

**Submission
No 28**

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

Name: Mr Harry Terry

Date received: 3/02/2010

Background

I was Principal of Kurrambee School for 21 years until the end of 2002.

Kurrambee is a public school (SSP) which caters for students with a severe or moderate level of intellectual disability from the age of four until eighteen.

It is situated at Werrington.

The comments below refer almost entirely to students in schools for specific purposes with moderate or severe intellectual disabilities.

I was the founding convenor of NSW SSP Principals' Network for 7 years.

I was a founding member of the organising committee for the Australian Federation of Special Educational Administrators for six years.

I represented SSP principals on the Primary Principals Council and was a member of the Special Education Committee.

I am currently a committee members of Little By Little Inc, a charity which supports students with disabilities at Kurrambee School. I established this charity.

It has been a deliberate decision to present my beliefs as unexpanded dot points. If further explanations/information is sought please do not hesitate to contact me.

I am fully aware it is not feasible for the development of student outcomes to be the sole reason for decision making but I am yet to be convinced evaluation of appropriate student outcomes has been carried out and I am yet to be convinced a set of appropriate indicators of student success have been developed by the Department of Education and Training.

1. The nature, level and adequacy of funding for the education of children with a disability

* It is recommended the New Zealand and Victorian models are evaluated as to their effectiveness and efficiency.

2. Best practice approaches in determining the allocation of funding to children with a disability, particularly whether allocation should be focused on a student's functioning capacity rather than their disability

It is recommended the New Zealand and Victorian models are evaluated as to their effectiveness and efficiency.

It is recommended the model proposed in the report commissioned by the DET and prepared by George Comino in the late 1990s be considered.

It is also recommended the work carried out by Margaret Goninan as a consequence of that report be considered.

All of the above focus on allocation of funding based on a student's functioning.

The challenge is to identify a system that promotes student outcomes that are functional and is fair, open and operationally efficient.

3. The level and adequacy of current special education places within the education system
It is argued:

The current array of types of educational settings remain i.e. mainstream, support classes in mainstream schools and schools with specific purposes remains and is supported equally.

Schools for Specific Purposes should only exist if they can provide more appropriate outcomes for students with disabilities than a regular school or support class in a regular school can provide.

(or can provide a more economical level of service for appropriate students than can be provided in regular schools or support classes without sacrificing student outcomes).

(or can provide a safer environment for both students and staff without sacrificing student outcomes).

parental choice should be a major contributing factor in student placement.

clear, precise indicators of success of students' skills and functioning are identified.

curriculum not placement should be the basic premise i.e. which setting can provide the most effective setting for a student as any given period of time.

equity of staffing and resourcing should occur across different types of settings.

offers of placement from year 6 to year 7 should be made at the same time as for mainstreamed students.

the re-establishment of schools for specific purposes for students with a mild level of intellectual disability be considered. It is argued the reallocation of such schools in the 1980/90s to a different student cohort has had a seriously negative impact on a large number of students denied access to those schools in terms of their ability to function self dependently within the community and to access the facilities of the community.

It is argued it would not be an overly difficult task to evaluate the outcomes achieved by such schools as compared with the outcomes achieved by similar students in support classes and in the mainstream classes on that basis.

It is argued such SSPs had far better retention rates than for other settings and students who had attended such SSPs were far more successful in gaining and maintaining open employment.

4. The adequacy of integrated support services for children with a disability in mainstream settings, such as school classrooms

5. The provision of a suitable curriculum for intellectually disabled and conduct disordered students

It is argued the inclusive curriculum currently used by the DET is based on notions of anti-discrimination rather than the promotion of the achievement of functional skills that facilitate the students' ability to participate self dependently as fully as possible within society.

In the 1980s/90s a number of Schools for Specific Purposes that catered for students with a moderate or mild level of intellectual disability moved away from a watered down regular curriculum and focussed on the identification of student needs in allowing them to access the community in a self dependent manner as possible. In many settings this was done in collaboration with the parents/carers/support staff. This functional style of curriculum was adopted by the DET when it produced the Curriculum Statement for Students with Severe Disabilities. In some SSPs this curriculum was organised around the three domains of daily living, work experience and recreation/leisure.

It is argued as a direct consequence of the changed curriculum model, many students of twenty years ago were more capable in living skills, travelling to and from and participating in work experience and recreational activities self dependently as possible more effectively than comparable students of today.

It is argued such skills should be the indicators of success as mentioned above.

6. Student and family access to professional support and services, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and school counsellors

7. The provision of adequate teaching training, both in terms of pre-service and ongoing professional training

8. Any other related matters.