

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

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I am married and have 4 young children. Our son is 4.5yrs and has a *Global Developmental Disability*. My husband and I both work fulltime and rent a home in Sydney. We have chosen to live close to our work, schools and the hospital with easy access via car, public transport and walking within our community.

Please find below my submission and response to the recent '*Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in government and non-government schools in New South Wales*'

### **Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in government and non-government schools in New South Wales**

That General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3 inquire into and report on the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in government and non-government schools in New South Wales, and in particular:

#### **(a) equitable access to resources for students with a disability or special needs in regional and metropolitan areas**

Since learning of my son's challenges at the age of 11weeks, we have been active participants in the areas of the health, hospital and therapy interventions. For each of these areas we have faced a wondrous amount of emotional heartache as well as financial hardship.

The words '*equitable access*' cannot be applied to us. Each time we seek one of the above interventions we are filling out forms to prove his disability / health conditions, justifying the need for assistance and to only find out that many of these services are means tested.

Having resources means tested could potentially limit our access to intervention and our son's progress if we had limited funds. Considering we are active and supportive members of our community, pay considerable taxes and are then left to pay mostly full price for therapies and interventions etc. In turn we have restructured our lives so our sons needs are met and nourished.

Access to resources in our area is plentiful. **The cost of these services is also plentiful.** At no stage would I dismiss the earnings of a teacher, doctor or therapies as they are worth their weight in gold. For example - Speech and OT for my son –

- Private Speech -1 thirty minute session per week \$120 x 50weeks = \$6000
- 4<sup>th</sup> Year Student giving thirty minute session per week \$60 x 50weeks = \$3000
- With Benefits (medicare and private health) **total out of pocket = \$8150**
- Private OT - 1 thirty minute session per week \$90 x 50weeks = \$4500
- 4<sup>th</sup> Year Student giving thirty minute session per week \$60 x 50weeks = \$3000
- With Benefits (medicare and private health) **total out of pocket = \$6750**

The above is only for Speech and OT. We also have regular session for hydrotherapy, physio, an inclusion support teacher, regular doctor check ups etc which costs aren't considered above.

**(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**

After spending an extensive amount of time reading this policy it was clear to me that the services, expectations and future directions for catering for children with special needs is quite diverse between Public Schools and Catholic Schools.

Policies always look better on paper, however when put in practice it can be noted that there are still areas of development required.

I cannot speak based on experience in a Public School. I can share my experience in dealing with the Catholic System. Being an active member of the community regularly leads to parent chatter, opinions and rumours. My submission response is purely based on my experience and training.

Reading 'Every Student Every School' gave me the feeling of hope, the feeling of it. In practice, meetings, conversations and observations I have made, it is challenging for a parents to feel comforted in making a decision that is best for their child. Based on Article 26 from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – 3. Parents have the prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children, Even when our choice is decided on it is challenged, especially give the amount of time, effort and living adaptation parents make.

**(c) developments since the 2010 Upper House inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs and the implementation of its recommendations**

Information relevant to non-government schools mainly can be seen in the ADHC services and their action plan of providing therapy and behaviour support to school age children. I have not experienced this option in my planning and transition of my son to attend a Catholic School. It has not been explained to me the access of this plan.

This plan in hindsight it a great asset mainly to families who have not been as proactive in the early intervention of their child's needs. My son has been having all types of early intervention therapies since the age of 18months. Since then he has made improvements developmentally and mainly due to the positive rapport and relationship he has with his therapists. The most obvious and positive way to move forward would be to continue working with his therapists who he has built trust and confidence with. At present I have asked and am unsure if the school will allow them on the premises, or do I need to then switch therapists and use their recommended services.

**(d) complaint and review mechanisms within the school systems in New South Wales for parents and carers, and**

Given my current position of having my son yet to attend the school in the Catholic System would see my views regarding complaints only anticipation.

My complaints on the process of enrolment could be considered, as the enrolment process has been extensive, starting from when my son was 18months old. Having 2 older children already attending our intended school has allowed me to develop a relationship with staff, parents and parish community.

I have continuously kept the school and Catholic Education Office informed of my son's needs, his developments, diagnosis and therapy timetable. It is therefore why I feel deflated when told to explore my options. In response to this, I have contacted and touched base with the Department of Education and the Private Sector. After further meetings with the CEO I was once again recommended to explore our options. Reflecting on this I question... why do I need to when we have grown our family within this community.

My husband and I have chosen a Catholic Education and School for our family. We are Parishioners within our Church and have had all our children baptised and guided them with the Catholic and Gospel Values. Having these values instilled in our children is of such importance to us that I have opened a long day care service with these values embedded in the daily life and running of the centre. Our choice of education for our children is a Catholic Education.

I understand that there are differing governing bodies involved within the departments. I understand that the school may need to provide adaptations for children with special needs. I also understand our rights as parents and funding is provided for children with special needs.

**(e) any other related matters.**

- I have a background in education, not only experience but also training. I believe there should be a review on the delivery of *Teaching Courses* at a tertiary level. Special Needs and Children with a Disability should be a core subject and touched on each semester, not only will this benefit the children with these needs but also enhance neurotypical children.
- The fault in providing an education for children with special needs is not to fall on our regular mainstream classroom teachers. They are doing the best they can, however this is difficult to practice daily without the training and knowledge of how to educate and care for children with a diverse spectrum of needs.
- Lucky are the children whose advocates won't give up, the advocates who ask and research their conditions. I love to engage with therapists and doctors who are up to date with revolutionary practices, who are open to conversations and trails relating to their diet, brain development, health and well being.
- More avenues / courses for educators to be involved in learning about Mental Health and Anxiety in Children and taking a closer look at the benefits of Mindfulness and Meditation.
- Consideration towards the health and well being of parents of special needs children also should be addressed. Avenues, which are easily accessible for parents to attain in the specific areas of positive mental health avenues and also financial assistance. It was heartbreaking to have to again fill out and update my Centrelink Form. Heartbreaking not only because of the length of it, not only because I had to pay extra to get his paediatrician to complete a medical aspect but because it was a confronting reminder of the difficulties I am facing with my son.