

**Submission
No 717**

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

Organisation: Department of Education, Government of Western Australia

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Government of Western Australia
Department of Education



Your ref :
Our ref : D10/0153665
Enquiries :

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 your letter dated 7 December 2009 inviting the Department of Education to provide a submission to the NSW Legislative Council's General Purpose Standing Committee into the provision for students with disabilities or special needs

I would like to thank the Committee Secretariat for arranging an extension. Please find attach the Department's submission.

Yours sincerely

MARGERY EVANS
DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL, SCHOOLS

19.3.10

Att.

**SUBMISSION TO NSW LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL'S GENERAL PURPOSE
STANDING COMMITTEE No 2
Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special
need**

This submission provides information specific to the Western Australian Department of Education. It does not address provisions for students with a disability or special educational needs in the other education sectors.

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

The Western Australian Department of Education provides supplementary targeted funding to public schools for students with disabilities. Supplementary funding is provided through *Schools Plus* Resourcing mechanism. In order to access supplementary targeted funding students must meet eligibility criteria for a specific disability categories: intellectual disability, global developmental delay, autism spectrum disorder, vision impairment, deaf and hard of hearing, severe mental health disorder, physical impairment and/or severe medical/health condition.

Approximately 3.0% of the student population in Western Australia meet the eligibility criteria for disability. The 2008-09 Annual report indicates that 7145 students with identified disabilities attracted supplementary funding through *Schools Plus*. These students are enrolled in local primary schools, local secondary schools or education support schools and centres.

The Department acknowledges national estimates that approximately 13 to 17% of the student population in public schools are at risk of not meeting national performance benchmarks and may benefit from additional support within the classroom. This rate is consistent with the NAPLAN results for Western Australian

public schools. A significant number of these students have special educational needs associated with learning disabilities or difficulties but are not eligible to access *Schools Plus* funding.

WA public schools have access to a variety of resources and support students with learning disabilities or difficulties, these include:

Statewide Specialist Services – these services provide support for students with disabilities and diverse learning needs through teams of visiting teachers and support officers working from the Centre for Inclusive Schooling (autism education service; assistive technology; learning difficulties, high support needs; resource library and specialist equipment), Hospital School Services, Speech and Language Service, Vision Education Service and the Western Australian Institute for Deaf Education.

School Psychology Service – provide student assessment and educational, social, emotional and behavioural advice and support for students and school staff. The service has grown in 2010 with the addition of an extra 50 school psychologists allocated over the next four years across the State to meet a recent election commitment.

School Support Programs Resource Allocation – as of 2010 schools which would normally be provided funding through various programs via the School Support Programs, will receive funding through a single school resource allocation. This will enable schools to make their own decisions about the use of this funding that will best meet the needs of their students. These capped resources are allocated to the school not individual students.

Independent Public Schools – the 2010 Independent Public Schools agenda allows schools to take greater responsibility for decision making at the local level. A one-line budget is provided to allow greater financial flexibility. New staffing arrangements will enable principals to develop staffing profiles that meet the needs of their student

population. This means that schools, with greater independence, can develop the right responses to meet the needs of their diverse range of students.

District based support – visiting teachers for generalist disabilities are located at the metropolitan and some rural district offices.

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.

Pathways to the Future: A Report of the Review of Educational Services for Students with Disabilities in Government Schools (2004) provided the Western Australian Department of Education with clear principles around inclusive education and informed improved best practice. The seven principles (providing access and participation; valuing diversity; ensuring local decisions and adjustments; providing a new framework for resource allocation; matching pedagogy with student needs; delivering responsive programs and services; collaborating for better outcomes) described the characteristics of an education system capable of delivering quality services and support for all students requiring teaching and learning adjustments. One of the actions from the review was the need for a fairer and efficient allocation of resources for students with disabilities.

As a consequence, the Department of Education developed *Schools Plus* as a mechanism that allocates funding resources to schools. This is a model of informed practice that matches the need for curriculum differentiation and personal educational needs to supplementary resource allocations for schools. *Schools Plus* links teaching and learning adjustments, services and support, professional learning and supplementary resourcing for schools.

Schools are eligible to receive support from *Schools Plus* when:

- the student meets the eligibility criteria for one or more of the indicated groups and significant levels of adjustments are required to support participation and achievement in schooling; **AND**
- a school decision making team considers that the nature, extent and range of planned adjustments for a student will be ongoing, are beyond the schools' current level of capacity, and have sufficient impact in the learning environment to require additional external funding to respond effectively to the student's special educational needs.

Schools Plus is nationally recognised as an evidence-based, rigorous, transparent and accountable funding mechanism. In 2009 the Department of Education reviewed *Schools Plus* and is currently progressing recommendations towards the development of a funding model which will reduce the workload for schools and increase the flexibility of resource deployment at a local level. The feedback from the review has indicated that there are many positive elements to the *Schools Plus* funding model. These include equity of resourcing for students and improved commitment from schools to provide appropriate teaching and learning adjustments.

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

Western Australia offers a range of provision in public schools for those students with a disability who experience significant delays in their ability to access the curriculum. The aim is to provide a continuum of support for students, with informed parent choice, to determine a students' placement.

The continuum of support includes:

1. local schools with small numbers of students with a disability who are educated alongside peers in a personalised or modified educational program to facilitate their participation and access to an appropriate curriculum;

2. individual local schools or a negotiated cluster of local schools with a large number of students with a disability are provided with additional human and financial resources in recognition of the increased organisational or management pressures associated with these students, the nature of the educational program is negotiated at a local level;
3. education support centres and schools offer students with a disability a more specialist educational program that is managed by an education support principal, the nature and extent of interaction with peers without a disability is negotiated between the education support facility and local schools; or
4. newly built schools which include special purpose buildings or facilities may, depending upon numbers of eligible students with a disability, have an additional administrator appointed with specific responsibility for the educational provision for these students, the school site has one principal.
5. placements are also available for youth in transition and pathways that signify the journeys they make from compulsory education through to independent adulthood. Pathways can include senior secondary education, vocational education and training, an apprenticeship or traineeship, higher education, community education, informal learning, volunteering, leisure and recreation, workplace experience, casual, part-time or full-time employment, and various combinations of the above.

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

Inclusion in Western Australian schools became synonymous with full time participation of students with intellectual disabilities in local schools. However there is a shift in the beliefs and practices of educational communities regarding the provision of services for all students. Inclusivity is not just for students with disabilities but for all students. A range of provision and services are available for students and parents

are encouraged to make an informed choice about where their child with a disability is schooled. As in any education system there are both good and poor examples of inclusive practice.

Integrated support services in mainstream settings in Western Australia are coordinated at either a local district or central level depending upon the nature of the need being addressed and the level of specialisation of service that is required to meet that need. There are early intervention approaches that mainly target students in the early years (pre-primary through to year 2) and those approaches that provide sustained services throughout schooling, to meet student need.

A range of supports and services, including specialist teachers with disability training, learning support coordinators and visiting teachers who can provide various levels of collegiate support, are available to enhance the capacity of teachers to effectively manage students with a range of needs. Statewide Specialist Services Teams and specialist psychological services and Behaviour Centres provide intensive planning and management assistance for educators and local support services.

The Department also has arrangements in place for external community based agencies, such as Therapy Focus and Rocky Bay, to provide a coordinated, therapy based intervention services for eligible students with a disability in metropolitan schools. In regional and remote areas these services are negotiated through local service providers or offered through visiting services.

Interested teachers are able to access a variety of Department sponsored professional learning programs that enhance their capacity and confidence in providing quality personalised educational provision with students with special educational needs.

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

Western Australia has not developed mandated, specific curriculum for students with an intellectual disability or a conduct disorder. The *Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 Education in Western Australia* sets out the knowledge, understandings, skills, values and attitudes that all students are expected to acquire.

Syllabus documents have been developed for each of the 8 learning areas across all Year levels. These are supported by more explicit instructional advice and comprehensive teacher resources. Teachers consider the educational needs and instructional targets for individual students with a disability in the context of their developmental needs and their class group.

A range of support services are available to schools needing to develop adjusted curricula for these students. The *Building Inclusive Classrooms* strategy provided 12 days of professional development for Learning Support Coordinators around the teaching and learning of students with disabilities. There are speech and language teams that provide school or individual student support around whole school planning and curriculum adjustment. Teachers in local mainstream schools may be provided with assistance from the specialist state wide Visiting Teacher teams to develop an individualised educational plan and suitable learning and teaching strategies. Eligible students are provided with specialised resources or equipment to facilitate their access to the curriculum. Students with a conduct disorder are generally provided with a structured behaviour management plan which complements their teaching and learning program. Four Specialist Behaviour School Psychologist provide support for schools with students with severe behavioural disorders.

The Department is currently adapting the United Kingdom's P Scales to ensure their relevance in the Western Australian context. This work will enable teachers of students with a significant intellectual disability to implement suitable assessment

strategies and make confident, comparable professional judgments regarding individual student progress and achievement. These materials will become available for teachers through the Department's portal during 2010.

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

A limited range of professional support services are accessible to students through their local school. These services and supports are provided to supplement those available through other Government Departments and private providers in the local community. School psychology services are accessible to all students from Kindergarten to Year 12. The services provided through the Department may consult with family members however the resource primarily provides an educational service that supports teachers to adopt effective classroom practices.

Students who are enrolled in education support centres and schools have access to therapy services. Students with disabilities in mainstream settings have limited access to these therapy services. When it is available the therapist usually consults with the teacher or education assistant rather than provide one on one therapy to the student.

If the family requires family-focussed interventions, other agencies, such as the Department of Health, Disability Services Commission, Therapy Focus, currently provide this function. These services and supports are independent of the education service providers.

There are some multi agency approaches that provide "joined up" support for families. Memorandums of Understanding exist between the Department of Education and Health; Disability Services Commission and the Child and Adolescent

Mental Health Service. These are improving student and family access to professional support and services.

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

The Department of Education actively promotes ongoing professional learning for its teachers to enhance their capacity to meet the needs of students including those with special needs. The Statewide Specialist Services Teams offer high quality tailored and accredited professional learning programs for teachers and education assistants that address specific educational strategies.

Current pre-service teacher training specifically in special needs and disabilities in WA is not compulsory and limited options exist for those undergraduates who wish to undertake a specific qualification in this area. Universities have each committed to providing a compulsory, introductory diversity awareness unit within the 4-year teacher training program. Post graduate options are available for those teachers with initial qualifications and experience.

Further information about Western Australian educational provision is available through:

<http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/annualreport/index.html>

<http://www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolsplus/detcms/portal/>