

INQUIRY INTO POST SCHOOL DISABILITY PROGRAMS

Organisation: Wilson Park Public School

Name: Mrs Helen Rea

Position: Principal

Telephone:

Date Received: 04/03/2005

Subject:

Summary

Legislative Council
GENERAL PURPOSE
STANDING COMMITTEES

- 4 MAR 2005

RECEIVED

4th March 2005

The Honourable Patricia Forsythe MLC
Chairperson
Legislative Council
General Purposes Standing Committee No. 2
NSW Parliament House
Macquarie Street, SYDNEY 2000

Per fax no. 02 9230 3416

Attention: Mr Steven Reynolds

Dear Ms. Forsythe

**Re Submission to Inquiry into Post School Programs
for Young People with a disability**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this important area of education and social policy.

Please find attached our submission to the Committee's Inquiry.

As you will see from our submission our school has significant concerns about the adequacy of the funding and assessment methodologies for post school programs for young people with a disability.

We would welcome an opportunity to expand on the brief comments made in our submission, so I wish to formally invite the Committee to visit our school to meet teachers, parents and students likely to be affected by the recent changes to these programs.

We would appreciate your acknowledgement of our submission.

Yours sincerely



Mrs Helen Rea
Principal

Submission to
NSW Legislative Council
General Purposes Standing
Committee No. 2

Inquiry
into Post School programs for
young adults with a disability.

MARCH 2005

INTRODUCTION

Wilson Park Public School is a school for specific purposes catering for the educational needs of students with a disability from pre-school to Year 12.

An inclusive curriculum is provided for all students across key learning areas. Each student has an individual education program in which the priority activities are determined by the family and the school working together. In the secondary school an individual transition plan supports each student in the move from school to the community.

This submission has been prepared in association with classroom teachers, specialist staff based at WPPS and the school executive.

COMMENTS ON THE COMMITTEE'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

NB The Terms of Reference for Inquiry by the Legislative Council General Purposes Standing Committee No. 2 are numbered and shown in italics.

The Committee is to inquire into and report on the appropriateness of changes to post school programs for young adults with a disability, and in particular:

1. The program structure and policy framework including eligibility criteria for the new Transition to Work (TTW) and Community Participation Programs (CPP).

- Eligibility criteria for either TTW or CPP have changed over the years. Criteria need to be more appropriate for school leaver age group and DADHC needs to use existing information or assessment about the school leaver already held by schools and families.
- Assessment 'tool' (application form) used at present comes from aged care focus and is inappropriate (e.g daily living skills and behaviour questions) and difficult to apply to young adults
- The eligibility criteria for these post school programs disadvantage students with a disability who leave school early, because the criteria require applicants to be in Year 12. This criteria specifically discriminates against many students who will not continue to Year 12 because of their special needs.

2. The adequacy and appropriateness of funding arrangements for the new programs.

- Inadequate level of funding levels: people with high support needs require one to one support so funding gives only a few hours per week. This is a major reduction in their program time. Whereas people with low and middle level support who can be supported in 4 or more to one carer, are able to be supported for many more hours per week. Inverse outcome in that highest needs get lowest support.
- Anomaly in funding levels: TTW has \$16k and CPP \$14k
- People with high support needs are not valued. People appear to be only valued if they are believed to be able to enter workforce.
- Schools find transition planning for young people to isolated and limited support options difficult and frustrating. Professional partnership approach to date is undermined. Role of schools is to assist young people to participate in the wider community.

3. The role of advocates both individual and peak groups in the consultation process.

- In the lead up to reforms, there was extensive consultation with parents and schools re ATLAS reforms: this was in the context of a movement to improve and refine services.
- There was no consultation prior to the announcement on 8 July 2004 of major cuts and reductions in level of funding.
- The announcements came as a surprise to everyone, including those involved in the consultations.
- Advocates were compromised by the announced reforms effectively taking the program funding backwards, while all expectations had been for an improvement in program delivery and funding.

4. The impact of the exclusion of students enrolled or preparing to enrol in post secondary and higher education from eligibility for assistance under the new programs.

- If someone plans to pursue further study they are effectively disqualified from having their other support needs met because they are not eligible for funding.

5. The appropriateness of the assessment methodology used to identify school leavers support needs and to stream school leavers into the new programs.

- The assessment tool designed for 2003 school leavers by Wollongong University for the then ATLAS program is now being used for other programs that did not exist in 2003. This tool offers no opportunity for young people to select TTW or CPP.
- The assessment tool has been used inappropriately more recently to stream people with high needs into CPP and has denied young people the opportunity to choose to pursue work the TTW.

6. The adequacy of complaints and appeals mechanisms established in relation to the implementation of the new programs and particularly with respect to assessment decisions.

- Some families are being told there is no appeal process for the program allocated. Those allocated to CPP cannot appeal decision not to be admitted to TTW.
- There is no information provided to families about the mechanism for appeal. Best practice indicates it is appropriate to advise the processes for review of decisions.

7. Whether appropriate and sustainable further education and vocational training and employment outcomes for people with a disability are likely to be achieved as a result of these changes

- It is highly likely that school leavers with low support needs could achieve success as a result of the TTW program.
- How inclusive the community is in employing young people with a disability is a major issue and will affect the prospects for success of young people in TTW.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Standing Committee No. 2 is invited to travel to Lismore to meet students / clients and their families affected by the 'reforms'.

Wilson Park Public School invites Committee members to visit their school to meet students prospectively affected by 'reforms' and to discuss the issues with relevant staff and families.

Impact of funding reductions is disproportionately higher in rural and regional areas of NSW since young people's access to employment is already reduced.

Young people's isolation in rural and regional areas creates obstacles for community participation due to non-existent public transport and long distances for private transport.

Many families with young people with a disability are in low socio-economic groups and are unable to provide extensive private transport to access community programs, training and education opportunities.

In rural and regional areas where there is already high levels of unemployment, young people with a disability are less competitive in the marketplace seeking employment. 'Reforms' do nothing to improve their ability to compete for limited employment on offer.

Young people's choices are not valued by the outcomes of these 'reforms'

The potential and actual contributions of young people with disabilities are not valued by the attitudes that underpin the 'reforms'. The reforms do not seem to show support and respect of people with different abilities. The approach adopted appears quite contrary to the government's stated policy "*Don't diminish my ability*".

People with disabilities can miss out on much needed support because of the discontinuity between State and Commonwealth funding arrangements and programs. This includes issues of timing and eligibility.

Direct communications between schools with young people with disabilities and the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC) regarding post school programs need to be utilised. Schools could be supported by being directly advised of the outcomes for student applications into the post school programs.

Adequate communication with schools by DADHC is required regarding the timelines for applications into these programs. Schools need adequate lead in and planning time to undertake assessments and prepare applications. As at March 2005 DADHC has not advised schools on the process for applications into these programs for 2005.