

**INQUIRY INTO STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR  
SPECIAL NEEDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES SCHOOLS**

**Organisation:** Mr Brett Holland

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As public school teachers and NSW Teachers Federation members we continue to campaign for the right of every student to receive a public education of the highest quality and for all students to become successful learners.

We are committed to equity and excellence for every student and in doing so assert, as was confirmed in The Review of Funding for Schooling (Gonski Review) that it costs more to deliver on these values for students with disability.

We will not stand by the currently inadequate provision of education to students with disability and the lifelong implications this inequity has.

The National Education Reform Agreement (NERA) and Australian Education Act 2013, acknowledge the requirement for, and commitment to additional funds for students with disability. The NSW government's unwavering commitment to the Gonski funding model paves the way for this investment to be realised.

We stand ready to work with our employer and NSW government in delivering equitable quality education but can only do so effectively when equipped with the necessary tools and supported by a system that is responsive to need.

We offer the following submission as an index of unmet need and a call for equity for every student.

#### **A) Equitable access to resources for students with a disability or special needs in regional and metropolitan areas.**

In the Tweed-Byron area, there is only 1 SSP for students experiencing disability (there is 1 other for students with behavioural disorders). Parents of students with disabilities are overwhelmingly choosing to have their children educated in fully mainstream settings. As such, we do not have the sort of expertise available in metropolitan areas. There are very few specialist teachers with appropriate postgraduate qualifications in specialised areas of special education. I hold a Grad Cert Ed Studies (ED/BD) and a M Autism Studies (as well as being the parent of a child with ASD) . Schools up here are struggling to cater for students on the spectrum in particular. We know these cases generate more complaints and "Ministerials" than any other cause. Yet our employer does not utilise my expertise to assist in this area. I (predominantly) teach students with learning difficulties in literacy and numeracy groups. The DoE spent \$13 000 for me to do my M Autism Studies, and X amount of money for me to study ED/BD students. As a taxpayer, I can see that this money has been very poorly spent. I now have expertise that could benefit more students and more schools, but I perceive that I am "tied" to servicing a single school in an area in which my qualifications are lower (a B Special Ed) and were achieved some 26 years ago. We also have an ageing teaching force, so many of my colleagues were trained without consideration of the presence of students with disabilities in their classrooms. Politically, we have 2 local National Party members. Their constituents (parents and public school teachers both) experience the daily struggle of service provision for students with disabilities, most of whom are enrolled in their local public school. The issues are not going to go away, they will only get bigger and more complex unless the DoE and state and federal governments address the equity issues involved in children with disabilities living in rural and regional areas. Without access to appropriate therapy services, our children with disabilities will not achieve their full potential, and will grow up to be more reliant on post-school support services than they would be if these services were available through our local public school networks.

**B) The impact of the Government's 'Every Student Every School' policy on the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in New South Wales public schools.**

Less students receive allocated funding support/ integration funding. It is too easy for schools to "top up" only a limited number of students who desperately need additional assistance. Schools are forced to "rob Peter to pay Paul" every single school day. Some very needy students receive no support at all. Classroom teachers are not adequately prepared or trained to provide differentiated curriculum and learning, and I know of only 1 other LaST who even knows what Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is. NSW is significantly behind other states in their preparation of and support for teachers to teach students with diverse and additional needs.

**C) Developments since the 2010 inquiry by General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs and the implementation of its recommendations.**

Schools are now expected to cater more effectively for a wider range of students. This enlarged expectation has not been matched with greater resources. We are, on a daily basis, being asked to "do more with less". It is not sustainable, and will lead to higher levels of stress, reduced teacher performance, less teacher time to focus on our more talented students, and ultimately more teachers leaving the profession and/or experiencing "burnout" and costing "the Crown" significant amounts in workers compensation payments.

**D) Complaint and review mechanisms within the school systems in New South Wales for parents and carers.**

As a teacher, I feel hamstrung in advocating for change and improvements for our most vulnerable students. As a parent, I feel that I am more able to advocate for my family and achieve the same change and improvements. As a parent, I have always been very grateful for the teachers, School Counsellors and Principals who have worked with me to cater for my child. However, I know that these outstanding professionals are overworked and under-resourced.

**E) Any other related matters.**

Our school is currently struggling with some students with very significant support needs due to disability and neurodiversity (ASD). My colleagues are doing the best that they possibly can within the resources that we currently have. It is heartbreaking to be a part of a system which is so obviously under-resourced to meet the needs of our most vulnerable and needy young people. It is equally disheartening to have to work with some great teachers who know that they are not able to do their very best because they do not have the resources and time to do their jobs to the best of their abilities.

Name Brett Holland

I am a Teacher

This email was sent from the NSW Teachers Federation website.