

Submission
No 310

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

Organisation: Warringah Council
Name: Mr Rob van den Blink
Position: Youth & Recreation Co-ordinator
Date received: 19/02/2010

To: General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2.

Re: Inadequate support for Out Of School Hours and Early Childhood Services

This submission on behalf of Warringah Council and other similar OOSH services admittedly falls somewhat outside the scope of the enquiry. However, I feel it is sufficiently important that the Inquiry look at the often ignored (as per this enquiry) issue of Out Of School Hours care services and Early Childhood services. Warringah Council operates 6 Vacation Care Services, which seek to integrate a high number of special needs children into the program. In fact the National Child Care Accreditation Council (NCCAC) standards, Department of Community Services (DoCS) regulations and Anti-Discrimination Act stipulate that we must accept and integrate special needs children into the programs.

However there is little support for the OOSH programs providing this valuable service to the community and families with children with disabilities. As there are approximately 10 weeks of school holidays each year it is often impossible or impractical for parents of special needs children to take enough time off work to be able to care for their offspring, and even if they can the additional stress on families frequently needs to be reduced by placing their child/ren in some form of care for even part of this time. This task then falls to the vacation care service in the area, and for other organisations and schools, the before and after school care service.

The level of support and importance of these services has been very undervalued and very under resourced considering the valuable role it plays. There is little funding available and there has been a cutback in support services in recent years.

The issues for OOSH services also apply to other early childhood services. Whilst the focus of the enquiry may be on school education, early identification and intervention reduces the levels of continuing support required i.e. later intervention, greater the cost. And the brain research supports early intervention.

The Inclusion Support Agency (ISA) is a federally-funded program, so this support (as inadequate as it is) is not even being provided by State Government. They support services, and not individual clients. Although services receive salary support for an additional staff member to facilitate inclusion, on our figures it is only about 50% of the real cost of the staff member. This is not available until processes, assessment, approval are completed. The ISA does a great job with the brief, funding and resources available. But it is simply not enough; the financial burden is being shifted to local government to provide adequate support in LDC and OOSH services through topping up of the 50% wage subsidy as well as having to carry out their own client assessments to ensure they are suitably placed within the service – a role previously carried out by Federally funded ISA services.

The Community Services Grants Program is pretty much all that services (including OOSH) receive from State Government, being salary subsidies to achieve inclusion targets, and not providing additional resources and support. This is nowhere near adequate.

I would urge that some consideration be given either by this enquiry or by a separate study to show the level of inadequate funding for the early childhood and OOSH type services so that some action can be taken to address this important issue.

Rob van den Blink

Youth & Recreation Co-ordinator

Warringah Council