

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

Name: Ms Janine Agzarian

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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.

The Department's restructure has changed the nature of the work of the personnel involved with disability education (Learning and Wellbeing Coordinators, Advisors, and Officers) in all NSW Educational Offices. Since the Department's restructure, Learning and Wellbeing staff are 'desk bound', caught up in managing administrative processes for the majority of their work time. Prior to the restructure officers working in the disability and behaviour area would work in classes, in schools, with teachers and executive, enhancing the learning opportunities for students with disabilities and/or learning differences. Educational Service staff currently spend the majority of the time processing (and correcting) Integrated Funding Support (IFS) applications from schools, processing applications for placement in support classes for Placement Panels and managing parent complaints. On rare occasions they can attend student reviews and work with Learning and Support teams in schools. Available is a school Learning and Support team learning and evaluation tool but of 60 schools (in two networks space) only one school has taken up the offer this year. This is possibly due to teacher workload and the management of change. Opportunities for effective professional learning, particularly around trauma are limited, through opportunity, costing, teacher relief, teacher stress. Teachers often find it difficult to see the trauma behind the student's behaviour relying rather on the disability confirmation. This requires a new approach to disabilities through professional learning and the release of the desk bound disability office personnel to facilitate new learning. Students are presenting with complex needs. Schools require more professional learning which was traditionally provided by Educational Services staff. With the Department's new initiative requiring these officers having 'recent school based experience', these officers will be in positions for less than three years – barely enough time to develop the necessary skills.

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.

Every Student Every School was an initiative with great promise. It was couched in inclusive philosophy. What is occurring now however is 'exclusive practices' as evidenced by the massive growth in support classes, particularly Multicategorical (MC) classes. These classes are organised in different ways across the state: some house students who never integrate with the mainstream school, while others offer an integration model (true to the guidelines of the original MC class philosophy). However, the Department lacks a detailed set of guidelines as to how MC classes operate. There is a tendency for schools to apply for a class in order to remove 'troublesome' students from mainstream classes. There has never been an evaluation of MC classes that warrants the exceptional growth in establishment of such classes. Teachers and Educational Services staff were promised a series of modules to assist teachers with the implementation of ESES. Some were developed but the remaining 5 were not forthcoming. There is an over reliance on the Department's Online learning course to affect change, often delivered after school in teachers' own time. While the courses are good, they are designed for classroom teachers to manage students with disabilities in class. They are not designed for specialist work. Learning and Support teachers are often first year out teaching students with little or no training in the area. Some schools are known to use the Learning and Support teacher resource to create a class and/ or for extra release time – never the intention of the resource, but the system has no mechanism to challenge its misuse.

The over diagnosis/misdiagnosis of Out of Home Care students, who make up 60-70% of ED/BD placements have Post Traumatic Syndrome Disorder (PTSD) and not behavioural disorders. These students need supported inclusive education not exclusionary practices.

There is an over representation of Aboriginal students in behaviour schools. In some cases this has increased by 300%.

The special schools as centres of expertise was a worthy ESES initiative but in the rural setting the expertise has never been shared and/ or the remoteness makes it difficult to share knowledge. One behaviour school has an exciting transition project but requires the support of a director to initiate the conversations with school. Prior to the restructure, directors, as well as having a responsibility for schools, they also had a 'portfolio'. It appears that without that leadership many initiatives are lost. In the new structure Directors are not responsible for service delivery to schools.

The Networked Specialist Centre is a failed initiative. An evaluation of its effectiveness is an imperative. While the concept is good, the practice is poor.

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.

The NSW government's interpretation of the Gonski funding model has led to improvements in practice in many schools. Integrated Funding Support (IFS) processes are sound and schools receive money in a timely manner. The quality of school applications is sometimes of concern and Learning and Wellbeing Officers are often required to return applications and assist schools with rewriting applications. This could be overcome if more opportunities for professional learning were available.

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

Parent complaints emanating from schools are often managed by Learning and Wellbeing Officers in

local Educational Offices. These matters can cause some difficulty when school practices are poor and the parent's concerns are legitimate. Challenging school practice can leave Learning and Wellbeing officers vulnerable, unless they have the support of their supervisors or directors. The Complaint Handling Guidelines needs reviewing as the guidelines are open for interpretation, often at the expense of parents' concerns.

E) Any other related matters.

1. The allocation of an administration officer in each local Education Office would enable Learning and Wellbeing Coordinators, Advisors, Officers to be released of their administrative duties (data entry, funding applications, analysis etc.) and focus more productively on school practice and professional learning.
2. Students and teachers are entitled to a safe learning environment that is conducive to teaching and learning, and a school's authority to suspend plays an important role in this. However often schools reach for the quick fix of suspension for resolving disciplinary problems, particularly for students with mental health issues/diagnosis when the problems demand a more supportive response. Current research supports the notion that suspension serves as the road to incarceration – 'the school to prison pipeline'. Students are more likely to be suspended if they are socially and economically disadvantaged; in a cultural minority group; and male. It is argued that within 12 months of being suspended students are 50% more likely to engage in anti-social behaviour and 70% are more likely to engage in violent behaviour. Research shows a correlation between suspensions and low achievement and non-attendance. School suspension is a critical issue for all students including students with disabilities. Often school do not make 'adjustments' for suspensions given to students with disabilities as regulated by Departmental policy and the DDA.

Name Janine Agzarian

I am a Teacher