

Submission
No 6

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

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Date received: 22/12/2009

Partially Confidential

General Purpose Standing Committee No 2
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
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PROVISION OF EDUCATION TO STUDNETS WITH A DISABILITY OR SPECAIL NEEDS

I have received advice that the Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No 2 is conducting an inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs. Having a 12 year old son with special needs I felt the need to write a submission in the hope that it may assist other parents in their long and tiring struggle to gain assistance for children with special needs.

I believe that the current NSW education system is failing children with special needs, it does not provide them with adequate assistance or resources for them to reach their full potential. Over the past 7 years my family has been put through a lot of stress trying to deal with our sons needs and battle with the state's education system.

I have addressed below each of the terms of reference:

Level and adequacy of current special education places.

Over the past 5 years the Government has closed down a number of special education places. Unfortunately my son was affected by this when the IM class he attended at Menai Public School was closed. I believe this has resulted in limited positions being available for children in special education settings.

The Menai IM class was closed due to low numbers, however the class was not promoted to the broader community. Parents with children who fall into the IM range are not aware that their child would qualify for an IM class. I also believe parents feel that 19 children in these classes is too many and that their child would be better in a mainstream class where you may only have 1 or 2 students with special needs as opposed to 19 students with special needs in an IM class.

If you do not want your child in a special unit within a mainstream school (i.e. IM or IO class) but would prefer them to attend a special school there are very limited options. My only choice was a school where children displayed poor and disruptive behavior. This would have had a negative impact on my sons schooling and although he does not have behavior issues I believe this could have led him to imitate the other children.

Having had my son attend a private special needs school I feel that a school which only caters for children with special needs is a more appropriate setting for him than being placed in a special unit within a mainstream school.

When the IM class at Menai closed we were so fed up with the lack of support for children with special needs in the NSW education system that we decided to send our son to Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC). We believe this is when our son truly started his education (unfortunately he was in year 4 by this stage). It is stated that this inquiry will have a particular focus on what can be learned from International and Federal approaches, and approaches in other States and Territories, I believe you need to look no further than our own State at MUSEC as they seem to be making great progress in the area of special education.

My son is about to commence high school and due to the lack of options and support we have previously received in the NSW education system we have decided to send him to a special high school run by the Christian Brothers at Wharoonga. This has not been an easy decision for us as he will have to travel 43 kms to attend the school; however we believe the benefits are worth the travel. This is a fantastic school and the only high school of its type in Sydney, the children get to experience a normal high school setting where they move classes for each subject with different teachers. The Government should model a high school for children with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities from this school and have one in the North, South, East and West of Sydney.

Adequacy of support services for children with a disability in mainstream school classes.

There is little or no support for children with an intellectual disability in mainstream school classes. When my son commenced kindergarten he was in a mainstream class as we were advised by the Department of Education that this was his only option (at 8 he qualified for an IM class) he received no funding for assistance within the classroom because he did not have a recognised diagnosis.

My son's intellectual needs are high, to give you an example he is nearly 13, about to go into high school and cannot read or write, to me this child desperately needed some assistance within the classroom. The Government advocates for early intervention but does not follow this through into the education system. For the first 2 years of my sons schooling he was allowed to wander around the classroom and completed no work, to me he became a professional pencil sharpener as this is what he liked to do and the teachers allowed him do this as she did not have the time or resources to support him.

Each child **must** be assessed on their functioning capacity rather than their disability to determine the level of support they require. The use of Teachers Aides is crucial as most of these children have poor attention and need one on one assistance to complete their work, the Teachers are not able to provide this.

Provision of suitable curriculum for intellectually disabled and conduct disordered students.

I believe it is very important for a suitable curriculum to be established for children with special needs that addresses their long term needs.

Access to professional support services, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and school counselors.

Most children with special needs require some form of therapy or counseling and if this could be incorporated into their education it would allow the teachers to then include the therapy or behavior management strategies in the classroom. It would also take some stress off the parents who are required to organise therapy outside of school hours and around their own working hours.

When a child has special needs families are put to a lot of additional expenses to meet their child's needs, some families are unable to afford private therapies and therefore go on long waiting lists to be offered 6 weeks of block therapy, this is inadequate as the children need a minimum of fortnightly ongoing therapy sessions for it to be effective. It also shows the inequities for those children whose families are unable to provide them with private therapies, each child deserves to be treated the same and it should not come down to the matter of one family being able to afford therapy and another not.

Adequacy of pre-service and post-service training

From what I have witnessed first hand in the NSW education system most teachers are not trained in special education practices, this is particularly important in special education settings.

NSW Teachers are now allocated 5 'pupil free' days each year for staff development, at least 2 of these days each year should be for training in special education practices.

Thankyou for the time you have spent reviewing this submission. I am happy to provide further information should you require this.

Yours faithfully,

Lisa May