

Submission
No 22

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

Name: Mr Doug Saxon

Date received: 22/01/2010

18th January, 2010.

Chair, General Purpose Standing Committee No 2
Ms Robyn Parker, MLC.

Dear Ms Parker,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to your enquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs.

1. Welcome to Holland.

In 2007 I undertook research and produced. 'Welcome to Holland'- The story of the Hunter Orthopaedic School. The book was published in 2008 and a copy is attached to this submission. Part of the research for the book included face to face interviews with families whose children had passed through the school. The book was written as The NSW Education Department proposed to close/amalgamate the five Special schools that operated in the Newcastle area and replace them with three schools that would cater for all disabilities including behaviour disorders. The following material comes from my research.

2. Brief History - The Hunter Orthopaedic School.

The fight to get an education for children with a physical disability was a long one. In 1929 the Rotary Club of Sydney carried out a survey to determine the number of crippled children in the Sydney area. The Rotarians found:

'..hundreds of children living out a lonely obscure life in 'back rooms' – children for whom no constructive rehabilitation was then available'

The consequent formation of the NSW Society for Crippled Children in 1930 saw the start of the fight to have educational facilities provided for physically disabled students.

In Newcastle it wasn't until 1950 that children with a physical disability who weren't hospital patients could get access to schooling.

Since 1950 the Hunter Orthopaedic School has catered for children with a physical disability. These children have had specialist staff including physiotherapists and occupational therapists to provide children with '*on site*' therapy.

A considerable amount of the school's infrastructure to support children with a physical disability **has not come from government funding** but from extensive community donations in both cash and kind. Examples of this are:

1. The school's swimming pool and associated tracking, lifts and other equipment. This was supplied by the Newcastle business community and donations from the crew of The HMAS Newcastle and the general public.

2. For over twenty years the Crippled Children's Association provided buses to transport physically disabled children to school when the State Government refused to transport these children even though it transported able bodied students.

3. The schools buses have been donated by community groups and charities including Variety, Service Clubs and the Crippled Children's Association.

3. Conclusions from the Research.

[a] There should be an option for those families of children with a physical disability who don't want integration into a regular class. The research revealed that some children who had tried integration were not accepted by their peers and were much happier in the Special School setting. The bonds that were formed between children attending the school were carried over into social settings outside of school and a strong support network developed. There were also positive networks developed between parents who appreciated the support and friendship which developed as they coped with their children's needs.

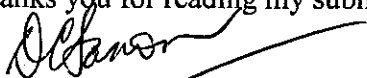
[b] Many people are concerned for the safety of children who are physically disabled if children with violent behaviour are enrolled.

[c] The proposed changes to Special Education in Newcastle appear to have been proposed without proper community consultation with people feeling disempowered.

Issues for consideration by the Standing Committee:

Please consider the appropriateness a one size fits all approach to funding children with physical disabilities in a Special School. Parents who have a child with a physical disability should have the right to continue to send their child to the Hunter Orthopaedic School which caters specifically for their needs. In the Hunter we have a Sports High School, Selective Highs and Performing Arts High Schools. Why should children with physical disabilities have their special facility taken away from them? Other disabilities should be considered separately. If the Hunter Orthopaedic School is not allowed to cater only for children with physical disabilities all the work over the past sixty years to cater for such children will be lost.

Thanks you for reading my submission,



Doug Saxon, Retired, former Primary School Principal