

Submission
No 276

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

Name: Ms Laurel O'Toole

Date received: 19/02/2010

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

Dear Ms Parker ,

Thank you for setting up the inquiry to investigate the educational needs of children with a disability and special needs . I am making the submission on behalf of my granddaughter Nina who is 6 years old . Nina's mummy Sandra has also contributed to this joint submission and would like appear at the Public Hearing to orally present the case for Nina's educational needs .

Human rights recognize the need for children to reach their full educational potential . This statement applies more to children such as Nina because these children will always be dependant on the state for the most basic care . Parents cannot live forever so it is essential that these children are given the opportunity to achieve a level of independence that will allow them care for themselves .

Education is a way to overcome poverty and reduce dependence on the state . What may seem to be a burden on government budgets now is in fact a reduction of cost in the future . There are many programs available both in the public sector and in the private sector but because of the range of disability it is often difficult to determine which program is suitable an individual child .

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is an intellectual and physical condition . The range of signs and symptoms is extensive .

Current statistical figures indicate ASD occurs in 1-160 children .

The probability for the increase in these figures is , that early intervention policies have led to , an increased awareness in early childhood centres and pre-schools .

Premature low weight babies are surviving due to improvements in neonatal care . Babies now survive from 23 weeks gestation . Unfortunately increasing numbers are suffering from major disabilities . Blindness is regarded as a moderate disability .

Governments worldwide have had to assess the impact , that the needs of these children , have had ,on the availability of services . We thank the government for their decision to hold this inquiry as it will allow a measured and thorough investigation . Budgets may be adjusted to provide for the educational requirements that may be needed .

The difficulties many parents experience are now noted :-

- 1) DIAGNOSTIC .
- 2) ACCESSING SERVICES . NO ONE STOP SHOP .
- 3) EMOTIONAL SUPPORT .
- 4) SIBLING SUPPORT .
- 5) MARITAL SUPPORT . (IN EXCESS OF 70% OF PARTNERS LEAVE)
- 6) GOVERNMENT SERVICES LIMITED ? BUDGETARY RESTRAINTS .
- 7) FINANCIAL - some private services cost up \$ 30,000 per/year . Some mortgage their homes .

OTHER MATTERS THAT IMPACT EDUCATIONAL NEEDS .

PHYSICAL .

- 1) UNABLE TO WALK , INCONTINENCE , UNABLE TO FEED OR ACCESS FOOD .
- 2) MUST BE SUPERVISED .
- 3) MAY NEED PERSONAL CARER .

4) UNABLE TO ACCESS TOILET OR INCONTINENT .

5) SHARED PARENTING - FAMILY LAW COURT DECISIONS .

LIFE START is a community based co-operative that services families in Sydney . It enjoys an excellent and a deserved reputation in assisting CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS (CWSN) . Life Start is in receipt of some government support . The organization services Sydney but has only 7 sites .

These are at :- EASTWOOD , FRENCHS FOREST , LEWISHAM , MAROUBRA, ST MARYS , TURRAMURRA and BAULKHAM HILLS .

There is a perception in the community that the education department has decreased the number of CWSN support staff . There has been more integration of CWSN into mainstream classes . If there has been a trial program it would be useful to see if integration has been successful .

Parents concerns are that CWSN may be bullied in mainstream classes . Many are unable to defend themselves . Support staff work 3-4 hours a day , sometimes this does not provide the support CWSN need .

Integrated class teachers have to take CWSN to the toilet and pacify autistic tantrums . They also have to care for the other members of the class .

I am a grandmother of a child with special needs . I hope my experience in the community may be of some assistance to the inquiry . During my 9 years as a Councillor and the Mayor at Strathfield Council I served as the Chairman of Community Services . After my retirement in 2000 , I continued to serve on the Chalmers Rd Special School Board . I am a NSW Registered Nurse and Midwife .

Thank you again for instigating the inquiry . I believe it will be a great benefit to assess the needs of the children who are unable to speak for themselves . I apologise for the format of the submission but I only became aware of the inquiry recently .

Yours Sincerely
Laurel O'Toole BA 1991 Sydney