

**Submission
No 499**

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

Name: Ms Tracey Burton

Date received: 25/02/2010

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

SUBMISSION

The Inquiry is requesting submissions from the public that address some or all of the following terms of reference. You are invited to detail your views, examples and recommendations for improvement in the spaces provided (*copy additional forms if more space is required*).

Please indicate if you would like your submission kept confidential.

NB: Not all terms of reference need be addressed.

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

As a parent of two children with a disability, I can honestly claim that funding for the education of children with a disability is totally inadequate. One child is in year 7 and has levels of literacy of an 8 year old not that of a 12 year old. No funding was available to him individually, because the small amount that was made available was shared between the class of 29 students so that he could be in a mainstream class (and the school seen as inclusive). The other son is in year 9 and the primary school constantly suspended for him for persistent disobedience (until he got a 'label'). This missed crucial building blocks in his learning and has taken him till year 9 to catch up on missed outcomes. The funding (because he had a bigger 'label') was also split between the teachers aid assisting all 29 students in the classroom (so the school could be seen as inclusive). As a high school teacher I am mortified that this is the current practise in the educational system. Most staff are ignorant to the inadequacy of funding for the education of children with a disability. They are also ignorant to disability, and to supporting students learning in a mainstream class without a 'label'. Label to some staff is a diagnosed disability or real disability as opposed to 'just a bad kid'.

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.

School counsellors, parents and or student's paediatrician/psychologist/psychiatrist combined with the classroom teachers of the student should make the decisions based on the disability and the student's functioning capacity. It should be needs based rather than the current practise of no diagnosis equals no funding which equals no support.

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

The level of adequacy available to special education places within the education system is minimal. My understanding is there are less than 50 places in a school of over 1000 students. I currently teach about 179 students. Of these approx 33 students clearly show characteristics and traits of having a disability. Out of these 5 have a diagnosis. The other 28 are affected in terms of learning outcomes and are failing to pass literacy and numeracy standards. They are in mainstream classes for all lessons. I do not have a teacher's aid in any of my classes. If that is not enough for the student with the disability, there is also the other students in the class room that have their learning compromised. This is due to classroom behaviour and a classroom teachers role to give one on one assistance to the students that require it. This is due to funding and no diagnosis and the student's falling into the category of being 'just a bad kid'. This is VERY PROBLEMATIC.

Students with a physical disability are recognised as requiring support, however students with mental health disabilities are not supported, unless they have a diagnosis and the diagnosis attracts funding. The student then may have a teacher's aid that will be shared among all students in the classroom to ensure the student with the disability is seen as being different.

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

As above.

It does not work. Inclusivity compromises the needs of the student with a disability as well as the majority of the mainstream classroom students. The complaints from students due to their lack of understanding and or ignorance are ongoing. Some students change classes and others go to a private school.

Students with a disability in mainstream classes are seen by some staff as a nuisance. This I believe is due to their inexperience to have empathy, or be able to teach them due to the attitude that 'I only signed up to teach able student's'. I currently ask for students with a disability or showing problems with learning to be in my classes. This is to ensure that they feel safe, are respected and ultimately learn.

At a recent school staff forum some staff laughed at descriptions of student's disabilities, others left commenting: So how do they expect us to accommodate them?

I attended the Special Education Forum at the St. Mary's Band Club on 16th February 2010.

However, there were 80 staff that could have attended and I was very disappointed that this represents the current attitudes among staff and the importance of special education, to them as teachers.

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

Students are expected to act 'able'. Students with conduct disorders remain permanently at the DP's office or on long term suspensions. This fails to integrate behaviour modification, counselling services, (which should be a mandatory part of returning from suspension) catching up on missed learning outcomes, and social competences. This solution also fails to take into the consideration of the parent working full time. In school suspensions as opposed to the student sent home to have some time off school, would isolate the student but not jeopardise access to school counselling services, social competences and missed learning outcomes.

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

School counsellors are decreasing and mental health is increasing.

School counsellors do not work full time at any school. This as a parent and a staff member is problematic due to it being impossible for staff, students or parents to build a professional relationship with one counsellor. This enables cognitive behaviour therapy to occur and relevant diagnostic evaluations to be conducted. If you get a different counsellor or Dr. each time you present with symptoms it makes it extremely difficult to be accurate with a diagnosis or consistent so that disability or mental health issues are resolved or referred.

As a parent my sons did a learning assessment at primary and were referred to their paediatrician for further assessment. I was able to do this and also had the financial ability to pay for the relevant services. However, some students do not even eat breakfast or bring a packed lunch. Some parents do not work, some parents do not drive. I understand there are concession cards but honestly the expert specialists accept cash up front usually \$175 and above for an initial consultation. I have paid in excess of \$10,000 because getting the right diagnosis is not only ongoing, but expensive. Therefore, there are so many obstacles in their way that they often do not follow up their child's disability. Also some parents have the same disability and do not recognise their child has a disability.

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

Pre service is 1 unit at university for a classroom teacher.

Professionally I have been continually attending professional training as a teacher and a parent. This is my third year at my school and to date no colleagues have attended any further training to my knowledge.

8. Any other related matters.

What price does Australia, as a society place on human rights?
What price does Australia, as a society place on a right to education?
What price does Australia, as a society place on human dignity?

When will we stop talking and address this injustice?

Name:

Date: 25/2/2010

(Please tick)

<input type="checkbox"/> Parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher
<input type="checkbox"/> Principal	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) Parent and teacher

If you are making a submission on behalf of an organisation, please indicate who has authorised it, for example, the executive committee, president or chairperson.

Organisation:

Authorised by:

Send your submission to:

The Director
General Purpose Standing
Committee No. 2
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Fax: (02) 9230 3416

Email: gpscno2@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Online: www.nswtf.org.au and click on
Special Education Inquiry