

Submission
No 297

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

Organisation: Kinma School

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Date received: 19/02/2010

Kinma School

Submission to the Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs.

"The Australian Government considers that all people with disability have the right to participate as fully as possible in community life and is committed to increasing fair access to education and training for all groups. Increasing access to education is one of our goals for Australia's future.

The Disability Standards for Education (the Education Standards) were formulated by the Attorney-General under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA). The Education Standards provide a framework to ensure that students with disability are able to access and participate in education on the same basis as other students. " (1)

About Kinma

Kinma is a progressive school in Sydney which offers an alternative to the traditional education where children from zero to twelve years enjoy learning in a stimulating environment. Kinma was established in 1972 as a non-profit, non-denominational, co-educational, Playgroup, Preschool and Primary school which is managed by parents and teachers. At Kinma, learning is based on trust, co-operation, integrity and friendship. Through these building blocks, our children explore a range of learning experiences which our staff expertly meld with the Board of Studies NSW curriculum. The teachers provide a curriculum geared to suit each individual child with the children being encouraged to work in a style and at a level suitable to their developmental stage. They are involved in determining their needs together with their parents and teacher. This is possible due to the multi-aged groups, small class size and the warm community fostered at the School.

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

At present there are discrepancies between the funding and service levels that are available to independent and the NSW Public School system. Significantly less funding is available to independent schools. Within the Independent sector funding for students with disabilities is linked to the Socio Economic System of funding which operates for the independent sector..

At Kinma the funding available for an individual student in the primary school with a disability from the Federal Government per annum is \$816. Funding from the NSW Government is \$1042.73 per annum (2009). Thus the total funding for

a child with a disability in addition to the standard funding in primary is \$1858.73 per annum. This equates to about 90 hours of work for a teachers aid. As an aid would need to be employed for a minimum of three and a half hours at a time, this amount of money would enable the school to employ an aid for less than three weeks of the school year.! Clearly this is not sufficient.

Funding for preschool education is different. The Preschool has to apply for funding for any child with a disability to Northern Sydney SCAN (in our case). Currently we get \$1125 per term for a child who attends three days per week. While this may appear generous, in fact it is \$112.50 per week or \$37.50 per day. This does not even pay for an aid for two hours per day. It certainly does not cover the cost of even the preparation time for an individual IEP to be developed.

Early intervention is known to produce the best outcomes for children. However the funding is not available to enable this to happen.

Under the Disability Standards for Education (2005) , section 5.3 (e) it clearly states:

“additional support is provided to the student where necessary, to assist him or her to achieve intended learning outcomes;”

Clearly, the current level of funding severely impedes the majority of independent schools from giving adequate assistance to meet these regulations.

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

As stated above, at Kinma we spend significant energy and time developing strong relationships between students, teachers, and parents and between students themselves. We believe that this forms a strong platform for learning to take place. Students' functioning capacity is a critical factor in determining how much time and attention is needed to develop and maintain this relationship.

Many parents are reluctant to formalise diagnosis early in their child's life due to the stigma of “labelling” . At Kinma we find that many parents are attracted to our model of education, as we support the individual differences of all children, without labelling. Taking this approach often hinders the School from applying for the limited funding that may be available.

The funding model required to meet the needs of young students is one that can allocate funding based on a non discriminatory measure of functioning capacity that does not permanently label a child as "disabled".

At Kinma we recognise and promote the importance of diversity and meeting the learning needs of all students.

We recommend

- that allocation of funding be based in a non discriminatory manner on a student's functioning capacity, not on a named disability
- that we move beyond the archaic diagnosis model, which separates and excludes students and work towards an empowering model that supports uniqueness and difference

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

Currently there are limited support systems that can be integrated into the classroom at Kinma unless funds are diverted to pay for external support (eg ASPECT). Indeed, if a child has extreme support needs, we may recommend that the child attends a state school where they do have access to support units with significantly smaller student /teacher ratios.

Student and family access to professional support and services, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and school counsellors

Access to such support services are available if parents can pay for private therapy. Services offered by the Government are excellent, yet waiting times are extreme and in some instances immediate action is the best support for the child and the family.

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

The provision of adequate professional development is essential. However, the greatest need in this area is that as a professional body we see the uniqueness of the individual and not the DIS ability.

(1) Julie Bishop (Hon) Minister for Education 2005