

Submission  
No 215

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

**Organisation:** Museum of Contemporary Art

**Name:** Ms Elizabeth Ann Macgregor

**Date received:** 18/02/2010

---

18 February 2010

The Director  
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000  
Fax: (02) 9230 3416

Dear Director,

I am writing to lodge a formal response to the inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs. I have responded to each area below that is directly relevant to the education programs provided by the Museum of Contemporary Art.

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

The MCA runs a unique program for children with special needs which has been developed and expanded in response to the extraordinary demand. Access to high quality artistic experiences is sadly lacking and resources are scarce. Yet the benefits for the children and indeed the carers of the kind of programs that the MCA runs are well documented.

The Bella program was established in 1993 as an annual event tailored for children with special needs and has since expanded into a whole season of programming.

This free program is offered to young people with specific needs, including physical, intellectual, emotional or behavioral disabilities, or who are disadvantaged due to financial, social or geographic factors. The objective is to offer art education to children who have little or no access to museums or cultural institutions.

It has since grown into a pivotal component of the MCA's education program. In 2008 an additional program was offered with the launch of Bella Plus, catering to people with special needs over the age of 18.

Since the Bella program began in 1993, the MCA has identified a serious lack of art educational provision for young people with specific needs. There are many barriers to participation, such as cost, distance, transport and the necessity for a low ratio of educators to young people which makes programs very costly.

The Museum of Contemporary Art receives one third of its revenue from the State and Federal Governments but must secure the remainder through sponsorship, donations, commercial activities and fundraising. The Museum's annual fundraising dinner, the Bella dinner is dedicated to raising funds for the Bella Program.

In addition, the MCA secures funding through partnerships with organisations who understand the community benefit in assisting children with specific needs. Mallesons Stephens Jacques have supported the MCA and the Smith Family to develop and deliver a four-day art education program for a group of at-risk young people from the Smith Family's Learning for Life Program. In 2009, Resmed provided funding for the Bella Plus program to provide for groups of people with disabilities or disadvantage aged 18+. However the amounts are relatively small and do not cover core costs of the program.

One of the main hindrances to access for these children is travelling to and from the Museum. On occasion the Museum has arranged access including bus hire to allow children to travel from outer Sydney regions. The MCA has worked with external organisations to raise funds to cover transport costs for children. One recent case was when a proportion of the price of a ticket for a special lunch with Maxine McKew was directed toward helping children in the Bennelong electorate travel to and from the MCA Bella program. Again this is small but vital amounts.

It is fundamental for these children from across NSW to receive additional funding to assist them with their travel needs in order to access the range of free programs that institutions across the state strive to deliver.

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

The MCA aims to address the key barriers for people with a disability which are cost, transport/distance and suitability of programs.

Everyone deserves access to cultural programs. The process of the creative experience can be therapeutic in itself but the Bella program allows children who may not otherwise have the opportunity, to experience the exhilarating freedom of artistic expression. Parents and carers are delighted to see the connections these children make when exposed to new creative ideas.

The MCA strives to deliver programs which take into account the functioning capacity of the participants and delivers the best positive program for that audience. Staff at the MCA are trained to ensure that knowledge of particular disabilities is incorporated in the preparation before visits and aids in ensuring an enriching experience for all.

As a national organization the MCA aims to deliver programs beyond the walls of the Museum.

The Bella program also reaches out to the wider community, to people across NSW who cannot usually access museums: eg hospitals, correctional centres and schools with ATSI students.

*Good Vibrations*, the MCA's innovative multi-sensory project in a fully accessible caravan, developed for and with people with disabilities, continues to tour NSW. *Good Vibrations* started in 2006 as the first Bella Artist In Residence project with New York artists Bruce Odland and Michael Luck Schneider but it has since travelled to various regional locations including the Victorian schools affected by the 2009 bushfires.

3. The level and adequacy of current special education places within the education System.

There is a need for additional training and more innovative approaches to extending the capabilities of students. Visits to organisations outside school can be of great benefit in creating new experiences and generating new responses in students.

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

It would appear that there is too much concentration on left-brain activities and the rewarding of excellence when more emphasis on individual growth and learning through play could be incorporated. It is essential that adequate support and resources are provided for the class teacher and learning support units. The arts have a critical role to play in this.

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

The popularity of the MCA Bella program demonstrates the need for learning opportunities beyond the classroom and support for teachers. The MCA experience is that teacher training is limited (to one subject, 4 hours a week, 1 semester on 'special education.') Teachers could undertake more practical training, placements with schools/non-school educational settings like the MCA.

MCA Art Educators are specially trained in the care of students with specific needs. The MCA is in the process of developing this aspect of its remit further to provide wider teacher training to teachers and teachers in training across NSW. The MCA is in the process of applying to be registered as a Registered Training Organisation and is in discussions with Universities to develop courses that will provide specific training.

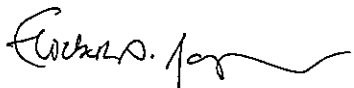
Teacher preview sessions are held each exhibition season to introduce teachers to the key themes presented at the MCA and how these complement the school curriculum.

8. Any other related matters.

Museums can be important sites for exploring and changing attitudes to disability and developing new approaches to learning. More work needs to be done to ensure the views and perspectives of people with special needs are incorporated into organisations' overall strategies.

As a strong believer in access and education for all, I am happy to contribute further towards the discussion into the provision of education to students with special needs. Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can provide any further information relevant to the inquiry.

Yours sincerely



Elizabeth Ann Macgregor

Director