

Submission  
No 397

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

**Name:** Ms Loretta and Mr Robert Heffernan

**Date received:** 23/02/2010

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Dear Beverly Duffy,

My Name is Loretta Heffernan, my husband Robert and I are the parents of a disabled young adult now, Gabrielle Anna Heffernan, who has been educated through the NSW public school system.

At the age of 7 years Gabrielle suffered two inter-cranial bleeds from an Arterial Ventricle Malformation (AVM) resulting in right sided paralysis, chronic fatigue, and brain injury. Her improvement over 11 years has been the result of her determination and also the support she has gained from family, teachers, disability support aides in the classroom, school counselling staff, community health personnel, private health and education practioners throughout this time.

From the beginning of this life changing experience it has been the collaboration which existed with health care providers and the schools that have supported Gabrielle's recovery and education. The organisations that were actively involved were The Children's Hospital Randwick Brain Injury Unit, Panania Primary School teachers and teacher aides, Bankstown Area Health Service initially.

In 2000 AD we moved to Tuncurry (Mid North Coast NSW) and here it was the collaboration again of the then Brain Injury Unit at Taree (this does not exist anymore), the Mid North Coast Area Health Service, Tuncurry Primary School teachers and teacher aides, Great Lakes Junior and Senior Campus Teachers and aides and School Counselors that ensured Gabrielle was able to attend school and pass the HSC in 2009. Gabrielle is currently enrolled in NSW TAFE studying CERT III in Children's Services with an aide in the TAFE classroom.

Throughout Gabrielle's schooling she has relied heavily on her teacher aide in the classroom. This was the person who reinforced learning but also offered a safe, caring presence when things got tough – which did happen at times. I have maintained communication with both school and health care professionals whenever there was any type of need and encouraged them to work together which in the majority of instances they were all more than happy to do so. Yours Sincerely,  
Loretta and Robert Heffernan