

Submission
No 286

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

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NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs

Submission

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

Our association has always been concerned that funding for the education of children with a low level of disability has not been adequate.

In the DET system (over half of our members are DET teachers) the allocation of resources in the past has been dependent on the results of ELLA/SNAP and NAPLAN testing. This has not provided interventions to meet the learning needs of students for a number of reasons. In schools with a high number of students with difficulties the allocation of resources has not met the demand. If there are only a few students in a school with a need for intensive support there often are no resources allocated. Schools have been forced to fund raise to employ needed staff. Part-time allocations of STLAs have not been effective and the designated STLA model is limited by the application process and often cannot meet the demand and has to refuse or delay much needed intervention to students in need.

The fear is that with the proposed model being introduced that students with low support needs usually those with reading and language difficulties will get even less support as the focus will be on students with greater need.

The level of funding in AIS/CEO schools varies with some schools particularly at the secondary level being able to establish Learning Support Departments and employ other professionals such as Speech Pathologists.

All students no matter what system they are in should have their learning needs met.

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.

Funding should be based on a student's functioning capacity. Labelling suggests that only a specialised teacher or setting can meet a student's learning needs. It has also led to cases where students receive funding for support they don't need or is unavailable or they miss out altogether because they don't have the correct label.

There should be no cap on funding and it should not be reliant on the label.

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

The concept of "special education places" promotes a division between special education and general education. This encourages classroom teachers not to take responsibility for the education of ALL students.

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

There needs to be more structures in place for collaborative practice.

The model works well when classroom teachers and integration support services share a common vision and have mutual respect and have some time allocated for the collaborative process. In most cases a pivotal belief in this vision would be that all students where possible have access to the regular curriculum. This means that a classroom teacher would make every effort to ensure, for instance, that a student with a sensory impairment in hearing would never be shown a DVD without captions.

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

The teachers represented by our association assist teachers adjust the regular curriculum to meet the learning needs of students or assist in the use of accommodations. The key issue here is the professional development of all teachers in this area and a common vision that students with special learning needs can in most cases access the regular curriculum and that every effort should be made to enable them to do so.

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

Students should not be denied access due to financial problems or lack of awareness of what support is needed and available. It is essential that schools have the capacity to support or initiate access to a wide variety of professional support. If a student has difficulties in any area of their social, emotional or intellectual growth appropriate services should be identified and should be available to the student

without them having to travel large distances or relocate. Structures should be in place to support early intervention with the appropriate service.

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

It is grossly inadequate at present. Many teachers in special positions have no training. On the other hand those that do receive no recognition. There is no incentive to increase skill base and no common skill base in place.

Inadequate training also results in failure to recognise some student behaviour difficulties as being language or literacy based and therefore the need is not addressed. Where the need is recognised it is not necessarily referred to the appropriate services for intervention and this can result in students not receiving Special Provisions for instance. It can also result in less than optimal study pathways and career advice.

8 Any other related matters

There is no career path for teachers in learning support roles. And entering this area can actually limit career progression. In the secondary setting there is little opportunity for relieving in higher positions or Stage 6 Exam marking. It is very discriminating and a breach of equal opportunity guidelines that secondary STLAs cannot become APLAs. This had led to the leadership team within the LAP program being biased towards primary based appointments. As many of these APLAs have gone on to be promoted to disability positions it has led to a skew towards the appointment of teachers with a primary background to key positions.

Supervising teachers should be trained in the area they are supervising.

The new proposed Learning Support co-ordinator needs to be a school Executive to be most effective.

This proposal submitted by the

Professional Association for Learning Support (PALS)

Authorised by the Executive committee 19th February 2010