

Submission
No 255

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

Organisation: Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association NSW Inc
Name: Ms Tanya Miller
Date received: 19/02/2010

Submission to General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2: Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs



Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association (ASLIA) NSW Inc

PO Box 1060, Parramatta NSW 2124

info@asliansw.org.au

Authorised by Sheena Walters, President, ASLIA (NSW) Inc

(02) 8833 3610

Scope of this submission:

This document will be confined to deal with students who are deaf or have a significant hearing loss, mainly in relation to the provision of sign language interpreting services. For the sake of brevity, the term “deaf” will be used to refer to these students. Deaf students may use Auslan (Australian Sign Language – a visual language with a grammar distinct from English), Signed English (a sign system based on English), Total Communication (signing and speaking simultaneously) or a combination of these.

Terms of Reference addressed:

1. The nature, level and adequacy of funding for the education of children with a disability
4. The adequacy of integrated support services for children with a disability in mainstream settings, such as school classrooms
6. Student and family access to professional support and services, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and school counsellors
7. The provision of adequate teaching training, both in terms of pre-service and ongoing professional training
8. Any other related matters.

About ASLIA (NSW):

The Australian Sign Language Interpreters Association of NSW (ASLIA NSW) is a not-for-profit professional body representing Australian Sign Language (Auslan) Interpreters and Relay (Deaf) Interpreters. We provide regular professional development workshops, social opportunities and information and advocacy on issues that affect interpreters and our deaf and hearing consumers.

Background:

The majority of children who are deaf are born to parents who have normal hearing, and do not know any sign language. Often by the time these children enter school, their language acquisition has been delayed due to inadequate exposure to a language they can access (a visual/signed language). This means that interpreters for these students may have the responsibility to provide excellence in interpreting, as well as the additional task of being one of the few language models in the student's life. Therefore, appropriately skilled, resourced and remunerated interpreters are vital for deaf students to achieve their potential and succeed in the education system and beyond.

Recommendations for action:

1. There needs to be a clear understanding by NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) that the provision of accredited interpreters is absolutely essential for students who use sign language (regardless whether they use Australian Sign Language – Auslan – or another sign system), and also that a high standard of interpreting is required, not only to provide access to the curriculum but also - unfortunately - to provide one of what may be very few language models in a student's life. DET must provide professional interpreting services to all students who use sign language.
2. All interpreters employed by DET must be accredited by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI). Auslan/English interpreting is a highly specialised field. Simply knowing both languages (Auslan and English) does not qualify a person as an interpreter. The interpreting task is complex and requires the ability to deconstruct and reconstruct the linguistic elements of two languages

simultaneously, rapidly and accurately. There is currently no requirement for this accreditation, and this work is often performed by Learning Support Officers without any formal training in interpreting, leaving students with limited access to the curriculum.

3. Learning Support Officers who are presently providing interpreting in the classroom, and wish to continue to do so, should be financially supported by DET to gain their NAATI accreditation by a certain date, such as within two years of NAATI accreditation becoming compulsory.
4. Teachers of the deaf should also be NAATI-accredited at the paraprofessional level as a minimum, and be financially supported by DET to gain this accreditation. This is because the duties of a teacher of the deaf often include ad hoc interpreting for students. There is no current requirement for teachers of the deaf to actually be able to communicate fluently (or even at all) with deaf students.
5. School interpreters must be recognised as the professionals they are and paid accordingly. Experience, NAATI level and academic qualifications must all be considered.
6. While recognising that interpreter numbers will depend on student numbers and requirements, DET needs to ensure that at least some DET interpreters are on permanent (or at least long-term) contracts. One of the main reasons highly skilled interpreters currently leave DET is because of ongoing concerns about their future employment. In addition to this, highly skilled NAATI-accredited interpreters are highly sought after outside of the school system, with pay rates reflecting this situation. Pay scales within

DET need to at least approach external interpreting rates to prevent the continuing attrition of interpreters from the school system.

7. Signing students require accredited interpreters for all classes. This is not always the case at present. Students are sometimes prevented from accessing the curriculum due to funding constraints, and sometimes due to the belief that a student may become too reliant on the provision of interpreting services.
8. Signing students also require interpreters for some extra-curricular activities such as school-organised excursions and social activities, access to the student council, parent-teacher interviews where a student would normally be present, or school counsellor.
9. Parents who are deaf must also be provided with NAATI-accredited interpreters in their interactions with DET schools, such as parent-teacher interviews, especially as DET states that:

A priority of the NSW Department of Education and Training is to ensure that full access to information is available to all parents, carers and school community members.

Interpreting and translation services are provided for parents and carers who do not speak or understand English well and for deaf parents and carers who use sign language.¹
10. DET should work with the Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association to develop a set of guidelines for school interpreters (which would not be at odds with ASLIA's present Code of Ethics).

¹ <http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/adminsupport/intertranslate.php> accessed 18 February 2010.

11. These guidelines must include OHS parameters to ensure that school interpreters are not injured due to their work, and also to ensure that students are not disadvantaged by mentally and physically fatigued interpreters. School timetablers must factor these requirements into their timetables.

Funding issues:

1. The current level of funding is barely adequate at present, and will not be adequate to implement all recommendations and ensure students are able to successfully access their education. Levels of funding need to be substantially increased.
2. The financial load may be lightened if future deaf students who live relatively close to the one school and who will undertake some of the same classes are both willing and able to attend the same school. The advantage of this to the students is the availability of another language model, and a peer or peers that they are able to easily and directly communicate with. However, this obviously should not be mandatory, and parents should not feel pressured to decide on their child's school for the convenience of DET.
3. If deaf students attend a school other than their nearest in order to access more appropriate/specialised education, the School Student Special Transport Scheme (SSSTS) may need to be expanded to allow for student transport to and from school without extra expenses being incurred by parents.