

**INQUIRY INTO TRANSITION SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS  
WITH ADDITIONAL OR COMPLEX NEEDS AND THEIR  
FAMILIES**

**Organisation:** NSW Chapter of the Australian Association of Special Education

**Date received:** 26/08/2011

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**SUBMISSION TO THE ENQUIRY INTO TRANSITION SUPPORT  
FOR STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL OR COMPLEX NEEDS AND  
THEIR FAMILIES.**

**FROM  
NSW CHAPTER OF THE AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF  
SPECIAL EDUCATION**

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# **INQUIRY INTO TRANSITION SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL OR COMPLEX NEEDS AND THEIR FAMILIES.**

## **SUMMARY**

- The Australian Association of Special Education Inc. is a national peak body
- The enquiry should consider the role qualified special educators should play in the full range of transitions that occur in the lives of children and young people
- Effective transitions require trained special educators with a range of skills including skills in identifying individual needs, programming and teaching a range of skills, working collaboratively with others
- Significant concerns relate to the shortage of qualified special educators, the time allowed for transition planning, implementations and follow-up and the limited employment of special educators in preschool and postschool settings.

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The NSW Chapter of the *Australian Association of Special Education (Inc.)* appreciates the opportunity make a submission to the Inquiry into transition support for students with additional or complex needs and their families.

### **The aims of AASE**

The Australian Association of Special Education Inc. is the national peak body of professionals, other paraprofessionals and community members with expertise and/or interest in the education of children and young people with special education needs.

The key aims of AASE are to:

- a) Provide educational leadership to the professional and wider community
- b) Advocate for quality education for all
- c) Commission, participate in and disseminate quality research to inform educational practice
- d) Arrange, promote and facilitate high quality professional learning events and conferences
- e) Coach, mentor and model best practice in teaching and leadership
- f) Build partnerships with universities, service providers and the community
- g) Actively influence policy and decision making

### **Key principles of effective transitions**

**AASE** would like to highlight the following principles, which should apply in relation to the transition of students with additional or complex needs. **AASE** would also like to highlight the important roles that can be played by appropriately qualified special educators in planning for and supporting transitions, in collaboration with families and carers, the students themselves, current and future teachers and other personnel from the various settings and support agencies involved:

Key points of transition between stages of education occur:

- In a child's **transition from home or a variety of early childhood settings to school**. A key contribution can be made by educators with qualifications in early intervention who have worked with families in childcare settings or preschools to assess children's needs and

strengths, to set priority goals for intervention in this setting, to prepare the child for the school setting and who have assisted in the implementation and monitoring of programs. Ideally the early intervention specialist would collaborate with a trained special educator in the school setting who would be part of the school support team for the student. This collaboration would assist in identifying appropriate skills to be taught at preschool in advance of the transition as well as covering the transition itself and any required follow-up.

- In the transition from **primary school settings to secondary school settings**. Once again, special education staff from the primary setting should be available to pass on full information about the student and their programs and should also have been involved in preparing the students and the family for the next setting. Advice can be provided about successful accommodations and adaptations employed in the primary school setting, and secondary staff can be fully briefed on the student's individual learning plan to ensure continuity of learning and teaching.
- In the transition of a student **from the compulsory secondary school years to senior years of schooling**. For many students with disabilities, this will mark the transfer of educational planning from the mainstream curriculum documents to the Life Skills curriculum. A special educator should be part of the team that prepares the student's individual learning program, drawing on appropriate curricula and advising teachers on appropriate adaptations and accommodations. If the student remains in the same setting, this should be a seamless process within the school.
- In the transition of a young person from **secondary school to a range of post-school education, training and/or employment environments**. Once again a special educator with expertise in post-school options and community living needs to be involved in planning for and supporting this transition. This often requires specialized knowledge of local services and opportunities and considerable liaison to determine the best post-school placement(s) and to consider post-school community living options. At this point if the student has been receiving additional services (such as therapy, medical services or transportation) through the school setting, arrangements need to be made to continue these supports post-school.

## **Effective implementation of transition processes**

At each stage, the effective implementation of a transition process is a key principle for a successful process. Most importantly a qualified special educator should be providing support for transition processes and will be competent in:

- Identifying knowledge and skills, including social and communication skills, self-management and self-advocacy skills, that the student will require in their next environment and supporting staff in the current setting to program and teach these skills.
- On-going collaborative planning for students with additional or complex needs which includes the active involvement of parent, carers and the student.
- Co-ordination between personnel involved with the student and family at each stage e.g. early childhood personnel and school personnel; primary school personnel and secondary school personnel; secondary school personnel and post-school education, training and/or employment providers to facilitate the continuity of programs and provisions for individual students
- Identification, planning and provision of teaching and learning, appropriate curriculum, patterns of study and credentialing to meet students educational needs while they are enrolled in any educational setting.
- Identification, planning and provision of teaching and learning of appropriate self-management and self-advocacy skills, so students can be involved to the maximum extent possible in their own transition planning. This may begin, for students with complex and high support needs, with teaching basic expressions of preference.
- Identification, planning and provision for additional support which may be required at each stage of schooling and the providers/facilitators of such support. Each student's individual plan should include teaching and learning of skills required for their next

environment. Planning for post-school should include opportunities for students to have some experience of the options available as well as developing community living skills in financial, legal, health, recreation and transportation areas.

- Interagency collaboration – between the students and their family and a range of government/non-government agencies, departments and community support personnel to maximize cooperation and delivery of services.

AASE is aware that a number of government departments currently have guidelines and practices to support the transition processes for young people with special education needs.

### **Summary**

Summary of the features required to ensure the success of these guidelines and procedures are the following:

- Continuing recognition of the high importance of effective transition planning at each stage of schooling
- Oversight of transition planning and process by a qualified special educator
- The provision of appropriate training and an allocation of time for personnel to be involved in planning and implementing collaborative transition processes for individual students at each stage of schooling
- A commitment to working collaboratively with parents/carers, the student and a range of other department/agency/community personnel as partners in the transition process
- On-going monitoring of transition planning processes to ensure their effectiveness and best practice.

### **Key concerns**

Key concerns that AASE (NSW) believes need to be addressed in order for transition planning to address the principles we have outlined include:

- **The shortage of qualified special educators.** Only 60% of teachers in special schools are appropriately qualified and this leads to concern about the qualifications and expertise of those involved in transition planning.
- **Lack of involvement of special educators in early intervention** for children with special needs. The Commonwealth funding packages made available to families of children with disabilities cover therapy services, but not the services of qualified special educators.
- **Preparation of special educators to provide support for transition planning.** Transition to post-school options in particular requires specialized local knowledge, which may not be developed in initial special education preparation programs. Ongoing professional learning is likely to be required, especially learning about local support services, employment opportunities, other post-school options and community living options.
- **Insufficient time provided for special educators** to devote to planning and collaboration with families, students and service-providers. Special educators should have a manageable caseload if transitions are to be effectively supported. Transition planning needs to begin at least twelve months out from the transition, and there needs to be support during the transition process and follow-up collaboration after the transition has occurred.
- **Limited involvement of special educators in many post-school options settings.** The importance of lifelong learning is recognized for typically developing adults, and young adults with disabilities should be provided with the same options to continue a learning program designed, taught and monitored by an appropriately qualified teacher. Too often, skills learned at school are lost in post-school options placements where staff is not aware of existing skills.