both inclusive curriculum and social outcomes through individual planning and community participation in school policies and procedures. Catholic schools aim to promote social inclusion for children with disabilities
- 4.2. Catholic schools strive to offer educational opportunities which promote local collaborative processes emphasising student voice, family aspirations, community resources and cross –agency services. To this end many Catholic Schools coordinate service delivery with Catholic welfare and health agencies. Catholic schools can, however, be inhibited from realising these goals through lack of resources.
- 4.3. Disability services for students in Catholic schools are allocated with specific reference to *The Disability Standards for Education 2005* which clarify and elaborate the rights of people with disabilities and the obligations of education and training providers. The Standards are applied to determine how schooling can be made more accessible, more supportive and more inclusive for Students with Disabilities. As noted at 3.1 above the developing CEC Profiling methodology aims to support the realisation of these Standards.
- 4.4. The Standards require that education providers must take reasonable steps to ensure that students are able to enjoy access to education on the same basis as students who do not have a disability and without experiencing discrimination. Catholic schools endeavour to meet the requirements of the DDA by supporting

students who require special provisions, such as translators, Braille, large print, readers and scribes by working within NSW Board of Studies Special Provisions requirements so as to ensure the equitable application and implementation of both Board of Studies curriculum and assessment standards and related together with Special Provisions adjustments.

- 4.5. Catholic schools generally understand and give effect to their obligations under the *Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act* (1992) and the corresponding *Disability Standards for Education 2005*. Catholic Schools also acknowledge the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006). However, as noted at section 2 above, Catholic schools are constrained in their efforts to ensure that these students have equity of opportunity due to a deficit in those resources needed to meet diverse student needs and associated adjustments.

5. THE ADEQUACY OF INTEGRATED SUPPORT SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH A DISABILITY IN MAINSTREAM SETTINGS

- 5.1. Since most Students with a Disability attend a regular class in their local Catholic school, delivery of service can vary according to the school location, as is the case across Australia with respect to the various State and Territory school systems.
- 5.2. Catholic education authorities respond creatively to assist students with special education needs to remain in their local community school. An example of this is the continuing growth of Autism satellite classes within Catholic schools. These are established in partnership with Autism Spectrum Australia (ASPECT). Currently there are 54 ASPECT satellite classes in Catholic schools across NSW. Students in these classes are not included in DEEWR Catholic school enrolment statistics and as a consequence these students do not attract funding support for the Catholic Schools which host them.
- 5.3. There are also satellite classes in Catholic regular schools which have been established in partnership with Catholic Special schools, such as St Lucy's, Wahroonga, St Edmund's, Wahroonga, Mater Dei, Camden, St Gabriel's Castle Hill and John Berne School, Lewisham. The students who enrol in these satellite classes are then able to access a range of specialised services. Such partnership approaches to service delivery are strongly supported by CEC NSW.
- 5.4. CEC NSW is concerned that students with special education needs are often further disadvantaged if they live in rural or isolated areas of NSW. In this context the Catholic Education Commission NSW has acted to support specialist services such as those provided by the DET Palm Avenue School and the Dalwood Assessment Centre. Indeed for some twenty years CEC has provided an annual grant to the "Palm Avenue School" to support the school's work for students from Catholic schools in rural and isolated areas. In 2008 this grant was \$101,651.45.

- 5.5. CEC NSW looks forward to the development of this service in ways that can continue to support rural students with special education needs. This can only occur with continued cross sector collaboration, particularly between all education sectors and the NSW Department of Health. Emerging rural support strategies should include, but not be restricted to, those which develop opportunities made possible by newly emerging digital technologies.
- 5.6. Catholic schools, like all schools, currently face a significant increase in problematic student behaviour. Students with extremes of challenging behaviour require significant resources but often they are not officially recognised as Students with Disabilities. The increasing incidence of such children has required Catholic Education authorities to develop intensive teacher professional support as well as, in some circumstances, the creation of centres for students with the highest level of challenging behaviour. Some of these students are diagnosed with clinical conduct disorders or other mental health issues but not all qualify for funding as Students with Disability given existing NSW disability definitions.
- 5.7. The need for services for students with emotional/behavioural needs is increasing dramatically. The DET operates a number of “behaviour/suspension schools” and the Catholic sector also operates a range of well established behaviour services, including: schools administered by the Christian Brothers in Penrith, Terrigal and Wollongong, the John Berne Special School, Lewisham; Marist Youth Care Services, Western Sydney; and Boys Town, Engadine. All offer behavioural support for students and all experience excess demand for student placements. These schools serve the broad NSW community being in effect community based behavioural schools rather than exclusively Catholic sector schools. The enrolment profile of these services includes many non-Catholic students whose previous school was a government school.

- 5.8. Given the NSW Government's Statutory commitment to assist young people alienated from regular schooling there exists an opportunity for a partnership with the non-government sector to address the new attendance provisions of the NSW Education Act 1990 at section 23 (2) (c). In particular, the capacity of school authorities to develop, for approval by the Minister, alternative education programs for children who are unable for social, cultural or other reasons to participate effectively in regular education needs to be actively progressed for students with challenging behaviour.
- 5.9. In this context it is noted that whilst most students attend their local Catholic school and are supported in mainstream classes, there is growing discussion around the need for specialist withdrawal classes or centres to support students with moderate to high support needs. Consequently, the seven Catholic Special schools have seen an increase in parent interest and subsequent enrolment over the past five years, just as regular schools have experienced an increase in students with recognized disability. In 1991 there were 211 students in Catholic special schools. The number of enrolled Special School students had grown to 483 students by 2009.
- 5.10. Parents are exercising their right to choose a special school setting to educate their child. The needs of the students in Special schools range from moderate to very high. Parents commonly report that their children have failed to thrive or be adequately supported in regular schools and have often been victims of bullying.
- 5.11. There is a high cost to ensure the viability of the Catholic Special Schools because of the necessity for low teacher student ratios and employment of high level support staff, including therapists. Catholic Special Schools typically need to raise between \$200,000 to \$600,000 pa in excess of available Government funding, in order to meet annual operating costs.

6. THE PROVISION OF A SUITABLE CURRICULUM FOR STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY AND CONDUCT DISORDER.

- 6.1. CEC NSW supports the provision and development of curriculum by the NSW Board of Studies to give schools flexibility in catering for the full range of students. The existing NSW Curriculum, particularly through 'life skills' courses, enables students to access courses in a range of ways according to their interests and needs, with all students having access to common Board of Studies Credentials. CEC NSW strongly believes that the emerging Australian Curriculum being developed by The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) needs to maintain the NSW standard of accessibility.
- 6.2. The CEC NSW believes that curriculum should provide schools with sufficient scope to provide age appropriate, rigorous, meaningful and relevant learning experiences and assessment opportunities for all students.
- 6.3. The curriculum should also provide schools with the flexibility to determine instructional methods and modes appropriate to individual student needs. Assessment processes also need to be flexible and accessible.
- 6.4. The NSW Board of Studies curriculum allows for this flexibility through the use of strategies which include special provisions together with Life Skills courses specifically developed for students with special education needs, especially those students with an intellectual disability.
- 6.5. In order to enhance the implementation of both existing Board of Studies curriculum and the emerging Australian Curriculum it will be necessary to make available more resources for ongoing teacher professional development. This could be done on cross sectoral basis through an expanded National Partnership for Teacher Quality. Such a strategy could achieve economies of scale, especially for rural schools.

Recommendation 5 The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) should be strongly advised to adopt the Board of Studies approach to Life Skills Courses and special provisions.

7. STUDENT AND FAMILY ACCESS TO PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT AND SERVICES, SUCH AS SPEECH THERAPY, OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY, PHYSIOTHERAPY AND SCHOOL COUNSELLORS.

- 7.1. CEC NSW is aware that local services such as speech therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and psychological services are not available in some local communities, this being especially so in rural and remote areas. If available they are often extremely costly to parents and schools and may additionally require expensive travel. Catholic schools are not always recognised in cross-Departmental arrangements for the provision of services to people with disability (e.g. Health, Education and Disability Services). As a consequence, advice in regard to available services, such as the new autism specific initiatives do not always reach all of the schools and parents who require support.
- 7.2. Students attending schools in remote areas of NSW are generally not able to access extra support from specialist teachers, psychologists or therapists because of the unavailability of these specialist services. It is particularly difficult for these schools to access State Health services, especially Child and Adolescent Mental Health services.
- 7.3. Catholic education authorities in these remote areas do their best to support schools through technology links and school visits by specialist staff. These authorities are however unable to address all student needs due to the tyranny of distance. To assist remote schools CEC NSW advocates greater cross-sectoral collaboration in service delivery including but not limited to the promotion of ICT based service options.
- 7.4. Catholic education authorities and some independent Catholic schools, including Catholic special schools, have employed therapists and psychologists to assist with family support including the provision of itinerant support to rural families. However, the lack of adequate funding means that there are not enough specialists to meet the current needs of all students who require specialist support. A need also exists for the development of cross sectoral and multi-

agency approaches to service delivery in NSW on the “full service school” model.

- 7.5. Given the increasing evidence of the benefits of early intervention, Catholic primary schools would like to be able to offer intensive programs in the first years of schooling. Many of these programs require the support of specialists, including speech pathologists, and are therefore difficult for schools to implement, due to the lack of local therapy services. Again, this is especially the case in rural areas.
- 7.6. The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) is a population measure of young children's development administered, for the first time, to all Australian students in Kindergarten in 2009. The checklist measures five key areas, or domains, of early childhood development:
 - Physical health and wellbeing
 - Social competence
 - Emotional maturity
 - Language and cognitive skills (school-based)
 - Communication skills and general knowledge
- 7.7. In the context of the first Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) national report, CEC NSW is aware of the need to address “developmental vulnerability” in the first years of schooling. In this context CEC NSW highlights the relevance of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) finding that 23.4% of children enter school with a developmental vulnerability. Such vulnerabilities if not addressed can lead to alienation from schooling, alienation often expressed through poor school behaviour.

- 7.8. In order to realise this goal schooling needs to be more directly linked with early childhood services. Therefore, responsibility for early childhood services should be transferred from the NSW Department of Community Services to the Education Portfolio. Steps should also be taken to integrate NSW primary schools into the Early Childhood National Partnership and opportunities presented by the Early Childhood National Partnership should be explored.

Recommendation 6 Responsibility for early childhood services needs to be integrated into the State Education Portfolio for the purpose of achieving both better early intervention strategies and better transition to school for Students with Disabilities and special learning needs. In this context Primary schools need to be linked to the implementation of the National Partnership on Achieving Universal Access to Early Childhood Education.

Recommendation 7 The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) process needs to be employed to target those school communities requiring early intervention services, in order to mitigate student alienation and associated behavioural problems.

8. THE PROVISION OF ADEQUATE TEACHER TRAINING, BOTH IN TERMS OF PRE-SERVICE AND ONGOING PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

- 8.1. NSW and ACT universities have accommodated the NSW requirement for completion of a mandatory two unit course as part of a Bachelor of Education / Teaching Degree. Although this requirement has been further developed through NSW Institute of Teachers requirements, there is a confusing range of delivery modes for the requirement. To overcome this, Universities should be encouraged to better integrate their formal course work with each student teacher's practicum and teaching methods.
- 8.2. Teachers in all schools in NSW need to be developed in those specific skills which will assist them to meet the diverse needs of those students who have complex learning and associated behavioural needs. Adequate preparation of beginning teachers is required if students are to be successfully included in local school communities. CEC NSW advises that school authorities need to be enabled to work with the new Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership, as well as the NSW Institute of Teachers, on this critical agenda.
- 8.3. Professional development by specialist educators is required to support teachers and support staff in developing implementation processes for students with special education needs, including students with specific behavioural and mental health issues. Catholic Education Authorities have established partnerships with local universities in order to implement specialised professional development courses, including Accredited courses in special education and behavioural support. Such partnerships exist between Broken Bay and Sydney Diocesan Education Offices and the Australian Catholic University; Wollongong Diocese and the University of Wollongong and Maitland-Newcastle Diocese and the University of Newcastle and Armidale Diocese and the University of New England. The University of Sydney has worked in partnership with Mater Dei Special School for over ten years.
- 8.4. Teacher Aides (also known as Learning Support Officers) are employed in both regular and special schools to support teaching and learning. They work closely

with teachers, collecting or developing teaching resources, establishing and operating equipment, undertaking administrative and student supervision duties and participating in teaching activities under teacher direction. Teacher Aides support students who may need additional assistance to achieve particular learning outcomes. Teacher Aides/Special Learning Support Officers are encouraged and often supported by their school to complete the TAFE Certificate III Course in Teachers Aide (Special). Through this course they can acquire skills and knowledge needed to assist teachers working with learners with special needs. Catholic school authorities would like to work with accrediting bodies on strategies for the further up-skilling of Teacher Aides Special/Learning Support Officers. This work may be promoted through the National Partnership on Teacher Quality focus on the role of Paraprofessionals in Schools.

- 8.5. As discussed at section 5 above, Catholic systems are currently investing in positive behaviour for learning programs, in ways similar to the Department of Education. Therefore CEC advocates collaborative, cross sector, approaches to teacher training.
- 8.6. The developing National Partnership for Teacher Quality should be adapted to address special education teacher development needs, particularly in relation to the development of teacher skills in the area of behaviour management. The aim should assist every teacher to be a special needs teacher.

Recommendation 8 The National Partnership on Teacher Quality should be expanded to address teacher skilling and re-skilling necessary to address the needs of Students with Disabilities and learning needs in a regular classroom.

Recommendation 9 The NSW Institute of Teachers should further develop its teaching standards relevant to the needs of special needs children.

Recommendation 10 The upgrading of the qualifications and skills of Teacher Aides Special/Learning Support Officers needs to be identified as a priority under the NSW State Plan.

9. ROLE OF TECHNOLOGIES

- 9.1. Specialist technology in the form of assistive devices, specialist laptops, sound systems, brailers, closed circuit TV and smart-boards are proving to be hugely beneficial in the successful inclusion of students with special education needs. However, even with enhanced funding through the Commonwealth's Digital Education Revolution, Students with Disabilities in Catholic regular and special schools are not always able to access all required technology.
- 9.2. This is an area where resourcing needs to be better linked to individual student needs. To this end CEC NSW would advocate further NSW input to the development of future iterations of the Australian Government's computers in schools programs.

10. ACCESS TO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

- 10.1. Participation costs for Students with Disabilities and learning difficulties who access TAFE Vocational Education and Training for school students (TVET) courses, particularly courses offered to students in Years 11 and 12, is an issue of concern to CEC.
- 10.2. In 2008, of the 1,831 Catholic school students who accessed TVET courses 96 (5.2%) were Students with a Disability. In 2009 total TVET participation grew by 2% but only 77 Students with Disabilities accessed TVET courses despite a 3% increase in the number of Students with Disabilities enrolled in NSW Catholic schools in 2009. That is, the participation rate of Students with a Disability in TVET actually declined.
- 10.3. In 2008 8.5% of total expenditure on external VET HSC courses was allocated to provide additional educational support for TVET Students with a Disability. That is, these funds were required to meet TAFE charges additional to those TAFE course costs which apply to all TVET students.
- 10.4. The above outlined 2009 TVET enrolment trends demonstrate that TAFE costs are a significant disincentive to the enrolment of Catholic school Students with Disabilities in TVET courses.

10.5. The following table compares TVET income and expenditure in Catholic schools for the period 2007-9, including the cost of additional TAFE support for Students with a Disability.

Table 3: TVET Support – Students With Disabilities

Year	Annual TVET Grant	Total charges TAFE and other RTO	Disability additional support costs	Disability charge %Total
2009	\$2,327,000	\$3,621,000	\$111,000	3.1%
2008	\$2,307,000	\$3,544,000	\$301,000	8.5%
2007	\$2,226,000	\$2,600,000	\$200,000	7.7%
Average	\$2,286,667	\$3,255,000	\$204,000	6.3%

10.6. Further, Catholic schools in the metropolitan area incurred proportionally higher TVET support costs for Students with Disabilities than in country areas. Rural schools by contrast were less able to access TAFE for students with special needs.

10.7. CEC NSW believes that TAFE TVET disability service charges raise serious DDA compliance issues for both the participating schools and TAFE.

Recommendation 11 Costing and funding arrangements for the delivery of TAFE courses to NSW school Students with Disabilities should be reformed so as to eliminate unnecessary access barriers.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the foregoing analysis and commentary CEC NSW would make the following recommendations.

Student Recognition and Resourcing Needs

- Recommendation 1** The resourcing implications for all schools arising from the Australian Government's recent adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) need to be addressed in the context of modern cooperative Federalism as managed through COAG.
- Recommendation 2** The NSW definitions of Students with Disabilities should be reviewed In the light of the forthcoming national definition so as to render them consistent with the requirements of the Standards for Education under the Commonwealth's Disability Discrimination Act.
- Recommendation 3** The resourcing needs of all Students with Disabilities and Special Learning Needs, irrespective of School sector, need to be addressed so as to ensure that each student can achieve the agreed National Goals for Schooling as expressed in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians.
- Recommendation 4** The existing NSW Supervisor Subsidy Grant should be made available to all students with moderate to severe disability, whether attending a special or regular school.

Accessible Curriculum and Assessment

- Recommendation 5** The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) should be strongly advised to adopt the Board of Studies approach to Life Skills Courses and special provisions.

Early Childhood

- Recommendation 6** Responsibility for early childhood services needs to be integrated

into the State Education Portfolio for the purpose of achieving both better early intervention strategies and better transition to school for Students with Disabilities and special learning needs. In this context Primary schools need to be linked to the implementation of the National Partnership on Achieving Universal Access to Early Childhood Education.

- Recommendation 7** The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) process needs to be employed to target those school communities requiring early intervention services, in order to mitigate student alienation and associated behavioural problems.

Teacher Quality and Learning Support

- Recommendation 8** The National Partnership on Teacher Quality should be expanded to address teacher skilling and re-skilling necessary to address the needs of Students with Disabilities and learning needs in a regular classroom.

- Recommendation 9** The NSW Institute of Teachers should further develop its teaching standards relevant to the needs of special needs children.

- Recommendation 10** The upgrading of the qualifications and skills of Teacher Aides Special/Learning Support Officers needs to be identified as a priority under the NSW State Plan.

Access to VET Courses

- Recommendation 11** Costing and funding arrangements for the delivery of TAFE courses to NSW school Students with Disabilities should be reformed so as to eliminate unnecessary access barriers.