

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

**Name:** Ms Kathy Dobinson

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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.**

##### **STUDENTS WHO NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORT INCLUDING ADJUSTMENTS**

Our LST meets fortnightly. Resources are allocated and change according to need.

Our school has given time so classroom teachers were able to participate in the OLT module Understanding ASD. We included an SLSO in our cohort. Class Teachers, Office staff and SLSOs have completed the Disability Modules.

##### **STUDENTS WHO NEED IN SCHOOL SPECIALIST SUPPORT**

Teachers regularly discuss students' needs informally and know how to refer students to the LST.

Timely access to support is possible as we have a full time LaST position.

I am an experienced LaST who was previously a DSTLA. I am also a tutor for OLT courses. I therefore have wide experience and know who to contact when we have students' needs to address. The professional judgement of Class teachers and SLSOs is valued.

We had new students come to our school during 2016 and we had to employ additional SLSOs. We were very fortunate to be able to engage some very capable SLSOs who were flexible in their work hours. It is very difficult for SLSOs when they are not permanent and their hours can change if students leave the school. They go above and beyond for our students.

Our School Counsellor had been at the school for 12 years. She knew the students, staff and parents. She worked incredibly hard! We have an allocation of 2 days per week, however the workload last year was high and we have many 'on the list' for the start of 2017 as she was not able to see all students referred. An issue is that when Counsellors are on leave they are not replaced. This includes Long Service Leave. If there is an urgent issue we can contact the Senior Psychologist, however testing and ongoing counselling is not covered.

##### **STUDENTS WHO NEED INTEGRATION FUNDING**

We have found there is a significant delay of up to 6 weeks between applications being sent in and finding out if funding is available. We use school funds to support students until funding is available

as the need is there. We were told Access Requests would go to State with a 2 week turn-around however this has not been our experience.

#### STUDENTS REQUIRING SUPPORT PLACEMENTS

Places are not always available. On two occasions students have moved to our area from a support class and there has been 'no placement' available! We have enrolled these students and used an alternate attendance plan. We felt that was very difficult for the family when the student, who had previously been on full enrolment, needed to have limited enrolment as in a mainstream setting we needed to see how he would cope.

We were told we could only apply for 20 hrs funding until Integration funding/placement was approved. In these cases Integration funding should be available immediately, we should not have had to wait for a panel to meet. There needs to be a way students, new to the area, can transfer smoothly from one setting to another.

We have also found a delay in finding the outcome of placement meetings. This used to be done within a week but now seems to take several weeks.

We have been asked to reassess the domain levels. Our counsellor had been involved as we determined the levels but we were told that the applications would not go through to state office until the levels were changed. In one case last year we had to follow up on an Access Request only to find we had not been told there was a problem and needed to change levels. That wasted 6 weeks!!

As so many staff are relieving in positions at Area Office there has been a lack of continuity. We need to find out who is relieving. This also impacts Access Requests as DGOs, APs of Hearing and Vision have to be included on ERN before we can allocate them a role, yet another job for our SAM or Principal.

#### SPECIALIST EQUIPMENT

Students with a hearing loss often have issues due to batteries/FM Microphones and equipment that their parents are responsible for. ISTHs try their best but they/we have no control if equipment does not come to school.

#### STUDENTS REQUIRING SUPPORT AND INTERVENTION FROM THE EDUCATIONAL SERVICES TEAM

Generally the team is supportive of the school however when we have questioned the appropriateness of a student in a mainstream setting when they have been in a support unit we have been reminded that under the DDA we must enrol the student, even though funding is not immediately available.

#### ADEQUATE RESOURCES

Our school has provided time for staff to meet with LaST to develop IEPs.

Most parents value what we do to support students. We don't please everyone!

We work with other agencies and provide speech therapy at school at no cost to parents. This all takes time.

These things are only possible as we are a larger school with an experienced LaST. We have an allocation of 1.1. I endeavour to know all students and work with all staff. Our SLSOs are fantastic. They go above and beyond as they care for our students in and out of the classroom.

Having SLSOs in our playground is essential to support those students who have difficulty socialising and need support and need to be taught how to play, have a structured group or an alternate venue available to them .

In my role, I work with students 1-1 and in small groups. I work collaboratively with class teachers, model lessons, provide professional advice and professional learning. I chair the Learning Support Team, timetable the SLSOs, organise casual relief for SLSOs, apply for funding and placement via Access Requests. Every time we have a change in attendance or new student requiring support, our SLSO timetables change. In Term 4 2016, that was fortnightly!! We have a Reading mentor program between our Year 6 students and Stage 1(Early Stage 1 are included in Semester 2). Playground buddies have also been set up to support the use of equipment in the playground. My role is valued in the school. As I am towards the end of my career and now working part time, the school has a succession plan in place so another staff member can be mentored to 'learn the role'.

We had an increased number of students brought to the Learning Support Team (95 students/ school

enrolment 409) in 2016. An increasing number of students need counselling as the separation of their families is impacting on their learning/socialisation. Anxiety is increasing. The number of students with a diagnosis of ASD has increased. Some receive funding, others don't, however parents believe diagnosis means funding. We have noted parents wanting this diagnosis before the age of six, so they can access funding outside the DoE.

Last year a student suffered a medical episode that caused vision impairment. He was going into Year 6. A lot of time was spent providing a safe environment eg Painted stairs and reflective tape on poles (not funded). There was an alternate attendance plan. We needed to liaise with his family, The Children's Hospital, Physiotherapists, Vision Australia etc. His transition to high school required numerous meetings. These events happen and schools just get on and deal with it, however it takes a lot of time that is not reflected in funding support.

With Out of Home Care students, and students where there are attendance issues etc, schools have to deal with complex needs that impact on the students in our care.

**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.**

We were the trial area so have been working under this policy since 2010. It is important for all schools to have access to a LaST allocation.

**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.**

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

**E) Any other related matters.**

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This email was sent from the NSW Teachers Federation website.