

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

Organisation: Department of Education and Children's Services, South
Australian Government

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Hon Robyn Parker, MLC
Committee Chair
General Purpose Standing Committee No 2
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Parker

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission to the *Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs* which is being conducted by the NSW Legislative Council.

The South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services' (DECS) response to this inquiry is limited to factual information on our current approaches and services. In 2009, I formed a Special Education Task Force and whilst this work continues, we are not in a position to provide opinions, arguments and recommendations.

Should the Standing Committee require further information after it has examined the submission please contact Mr John Brigg, Director Disability Services on (08) 8226 0550 or by email john.brigg@sa.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Robinson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Chris Robinson
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Date: 24-2-2010

The Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS), South Australia response to the NSW Legislative Council's General Purpose Standing Committee No.2

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The DECS response to this inquiry is limited to factual information and comment on those aspects which are public and can be disclosed and shared. The Chief Executive, Mr Chris Robinson formed a Special Education Task Force in August 2009. Whilst this work continues, DECS is not in a position to provide opinions, arguments or recommendations for future service provision.

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

The Disability Support Program is the program gateway for funding students with disabilities in South Australian Government schools. Funds are directed to students with disabilities in mainstream schooling through the school's Resource Entitlement Statement. The main source of funding for students attending special options is through Industrial Entitlements.

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

Current practice for allocating funding is a mixture of both functioning capacity and disability. In 2010 DECS is trialling a new non categorical approach, the Educational Support Matrix.

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

DECS has 153.5 special options consisting of special classes, disability units, special schools and centres for students with hearing impairment.

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

Students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms are supported by a range of services. These are grouped as Regional Support Services, the Special Education Resource Unit, Statewide Services and those made available through an agreement with the Ministerial Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities.

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

The South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework and the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) are the curriculum frameworks for South Australian schools. Currently DECS is trialling Indicators for Learning, within Standard 1 of the SACSA Framework, for students with intellectual disability. This has been developed to support teachers to assess, monitor and report on student progress.

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

Access to the Regional Support Services occurs with the family initially discussing with school leadership the purpose of a referral for professional support. Reference is made to the implementation in 2010 of the Paediatric Speech Pathology Project. This project aims to provide an improved integrated speech pathology service managed by SA Health.

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

The three universities in South Australia offer varied courses and modules within their pre-service teaching degrees. DECS has funded a range of Graduate Certificates at Masters Level and supports ancillary staff to access Certificate 3 in Government Disability Studies through its Workforce Development Program.

8. Any other related matters

Transition and post school pathways partnership arrangements for students with disabilities are currently being expanded through the Innovative Community Action Networks (ICANs) and the State Disability Transition Program.

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1. DECS Context

1.1 Overview Statement

The Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) currently has 580 school sites. The DECS school enrolment figure as of the DECS Annual Census Report, 2009 was 165,563 full time equivalent (FTE) enrolments. Of this total school enrolment figure, approximately 9% (15,126 FTE) are funded students with disabilities (note: see section 1.4 for included categories). DECS also currently has 416 preschool sites. Information pertaining to children with disabilities and additional needs enrolled in preschool sites has not been included in this submission. It needs to be noted that these children have access to many but not all the range of services mentioned in this submission.

DECS has a range of provisions and programs including statewide and regional support services, targeted resources and a range of special education options to support the additional needs of students with disabilities and learning difficulties. Included in this range of provisions is the DECS Equity Funding Program. This is one of the key initiatives by Government to provide additional support to reduce educational disparities between different groups and to address barriers to participate successfully in quality educational programs. The main recipients of equity funding are:

- Aboriginal Students
- Students with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties
- English as a Second Language Students
- Students from Low Socio Economic Background and
- Rural and isolated students.

1.2 Students with Disabilities

<http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/svpst/>

The DECS Students with Disabilities Policy provides a broad framework for teaching and learning practices and the provision of services and support. The policy is aligned to the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act, 1992 and Disability Standards for Education (Australian Government 2005). DECS has a commitment to ensuring that students with disabilities gain the necessary

knowledge, skills and attributes to achieve to their highest level of learning and participate successfully in society.

Direct funding to schools for students with disabilities and special needs occurs through two main sources:

- Students with learning difficulties
- Students with disabilities who meet the eligibility criteria for the Disability Support Program.

1.3 Students with Learning Difficulties

The Students with Learning Difficulties Grant is allocated to assist schools providing program support for students with learning difficulties who are not required to have a Negotiated Education Plan (NEP). The funding is intended to assist schools to provide programs to improve the learning outcomes of students who have very poor reading skills, limited vocabulary for their age, significant difficulty in the understanding of verbal concepts and significant difficulty in reasoning or problem solving using words. See 2.1 for funding arrangements.

1.4 The Disability Support Program

Students with Disabilities who meet the eligibility criteria for the Disability Support Program (DSP) must be verified as having one or more of the following disabilities:

- Autistic Disorder/Asperger's Disorder
- Global developmental delay (up to 7 years)
- Intellectual disability
- Physical disability
- Sensory disability (hearing)
- Sensory disability (vision)
- Speech and/or language disability.

2. DECS RESPONSE TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

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

In DECS the nature and level of funding for the education of children with a disability is best described through three key funding programs:

- Whole School Literacy and Numeracy Improvement Funding
- Students with Disabilities (Mainstream education)
- Students with Disabilities (Special schools, Units and classes).

More than \$200 million annually is provided to support students with disabilities in South Australian Government schools.

Whole School Literacy and Numeracy Improvement Funding

The Whole School Literacy and Numeracy Improvement Funding is a grant provided to support the improvement of students' literacy and numeracy outcomes. This grant incorporates a number of components including students with learning difficulties (see Funding Programs)

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities, verified as eligible for the Disability Support Program (DSP), are required to have a Negotiated Education Plan (NEP). They attend special schools, special units, special classes or year level classes in junior primary, primary or secondary schools. Access to the DSP occurs through referral to state or regional support services.

The DSP has a five-step process for students with disabilities attending year level classes to access additional support and resourcing. Each step involves gathering information that is used in planning and to profile the student's educational support requirements. This information also informs placement options for special schools, special units and special classes.

Funds for mainstream schools are allocated directly through the school's Resource Entitlement Statement (RES). This statement indicates the total resources the school receives including

funding for learning difficulties and for students eligible for the DSP. Under local school management, schools are responsible for managing this resource and for the learning outcomes of students with disabilities.

Funding Programs

Students with Learning Difficulties

Additional funding is provided to schools for students with learning difficulties. It should be noted that students with learning difficulties are not included in the total number of students with disabilities. The allocation formula uses a combination of factors, including measures of low socio-economic status, to distribute a proportion of total funds to all schools for students with learning difficulties who are not required to have a Negotiated Education Plan.

Commencing in 2007 an additional \$1.52 million has been allocated to schools per annum. This funding arrangement is for a period of 10 years to respond to the needs of students with learning difficulties and to support teacher training and development.

Currently funding ranges from \$275 (a small school with 18 students) to \$75,000 (a large school of over 1,000 students).

Students with Disabilities (Mainstream education)

In 2009, there were 12 434 students with disabilities attending year level classes in mainstream schools (82% of students with disabilities). Students with disabilities who are verified as eligible for the Disability Support Program attending year level classes in mainstream classes are allocated an additional level of support (on top of mainstream funding) and funded on a per capita basis.

- Students who have low to moderate support requirements receive funding ranging from \$1,722 to \$10,800 (per student)
- Students who have severe and/or complex disabilities receive funding ranging from \$10,800 to \$36,757 (per student)

Students with disabilities in mainstream classes are also eligible for:

- Challenging Behaviours Category 1, 2 and 3 support (ranging from \$2,743 to \$16,456 per full time student)

Regional Supplementary Funding for Students with Disabilities. Regions have a targeted pool of funding to manage short term and medium term risks.

Special Schools, Units and Classes

The Industrial Entitlements represent the main funding source for special schools and units. There are different industrial entitlements for country and metro special schools/units and classes.

Students in special schools and units who have severe and complex disabilities are also eligible for additional funding through the same processes as students with disabilities in mainstream classes.

These funding programs are:

- H, 'High Sustained' level of support
- V, 'Very High Sustained' level of support,
- Challenging Behaviours Category 1, 2 and 3
- Regional Supplementary Funding for Students with Disabilities.

2.2 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

Currently DECS has a range of approaches in determining the allocation of funding to students with disabilities.

- The levels of support: A, 'Additional'; D, 'Direct'; and I, 'Intensive' are based on a student's functioning capacity and support requirements
- The levels of support: Mainstream H, 'High Sustained' and Mainstream V, 'Very High Sustained' are based on the severity of hearing/vision disability or severe and multiple disabilities.
- Challenging Behaviour funding is allocated to students with disabilities who have autism, those who have an intellectual disability or for students with disabilities who have a mental health diagnosis.

2010 DECS trial of the Educational Support Matrix

In 2010, DECS is trialling a different approach to determine the allocation of funding to students with a disability. This process will focus on a student's functioning capacity rather than her/his disability.

The Educational Support Matrix provides a common structure and system that summarises the support and assistance provided to students with disabilities regardless of their category of disability. It will achieve a non-categorical approach to support provision and will reduce the differences in system requirements for allocating a level of support. It will serve to bring together the student's negotiated education planning documents with the profiling of a student's educational support requirements.

Support provisions for students with disabilities are considered against the South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework (SACSA) and the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE). The degree to which the curriculum is differentiated, outcomes modified, accommodations used and the specific or alternate programs in place to support the student's learning are identified and recorded.

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

DECS has 153.5 special options consisting of special classes, disability units, special schools and centres for students with hearing impairment.

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

There are a range of support services accessed by students with a disability in mainstream settings. These include:

- Regional Support Services
- Special Education Resource Unit
- Statewide Services

Regional Support Services

Regional Support Services were structured as a result of a state government reform commission into the public sector.

The commission recommended the alignment of state government boundaries into twelve regions across all government departments. The alignment of the government boundaries was intended to:

1. improve collaborative and planning, reporting and service delivery
2. deliver on regional targets in the SA Strategic Plan
3. encourage community linkage, liaison and working relationships between all levels of government and the local community
4. improve public sector efficiency, customer satisfaction with government services and decision making.

Regional Support services were structured into twenty multi-disciplinary teams across the twelve regions to support sites in school and preschool sectors. Each multidisciplinary team consists of a manager and staff from the disciplines listed below. The allocation of staff was configured according to formulae that included preschool and school enrolments, Index of Disadvantage (A measure used by DECS to signify the level of disadvantage for a school. There are seven levels with level one being the most disadvantaged), verified students with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, Guardianship of the Minister students and a country loading. The categories of each discipline across the state are as follows:

1. Aboriginal Inclusion Officers
2. Student Attendance Officers
3. Social Workers
4. Behaviour Support Coordinators
5. Disability Coordinators
6. Hearing Services Coordinators
7. Educational Psychologists
8. Speech Pathologists

The focus of the Regional Support Services is to provide support and intervention to meet the educational needs of children and students enrolled in government sites due to concerns about their learning, social, physical and emotional needs. Included in this group are a high proportion of school students verified as students with disabilities. While the full range of Regional Support Services may be working with students with disabilities at any one time, other children and students with special needs are also supported.

The disciplines which have a strong focus of support for students with disabilities are: Disability Coordinators, Hearing Services Coordinators, Educational Psychologists and Speech Pathologists. The other services may also support students with disabilities but do not focus on these students.

Special Education Resource Unit (SERU)

The Special Education Resource Unit (SERU) provides services for children/students with disabilities and learning difficulties, who live in South Australia. These services are available to teachers, other professional workers and parents/carers. The following services are for students enrolled in government schools:

- Transport Assistance to special schools, special units and special classes
- Access Equipment including lifting hoists and wheelchair ramps
- Assistive Technology including computers, alternative keyboards and software
- Audiological Equipment including soundfield systems
- Curriculum and Professional resources
- Conductive Education Program
- Information and Communication Technology
- Communication Support Service.

Statewide Services

The South Australian School for Vision Impaired (SASVI) and the Visiting Support Service

SASVI provides support to schools for students with vision impairment.

Kilparrin Teaching and Assessment School and Services

This service provides support to schools for students who have complex sensory and additional disabilities. It also offers a period of assessment and teaching for students whose placement is in doubt.

Regency Park Outreach Service

The Outreach team provides a statewide consultancy service for schools and preschools with students with physical disabilities.

DECS Learning Difficulties Support Team

This team sits within DECS Disability Services and provides a responsive service to preschools, schools and to parents to enhance inclusive methodologies through:

- professional development for leaders, teacher, ancillary staff
- supporting the school and parents to address the special needs of individual students
- managing the Special Education Needs Help Line.

The team works to build the capacity of Regional Support Staff and to work with other DECS units to facilitate the improvement of schools' literacy and numeracy programs and to enhance the schools' capacity to cater for the full range of learners.

Ministerial Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities (MACSWD)

MACSWD administers Australian Government Funding to the following Non Government Organisations (NGOs) to provide support to preschools, schools and special schools/ units:

- Novita Children's Services
- Townsend House/Cando 4 Kids
- Cora Barclay
- Autism SA
- Down Syndrome Society
- Guide Dog Association
- Families SA for the Children in Residential Care Program
- Child Youth and Women's Health Services (CYWHS): Access Assistant Program.

The Access Assistant Program also funded through MACSWD provides a medical consultancy to schools in government and non government sectors and employs trained health support officers to undertake complex and invasive procedures.

DECS does not employ occupational therapists or physiotherapists. Services listed above through MACSWD such as Novita Children's Services, and Autism SA may provide these services to school sites for students with a disability who meet their entitlement criteria.

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

The **South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework** provides curriculum entitlements for all learners, including those with disabilities and conduct disorders, Reception to Year 10. The Standards in the Framework represent the expectations we have for all students. They provide a common reference point for teachers to use in monitoring, judging and reporting on learner achievement over time. Accommodations and/or modifications must be provided as needed, to help ensure learner achievement against the SACSA Framework Standards and Outcomes. The scope of the curriculum provided for these learners is identified through the process of developing a Negotiated Education Plan and is recorded in the learning plan.

Currently DECS is trialling the ***Indicators of Learning, within Standard 1 of the SACSA Framework*** for students with significant cognitive delays/intellectual disability. The Indicators of Learning have been developed to support teachers to assess, monitor and report on the progress of this cohort of students with disabilities. They provide a way to map the emerging skills, knowledge and understanding of the student who is working within SACSA Standard One over an extended period of time. This initiative will fulfil the requirement of DECS schools to account for monitoring and reporting the progress and achievement of all students.

South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE)

In the senior years the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) and Vocational Education Training (VET) are the curriculum frameworks used by schools. The SACE is completed in two stages with Stage 1 commencing in year 11; there is flexibility for this to be commenced earlier. The Personal Learning Plan, a component of the Stage 1 SACE, may be commenced in Year 9 for students with disabilities. Stage 2 SACE is generally completed in Year 12 but many students particularly those with disabilities may take longer.

All students have opportunities to complete the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE). The SACE Board of South Australia provides alternative arrangements to students whose capacity to participate in an assessment is adversely affected in a significant way by illness, impairment, or personal circumstances. The **Special Provisions in Curriculum and Assessment Policy** is a critical strategy in assisting students to demonstrate their achievements. The policy aims to apply the special provisions responsibly, fairly and equitably. During 2009, the policy and its associated procedures were reviewed; on the basis of this review, the policy has been retained in principle for a further three years. The policy also more clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of schools and the SACE Board of South Australia in special provisions processes.

A modified range of subjects is available to students with severe disabilities at Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the SACE. The modified subjects are for students who have severe multiple disabilities or those with severe intellectual disability.

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

Students and families access Regional Support Services via a referral from the site where the child/student is enrolled. A referral to Regional Support Services identifies the service or services requested and a description of the presenting issues. At each school there is a component of the school counsellor role that focuses on the wellbeing of students. The counsellor role does not focus on students with disabilities but may have an ongoing role for specific students. School

counsellors are qualified teachers with training in developing student wellbeing processes in schools.

The referral may also indicate if other services are being accessed by the family, such as occupational therapy, physiotherapy, mental health services, disability agencies, health services, child welfare or other specialist services. These services are accessed directly by the family, and when appropriate the services work collaboratively to provide a coordinated service to the student and family at a school level. There is a commitment to maintain strong links between school services and other government and non-government services.

Negotiated Education Plans for students with disabilities are developed at a school to plan the educational program for the student. The planning includes parents, school personnel, Regional Support Services and other agencies and services as required.

Paediatric Speech Pathology Project

Currently Speech Pathologists are employed in DECS to provide a service to preschools and schools. The majority of DECS speech pathology work is in the early years of schooling from four years to eight years of age.

The Paediatric Speech Pathology Project aims to develop and implement an integrated speech pathology service under the one agency, with speech pathologists from DECS moving to SA Health. The intention is to develop a single service for children from birth to eight years of age to be managed by SA Health and in operation by the end of 2010. The project aims to provide an improved integrated speech pathology service through the provision of:

- Equitable service access
- Improved service coordination
- Improved consistency of service models
- Reduced gaps in service
- Improved transition points
- Reduced waiting time for service.

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

Pre-service degrees for the Bachelor of Education at the three Universities in Adelaide are offered in a variety of ways. The amount of pre-service study in the area of disability varies in each course.

- Flinders University offers a Bachelor of Education combined with a Bachelor of Arts/Science/Health Science over four years. <http://www.flinders.edu.au>
- Adelaide University offers a Bachelor of Teaching combined with a Bachelor of Arts/Economics/Mathematics and Computer Science/science over four years. <http://www.adelaide.edu.au>
- University of South Australia offers a Bachelor of Education <http://www.unisa.edu.au>

Flinders University offers a Bachelor and Masters Degree of Special Education which focus exclusively on the educational needs of students with disabilities and learning difficulties. Flinders University is currently reviewing its pre-service degrees to include aspects of teaching students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

DECS has funded a range of Graduate Certificates at Masters Degree level since 1999 in such areas as Hearing Impairment, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Transition, Learning Difficulties, Technology, Down Syndrome, Augmentative Communication, Behaviour Management, Inclusive Education, Orientation and Mobility and Asperger's Disorder.

DECS has provided funding support for accredited training through its Retraining Scheme. This was made available to education staff working in the field of disability and special education.

DECS also funds Certificate 111 in Government-Disability Studies for school ancillary staff who work with students with a disability, through its Workforce Development program.

The DECS Learning Difficulties Team manages the annual Special Education EXPO, a four day statewide professional learning experience showcasing new education initiatives, the work of regional support services and teachers, best educational practices. The EXPO also provides an opportunity to build networks with specialist state and national agencies that support students with disabilities and those with special learning needs.

2.8 Any other related matters

Transition and post schooling pathways

DECS is working in partnership with South Australian Government's Social Inclusion Unit to improve the learning pathways for students with disabilities through the Innovative Community Action Networks (ICANs) for those who are at most risk of disengaging from mainstream learning pathways (www.ican.sa.edu.au). DECS also coordinates access to accredited employability skills training, vocational education and training (VET) through the State Disability Transition Program. DECS maintains two student transition centres for students with disabilities who require a modified program with a focus on work readiness skills.