

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

Organisation: Socialist Women for Justice

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Submission to the GPSC No 2 (Closing: 19 February 2010)**Submission on behalf of Socialist Women for Justice****Authorising person: Ms Marion Hosking OAM****Person writing the submission: Leonie McGuire****To whom it may concern**

This submission is written to advise the Committee of a proposal by SWFJ (an Australia wide group of women concerned with issues of social justice) to address the entrenched disadvantage of many children entering the NSW Public School system. These children are suffering from egregious physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect, which all too frequently manifest in violent acting-out behaviours at school. This clearly disrupts their learning and that of their classmates. It reduces the capacity of Teachers and Administrative personnel to carry out their primary duties.

Background: SWFJ was made aware of considerable numbers of children at a NSW regional primary school suffering such disadvantage that they are unmanageable within the setting of a regular classroom.

A list describing the suffering of these children was compiled by direct witnesses and it became known as Lisa's list. (Attachment 1)

It is the understanding of SWFJ that current funding to address the needs of children at risk can only be made available if children are identified as suffering from a medical or neurological condition. The children we refer to are suffering from neglect and abuse, which ought not to be pathologised. Their plight is not being addressed in any systematic, monitored, specifically tailored child/family/school centred programs. SWFJ has received correspondence from The Hon Verity Firth MP advising that children at risk do have access to programs designed to address their learning needs in some schools. It is our opinion that such programs need to work in conjunction with skilled personnel to also address the physical and emotional needs of children who currently arrive at school dirty, hungry, frequently sick, hostile and angry. This anger is acted out in classrooms and playgrounds at schools and is factually described in Lisa's list. To date, in spite of the measures described by the Minister, these dangerous and anti social behaviours manifesting in classrooms from K - 6 continue unabated.

That children in our society continue to suffer neglect and abuse and that our current systems appear powerless to mitigate their pain, SWFJ found untenable and so we developed a proposal in 2008 to address the problems. (Attachment 2)

A list of the conditions experienced by many children in Taree and practical suggestions for addressing their adverse effects can be found in our correspondence to Bryce Wilson assistant advisor to the Hon Mark Arbib (Attachment 3)

Our correspondence (January 2009) with The Hon Verity Firth and the Hon Linda Burney (August 2008) is attached (Attachment 4) Again the letters demonstrate how current programs continue to fail our most at risk and vulnerable children.

Arguments to support this submission.

1 To date, resources and programs to support abused and neglected children are piecemeal and lacking a coordinated and universally monitored structure. Abuse and neglect generate problems, which should not be pathologised in order to meet current funding guidelines for other special needs children.

2 Our schools and society continue to deny our vulnerable children their right to a safe and nurturing environment in either the home or learning context. This premise is

based on observed, measurable, high numbers of critical incidents which occur on a regular basis in our schools and reflect the pain of our at risk children

3 Early intervention is sound economic/humanitarian practice.

4 It is untenable in a First World country such as Australia to accept as tolerable the current levels of child neglect and abuse which, in our view could be measurably addressed by the proposal described in Attachment 2 of this submission

5 The article by Pru Goward, NSW Opposition spokeswoman for community services, in The Sun Herald, January 31, 2010 (Attachment 5) articulates the very premise of this submission-that designated regional coordinator positions are required to ensure that appropriate case plans for children at risk from K-6 are designed, implemented and monitored in order to maximise the opportunities for young children to be supported out of entrenched dysfunction and suffering.

Recommendations for action

SWFI recommends that the Committee peruse and consider the proposal described under Suggestions in Attachment 2.

The key point of this recommendation is that a designated position should be created to oversight all the personnel and strategies pertaining to the case management of an identified child at risk within the K to 6-school system. The position would track all the filed cases with regular reporting and adjustment to case plans where results are not in line with time lines for achieving agreed goals. (Arrived at in consultation with the family and relevant stakeholders)

Thankyou for your consideration of this submission.

Leonie McGuire

February 5 2010

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Lisa's 1st - Attachment 1

Provision for emotionally disturbed/ neglected students in NSW Public Schools Public Schools in New South Wales Public Schools

Public schools in New South Wales have become aware of an increase in the high number of severely and emotionally disturbed students enrolling in mainstream classes. Often, these children begin their schooling at non-government schools but are asked to leave once violent behaviours emerge. Non-government schools do not cater for such children therefore leave it up to State schools to provide their education.

Both teaching and non-teaching staff in NSW public schools are dealing with high numbers of emotionally disturbed children without adequate training or qualifications. The fact that the health system fails to adequately provide basic health and mental care results in undiagnosed and untreated children.

The only option open to Principals, when behaviours become uncontrollable, is suspension thus, compounding the problems. Suspension means that often children are sent home to places of violence, drug and alcohol abuse, which have become a staple of their everyday life.

In attempting to diffuse situations before they get to the suspension stage, staff find themselves in the position of transporting children home.

The above results in chronic compassion stress and a belief that the system is failing and will continue to fail both children and staff.

The following will give some idea of the dire circumstances in which the staff works. This is a first-hand experience of an average day at [redacted] where I am employed:

- Supplying children with breakfast (300 per month).
- Organising lunches for children who present without lunch.
- Attending to boils, infected sores etc.
- Clothing changes for those who come to school in filthy clothing.
- Washing clothes.
- Showering those children if required.
- Medication sorted.....missed at home.
- Phone call to parents ascertaining medication regime and whether the child has had the morning dose (ADHD).
- If no 'phone contact made, driving child home for medication.
- DoCS referrals for that day.
- Attempting to remove children from fences, trees and roof.
- Reports to safety and security directorate.
- Dealing with children threatening to commit suicide.
- Hygiene class.
- Children trashing rooms when the situation is not to their liking.

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Lisa's list - Attachment 1

- Children lashing out at staff and other children for the above reason.
- Removing children from school to home because of behaviour.
- Phone call to parents often go unanswered or the 'phone has been disconnected.
- Suspensions
- Dealing with irate parents
- Absconding children.
- Gathering children back into class after they walk out of class.

These duties are on top of our day-to-day running of the school.

Comment

More efficient management of the provision and delivery of the service is vital.

The reporting system of neglect and abuse is failing.

- I believe that providing more money to the mental health system is obviously not the answer as previous increases in budget have not produced better results.
- Education of parents in parenting skills urgently required (there are many families in our communities for whom this basic skill does not exist)

Urgent

The Government must rethink its policies **NOW** particularly in the areas of private/ government participation. There are too many agencies creating a situation where finances and staff are spread too thinly. Waiting times and lack of response are a daily hazard. Children need attention **NOW**.