

**Submission
No 148**

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

Name: Mr Bruce Donaldson

Date received: 17/02/2010

The General Purpose Standing Committee No2:
Parliament House Sydney.

“The provision of education to students with a disability or special needs”.

Attention :

Ms Robyn Parker MLC
Chair of General Purpose Standing Committee No2 :
Parliament House Sydney .

From :

Bruce Donaldson

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Father of a young person aged 17 years with Autism attending a Special School
Special Educator & Retired Principal of Special Schools and Mainstream School
University Supervisor of Special Education Teacher Trainees.
Volunteer with a Special School and P&C Ass.
Official Visitor with NSW Dept of Corrective Ser. Visiting Juvenile Detainees.
Official Community Visitor with NSW Ombudsman's Office visiting Children
and Young People in Out of Home Care .

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Introduction:

My professional background, experience and ongoing professional commitment provides me with a unique opportunity to see firsthand ‘ The provision of education to students with a disability or special needs’ . This opportunity ,to be engaged in the past and present special education environment , is spread over a wide variety of settings and therefore gives me a broad perspective of the level , quality and adequacy of provision of educational needs of students with a disability .

Addressing the Terms of Reference:

This submission would like to address the following:

- * The level and adequacy of current special education placements within the education system.
- *The adequacy of support services for children with a disability in mainstream settings.
- *The provision of a suitable curriculum for intellectually disabled and conduct disordered students.
- *Additional related matters.

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“The provision of education to students with a disability or special needs”.

*Comment Terms of Reference * The level and adequacy of current special education placements within the education system.*

The past and present provision of special education placements has always been determined by “State Budgets Provision”. The lack of funds for staffing and accommodation results in the creation of “waiting lists” of students who require a service or a special education placement in a class or school or support program. Therefore policy decisions, some of which were developed many years ago, are taken to create barriers which are used to reduce the number of students on waiting lists.

Examples:

*Size and classification of Special Schools: This actually restricts the number of students who can attend and be accommodated at a special school. Students not placed in this way are placed in “Support Classes” in regular schools which have a ceiling on the number of students per class. The cascading effect results in special needs students being placed on waiting lists and held in regular classes. Additionally policy prevents the creation of additional support classes until a prescribed number of students have been assessed and are on an eligibility waiting list.

Consequences:

This is one example of “Budget Restraints” and “Policy Barriers” (which are numerous) which results in a variety of special needs students failing to receive adequate education provision.

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Comment Terms of Reference *The adequacy of support services for children with a disability in mainstream settings.

The rationale for the placement and support of Students with a disability in mainstream settings is varied and complex, but in general it is based on the students level of disability and the type of educational and support services they require. Within a mainstream school environment there are generally three types of placements for special needs students via Support Classes, Regular classroom placement , with support services and regular classrooms with no services and no provision . The degree of support available is based on available resources and funding. It is considered that the students in support classes in mainstream settlings are well resourced and attract some support services on a needs basis. Special needs students in regular classes in mainstream schools attract support by “ funding submission” or from “ itinerant services”. At best funding submissions attract limited classroom support in the form of a part time Teacher’s Aide or some equipment , while “itinerant support services” provide limited program and small group lesson support for approximately one hour per week. Since the need is greater than available resources there are special needs students in mainstream environments who do not receive any support services.

Consequences :

*The placement of students with a disability or a special need, in mainstream school settlings requires intensive amounts of resource if the process is to achieve effective outcomes. Philosophically , integrated settlings are considered to be the best form of education for special needs students and the wider community , however to be successful such settlings must be adequately resources. There is a need to avoid ad hoc and one off pilot programs which only reach and support a limited number of students . The nature of intensive intervention, can achieve positive and effective outcomes, however the current model of “Itinerant Services” to support special needs students in mainstream schools is not cost effective.

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Comment Terms of Reference*The provision of a suitable curriculum for intellectually disabled and conduct disordered students.

Special Educators have a long history as innovators in providing learning opportunities and specific programs designed for students with disabilities. Programs such as “Work Experience”, “Life Skills” and “Special Olympics” as well as methods such as “Applied Behavioural Analysis” and “Reading Recover” have their original in programs designed to meet the educational needs of “students with a disability”. Currently there is available a large amount of research from University Based Studies as well as Technology based learning resources which are not being adopted into the special education classroom. With particular reference to technology and learning, the barriers appear to be both the cost of software and the professional training required to implement programs into the classroom.

Consequences:

Failure to adopt new teaching and learning strategies based on sound curriculum material places students in support classes at a further disadvantage. The nature of and the need for specific focus software and adapted equipment is an expensive process which needs to be weight up against other priority such has the need to provide additional human resources.

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Comment Terms of Reference *Additional related matters.

The NSW Disability Services Act 1993 lists the ten points containing “Disability Service Standards”. These standards are very relevant to the provision of education to students with a disability or a special need. Unfortunately these standards are not well recognised within Educational Settings (Both Public and Private). The application of these standards appears to be either ignored or avoided. The development of a greater understanding and application of these service standards by Schools, “NSW Dept of Education”, “Catholic Board of Education” and “The NSW Independent Schools Ass” would result in the provision of more effective and purposeful educational programs, facilities and resources for student with a disability. Additionally a recognition of the rights of students with a disability would reduce discriminatory practice and enhance the life of all students.

Examples and Consequences:

#Failure of Private Schools and other non-government schools to cater for the physical access of students with a disability.

#Policies and Processes adopted and adapted within both mainstream school environments and the special school environment, which confines and restricts special needs students to a specific recreational area within the playground, based on safety measures. The safety aspect of this type of policy is understood and acknowledged, however the process results in inappropriate fencing / gates / locks / doors and the reduction of area per person ratio.

#Implementation of Safety Policies, which require students with a disability to wear items of clothing such as hats, shirts, vests etc which are a different colour to that of mainstream students.

#The failure to enrol students with behavioural difficulties in alternative educational programs based on “risk assessments” which provide information and a rationale for a school to state that it does not have the resources to meet the needs of an individual student. The result is that these students do not attend school and are not engaged in any alternative educational programs.