

**Submission
No 42**

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

Name:Name suppressed

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Submission

Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in Government and Non Government Schools in New South Wales

Name withheld by request

29 December 2016

[This submission is from a parents point of view, highlighting the lack of understanding of hidden disability in the NSW school system. It shows school systems are failing to identify hidden disability and failing to identify/acknowledge Gifted students with learning disabilities (GLD), known overseas as Twice Exceptional/ Dual Exceptionalities. It highlights a parents frustration with the school system, transparency, accountability and gives examples of some events faced in NSW schools]

Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	2
COMMENTS.....	4
OUR EXPERIENCE, SCHOOLS, BOSTES AND HSC DISABILITY ADJUSTMENTS	10
RECOMMENDATIONS	16
APPENDIX Attached to Submission.....	21
Appendix 1 – Examples of School issues.....	23
Appendix 2 – Extract of Letter to Hon Mr Piccoli re BOSTES HSC Disability adjustments.....	29
Appendix 3 – Copy of letter and completed form sent from School to UAC re Disability, email from principal, and Letter from Director	33
Appendix 4 – BOSTES Appeals guidelines and Principal response	36
Appendix 5 - BOSTES 10th declined decision letter.....	37
Appendix 6 - BOSTES communication with Australian Human Rights and Students Family	38
Appendix 7 - BOSTES guidelines obtained under GIPA Act 2013.....	39
Appendix 8 - Medical Practitioners who supplied assessments, reports and diagnosis. Information supplied to school/BOSTES for further evidence of disability for HSC Disability Adjustment appeals	39
Appendix 9 – Extracts of Medical Practitioners comments written in 2016 medical reports not taken into consideration by BOSTES/school for HSC Disability Adjustment appeal.....	41
Appendix 10 – Copies of BOSTES medical professionals reports in disapproving disability adjustment - Documents received under GIPA Act 2013.	45
Appendix 11 – Response received from Hon Adrian Piccoli following complaint to Hon Jihad Dib.....	48
Appendix 12 – Copy of some pages from a “naughty book” my son was forced to carry around in Primary School	52
Appendix 13 – Student signed a document at school but did not understand what he was signing - document stated he understood that he will not meet the eligibility requirements to complete Year 11 (Preliminary). This document was emailed to us with no explanation, heading just the documents and scanner details	57
Appendix 14 – Letter received from High School principal about perceived difficulties and not acknowledging NAPLAN was below School and State standard in Persuasive Writing.....	58
Appendix 15 – GLD websites, NSW school policies, Australian Government and documentation..	59
Appendix 16 – Extract from DEC 2004 Policy & Implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students – revised 2004 Support Package Identification – ISBN: 0731383443	61

29 December 2016

INTRODUCTION

I am a parent of two children, both of whom were schooled in regional NSW and have been medically diagnosed with “hidden” disabilities. Between my two children, they have diagnosis of Aspergers, ADHD, Specific Learning Disorder, Specific Learning Difficulties in reading comprehension and written expression, dyspraxia, slow working memory, anxiety, slow handwriting speed and physical handwriting difficulties due to hypermobility amongst other disabilities.

Both of my children have also been diagnosed as gifted, known by Department of Education and Communities (DEC) as Gifted with Learning Disabilities (GLD). GLD is known overseas as Twice Exceptional, Dual Exceptionality has been known about by DEC for many years (<https://schoolsequella.det.nsw.edu.au/file/c1498bd3-2044-48c7-9c3d-1e61fe0fed22/1/Gi-T-Identification.pdf>) and overseas for well over 30 years.

GLD students are rarely known about in Australian schools, if at all, although mentioned in DEC policies. When this terminology is brought to the attention of schools, teachers, Directors, BOSTES (or newly named entity, NSW Education Standards Authority) and other education providers, it is wrongly assumed that parents are trying to be elitist, parents do not know what they are talking about, the student doesn't have a disability; rather than seeing a parent trying to do their best to help their child, based upon medical recommendations, often obtained by parents because they know their child is struggling, needs help at school (and outside of school) but struggles in asking for help, even in the Senior years of High School.

Parents provide medical information to assist their child's school in understanding their child's disability and educational need. Schools ignoring GLD students and not acknowledging their disability nor intelligence, not providing recommended medical adjustments; makes students embarrassed about their disability, makes the student feel they are dumb and cannot learn, causes the student to not want to acknowledge their disability and makes the student feel uncomfortable in requesting the assistance they need at school to help them succeed, thereby creating further detriment to the student. Not providing assistance to GLD students creates problems at home and school often with students skipping classes, skipping school or dropping out of school all together due to an inappropriate curriculum and lack of disability adjustments for them at school. It creates distress and frustration not only for the student, but also for the family, because they can see their child's well-being is affected and no one is listening or trying to help, even with policies

of every student every school, these do not appear to be implemented for GLD students, as it is assumed because they are gifted they do not need help.

<https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/about-us/how-we-operate/national-partnerships-program/every-student-every-school/learning-and-support.pdf>

Because of the lack of acknowledgement of GLD students, lack of suitable programs for GLD students, this can and does create mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse for the student and can and does assist in the breakdown of the family unit. If medical recommendations were accepted and immediately put in place, the student would have had a better understanding and acceptance of their disability, acknowledgement of their needs and acceptance that they can learn and are not dumb, their well-being and mental health needs have then been assisted.

Parents try everything they can as recommended by medical professionals, attend therapies, go to Headspace, have their child involved in external activities, attend Geric programs in school holidays as recommended which their child is very happy to attend, but when parents advise schools of this, they are shunned for advocating for their child. Interestingly, the children are happy to attend these external educational programs even in school holidays, as they are with students similar to them and the work is pitched at a higher level, something that classrooms do not offer GLD students. Parents try their best to provide what they can for their GLD child but schools do refuse to acknowledge the students needs so the student misses out. Shouldn't schools be providing a suitable curriculum for GLD students also?

Some articles written on The Conversation and School News, describes the struggles GLD students face. The links to these are:-

- <https://theconversation.com/intellectually-gifted-students-often-have-learning-disabilities-37276>
- <http://www.school-news.com.au/education/should-gifted-students-go-to-a-separate-school/>

I have written this submission because I strongly feel that many students with hidden disabilities are not getting the assistance they need at school, that Schools, teachers, Directors, BOSTES and other education providers do not really understand hidden disabilities and the effect it has upon students well-being, school life, further education, job opportunities and family life.

COMMENTS

Education Providers/Authorities do not seem to understand that by refusing to acknowledge a student's disability or provide students with medically recommended disability adjustments or medically recommended educational needs; Education providers/authorities are setting students with disabilities up for failure and are creating further detriment to the student and not only at school. It creates further stress, confusion, and frustration for the student, not to mention what it does to families who thought they could trust the school system to help their child.

Education Providers/Authorities make it harder for students to accept their disability and ask for the assistance they need for fear of rejection or ridicule, again creating further disadvantage and making school a miserable place to be, causing some students to drop out of school. Education Providers/Authorities that do not understand hidden disability and GLD; that argue about whether the student has a disability, arguing whether the medical professionals' assessments are right, providing inappropriate disability adjustments or inappropriate remediation programs at school due to not understanding the student's disability and/or intelligence, create further issues for the student.

These actions from Education Providers/Authorities, place these students down a much longer path to access further education if at all, access university or access employment opportunities than a student without disability has to do.

Even though the education of students is supposed to be a partnership, there appears to be no partnership when GLD is mentioned and any information a parent provides from medical professionals is not used. No thought is given to the student's well-being, what parents experience at home because of school.

Ignoring GLD students in the education system creates many issues for them and their family; socially, emotionally, financially, educationally and is not helpful to their well-being or families trying to help their child. Ignoring these children can and does lead to a lifetime of issues for some students and their families. It can and does place a higher cost on the community, Government Services and families in the long term for example, mental health issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, suicide; educationally, trouble with the law, family breakdown being just some examples.

A disability is a disability whether it is a high IQ or low IQ. A disability does not discriminate; it is only the type of assistance given to students with disability that discriminates. The lack of assistance to students with disabilities, I believe is due to lack of understanding of disability and hidden disability, the disability does not meet a certain criteria for assistance at school, no funding, school autonomy, educators not wanting to know about another group of students, "we don't see your child like that" attitude, schools not believing

medical documentation, not enough staff, no training of staff about disability, school tired of parents advocating for their child and lack of understanding how disability adjustments assist students, often with the later, wrongly being considered by many teachers, BOSTES, and education providers as an unfair advantage, even when medically recommended.

If students with hidden disabilities needs were met from start of school, even preschool, there may be less need for Government Services and Intervention in years to come thereby saving taxpayer dollars and a better outcome for the student. It is not these students or families fault the student has a hidden disability, nor is it their families' fault what they have been diagnosed as such, nor is it the families fault what interventions have been recommended to be implemented for their child; these students also deserve an appropriate education and to have their needs supported at school.

A disability still affects the student, no matter whether it is a high IQ or low IQ, and it seems unreasonable and unjust that schools will only assist certain types of disabilities and completely ignore others, i.e. GLD students. Most schools, BOSTES and education providers wrongly assume because a student has a high IQ, they do not need to be given assistance as their intelligence will get them through or the student is being lazy and unmotivated not part of their disability. They do not understand the affects disability has on the student and the behaviours caused because of the disability. **All students with disabilities deserve and need assistance at school, not just those that are funded or have a lower IQ.**

Parents providing information and/or medical reports and documents to schools, BOSTES and education providers, these should be accepted unconditionally and parents should not be made uncomfortable for presenting them and requesting recommendations be implemented, even more so when there is very little cost involved to implement adjustments and assistance.

Education providers should not be trying to prove the medical reports are wrong, rather use the information provided to assist the student. The medical reports should not be hidden away in some filing cabinet because a school, BOSTES or education provider does not agree with what has been written and have their own agendas, **(school autonomy does create issues)** or it doesn't fit in with the schools funding plans. A parent has often taken a lot of time off work and spent money in providing these documents for the education providers, the student has been put through rigorous testing and to have these ignored it is inexcusable and schools/education providers should be held accountable in not using these. These documents provide valuable information to assist the school in helping their child with their disability. It is negligent that these medical documents are not being referred to in assisting the student. Education providers should be using medical documents immediately and not waste valuable educational time for the student.

No thought is given to the student and why the family have chosen to have their child externally tested, than within the school system. Parents knowing there is a problem and school cannot “see” it or want to “see it. Where is the education providers thought about the students’ well-being, parental choice and student/parental rights? How is it, NSW Government considers the education of a child is primarily the responsibility of the child’s parents, and when parents present information to schools they choose to ignore it, how is this helping the student and creating a partnership with the family?

Educational providers should be held accountable for implementing medical recommendations, but to date they do not appear to be held accountable to anyone. School Autonomy in acknowledging disability should not be left up to schools, because I do not believe there has been enough training of all staff to properly understand all types of disability, even more so when medical documentation is ignored.

Schools, BOSTES and education providers should be accepting of DEC, BOSTES, school policies, TAFE procedures, guidelines, code of conduct and disability laws. They should not be questioning medical documents just to weasel out of providing medical recommendations and disability adjustments to students. These documents should be available to all parents on the school/DEC/BOSTES websites.

Parents should be allowed to question school policies, procedures, guidelines, code of conduct and disability laws and have their questions and complaints responded to, not go around in circles never to be answered. Parents should be provided with school policies and documents when they request these, not continually be told policy is being rewritten or provided with some other excuse or the ignored completely. No family should have to apply under the GIPA 2013 Act to have information they requested supplied to them? How is this being transparent?

Schools, BOSTES and education providers should be aware of GLD students, as it is in their school policies, procedures and websites. Educators should be using this acronym as it does assist with understanding a student’s needs. Schools should be appreciative a parent has wanted to assist their child with their education and try to form a partnership, but all too often schools take it the wrong way when a parent provides this information; some taking offence that a parent has discovered disabilities and learning needs that the school has not picked up upon. Some schools then set out to disprove what has been written in medical reports, making life difficult for the student and their family over many years. Having been there it is not a pleasant way to live.

That said, teachers have many roles and many students to teach in a class room so often it is difficult to see an issue with a student, but teachers/principals should listen more to parents and learn from them also, rather than write them off as knowing nothing about their

children's disability, thinking that their medical professionals are wrong, that schools are the only experts in assessing students' needs.

As the NSW Education Act 1990 Section 4 Principles on which this Act is based
http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/ea1990104/s4.html state:-

“every child has the right to receive an education,

- (a) the education of a child is primarily the responsibility of the child's parents,*
- (b) it is the duty of the State to ensure that every child receives an education of the highest quality,*
- (c) the principal responsibility of the State in the education of children is the provision of public education”*

And Education Act 1990 Section 6 Objects for administration of this Act or of Education
http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/ea1990104/s6.html states:-

“(1) It is the intention of Parliament that every person concerned in the administration of this Act or of education for children of school-age in New South Wales is to have regard (as far as is practicable or appropriate) to the following objects:

- (a) assisting each child to achieve his or her educational potential,*
- (c) encouraging innovation and diversity within and among schools,*
- (d) provision of an education for children that gives them access to opportunities for further study, work or training,*
- (e) mitigating educational disadvantages arising from the child's gender or from geographic, economic, social, cultural, lingual or other causes,*
- (j) provision of opportunities to children with special abilities,*
- (k) provision of special educational assistance to children with disabilities,*
- (l) development of a teaching staff that is skilled, dedicated and professional,*
- (m) provision of opportunities for parents to participate in the education of their children*
- (n) provision of an education for children that promotes family and community values.”*

(1A) It is the intention of Parliament that the provision of courses of study required by this Act for the Higher School Certificate has the following objects:

- (a) to provide a curriculum structure that encourages students to complete secondary education,*

(b) to foster the intellectual, social and moral development of students, in particular by developing:

(i) their knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes in the fields of study they choose, and

(ii) their capacity to manage their own learning, and

(iii) their desire to continue learning in formal or informal settings after school, and

(iv) their capacity to work with others, and

(v) their respect for the cultural diversity of Australian society,

(c) to provide a flexible structure within which students can prepare for:

(i) further education and training, and

(ii) employment, and

(iii) full and active participation as members of the community,

AND

Australian Education Act 2013 – Preamble states

http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/aea2013210/preamble.html

“The Parliament of Australia acknowledges the following matters.

All students in all schools are entitled to an excellent education, allowing each student to reach his or her full potential so that he or she can succeed, achieve his or her aspirations, and contribute fully to his or her community, now and in the future.

The quality of a student's education should not be limited by where the student lives, the income of his or her family, the school he or she attends, or his or her personal circumstances.

The quality of education should not be limited by a school's location, particularly those schools in regional Australia.”

And Australian Education Act 2013 – Section 3 Objects of this Act

http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/aea2013210/s3.html

“Quality learning

(4) Australian schooling will provide a high quality educational experience with an environment and curriculum that supports all school students to reach their full potential.

Empowered school leadership

(5) Leaders in schools will have the resources, the skills, and greater power, to make decisions and implement strategies at the local level to obtain the best outcomes for their schools and school students.

Transparency and accountability

(6) Support will be provided to schools to find ways to improve continuously by:

(a) analysing and applying data on the educational outcomes of school students (including outcomes relating to the academic performance, attendance, behaviour and wellbeing of school students); and

(b) making schools more accountable to the community in relation to their performance and the performance of their school students.

Meeting student need

(8) Australian schooling will place the highest priority on:

(a) identifying and addressing the needs of school students, including barriers to learning and wellbeing; and

(b) providing additional support to school students who require it.”

Shouldn't the Australian Government support GLD students and advise schools, BOSTES and education providers they are required to meet GLD students' needs, train their educators about GLD students, given the NSW Education Act 1990, Australian Education Act 2013.

Also, the NSW code of conduct policy document https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/associated-documents/Code_guide.pdf states:-

page 4 stating “by accepting employment with DEC and TAFE NSW you must be aware of and comply with this code”

page 4 stating “therefore, you must:-

- i. engage in personal or professional conduct that upholds the reputation of the Department and TAFE NSW*
- ii. apply the Department's and TAFE NSW's policies and procedures*
- iii. act ethically and responsibly, and*
- iv. be accountable for your actions and decisions and*

page 6 *“as an employee, you should be aware of the DEC and TAFE NSW policies, procedures and delegation particularly those that apply to your workplace”*

OUR EXPERIENCE, SCHOOLS, BOSTES AND HSC DISABILITY ADJUSTMENTS

I will try not to make this sound like a complaint letter, but I also strongly feel what has happened to my family needs to be told. The truth needs to be told about what happens in schools, what BOSTES put students with disabilities and their families through in applying for disability adjustments, as many other families cannot tell their stories.

I do not ever want to see or hear of another family experiencing what we have in the school system because schools/BOSTES disbelieve medical diagnosis, refuse to acknowledge a student needs help, ostracise families for advocating for their child and will not implement medical recommendations to help the student unless a parent loudly complains to Disability Advocates, Australian Human Rights, NSW Ombudsman or NSW Anti-Discrimination Boards. It shouldn't be like this to get the help a student needs.

Thankfully my children have completed their schooling, but not without drama, with one son dropping out of Year 12 due to his disability, stress/anxiety, school not understanding or trying to work with him and/or his family. Interestingly, my son who dropped out of Year 12, completed a pathways to university course, is now attending university, albeit having to take a much longer route to get there, than a student without a disability would have to do, he is still experiencing difficulty and struggling to accept his disability.

Schools expect all students to remember what is told over assemblies, to record details in diaries of what they are told in class or are given notes to take home, not easy if you have disabilities of distraction, working memory etc. Not all information given out at school reaches the homes of students with disabilities, School websites do not contain all information and calendars do not always have information either. Because of schools belief of my son i.e. no disability, he (and others like him) unfairly missed out on school events, sports trials and other school information.

Schools wrongly interpret a parent is not interested in their child's education, it's a bit hard when you do not get the information. Families who advocate for their children are thought of as trouble makers and are left in the dark about what is happening at school and when parents ask their children, they do not know or remember details due to their hidden disability.

My sons' school wrote about helicopter parents in their school newsletter, along with other schools in our district, after I had mentioned to the principal that I often felt like a helicopter parent, because I often had to contact the school on behalf of my son as he didn't get all information needed. Imagine a school actually printing that; imagine how some parents of students with disabilities must feel, believing that they are not able to contact the school because they worry about what the school thinks of them.

My sons' school would not allow us any correspondence with my sons teachers, all correspondence had to go through the principal (I believe because I had gone to Australian Human Rights), often with us waiting several days before a response was provided even for information in regards to homework. Often we were advised that we would receive information as soon as practicable and follow up never received, with us having to continually follow up. I was constantly told my son had to ask for himself, I would have loved him to do this, but he forgot once he walked out the front door, even with me reminding him just before he left! Plus it was a struggle to get him out the door at times, as he did not want to be at school, a lot caused I believe because his disabilities made it difficult for him in some classes, but again this is not understood, but thought of as lazy and unmotivated but never asked what caused the lazy and unmotivation?

My youngest did complete the HSC but it was a very stressful time for him and our family, brought on I believe by a school system and BOSTES putting up unnecessary barriers, not being able to interpret new medical evidence and use old medical evidence, not interpreting their own policies, guidelines and procedures and disability laws and standards. Also not responding to questions asked after documentation was obtained under the GIPA Act 2013 in explaining their decision.

In applying for disability adjustments for the HSC, the same adjustments my son had been using at school since school provided these (after going to Australian Human Rights), BOSTES refused to acknowledge my sons new medical evidence preferring to rely upon their own interpretations of evidence, internal procedures, guidelines, own medical assessors who had not seen my son, resulting in us having 10 appeals for disability adjustments. During this stage my son developed Alopecia.

Imagine what this does to a student sitting their HSC, imagine their well-being.... Imagine how they felt being forced into continual further assessment, continual questioning of his disability, continual moving of goalposts and no reasonable explanation provided why his

usual disability adjustments were continually being refused, even when medical practitioners wrote extra supporting letters. One medical practitioner refused to write another letter, rightly so claiming it was all in his letter and completed BOSTES form, plus it was wasting his time also.

I approached my medical practitioner, who does not see my children, to see if they would write a report for BOSTES, using the current medical evidence, but they advised they were unable to do so as they had not physically seen my son. So how can BOSTES medical professionals advise recommendations for disability adjustments if they have not seen my son either?

Interestingly students and parents have to provide all information for BOSTES, but BOSTES cannot or will not advise what qualifications their medical assessors have and if they are qualified to make these decisions. They will not even provide copies of documents their medical assessors advise, even when it is about your child, unless it is requested under the GIPA 2013 Act, even then the documentation received is blackened out.

It appears that BOSTES were choosing not to acknowledge any of my sons medical reports and were looking for the magic words, labels etc. in one report, and not reading and taking all reports into consideration to give the overall big picture of my sons disability. Plus BOSTES had medical evidence dated back from 2003 stating the same disabilities.

My sons' school lodged the original application for him, but any subsequent appeals, my sons' school refused to follow BOSTES procedures and guidelines and write further appeal documentation about new evidence supplied – stating to us it was written in the reports. His school just attached new evidence, sent it to BOSTES and that was it.

The Director Public Schools was contacted and she advised by letter the school was doing the correct thing even though again I questioned schools response, BOSTES guidelines and procedures and it advised it stated differently on BOSTES guidelines for schools.

Parents cannot discuss or question policy, procedures and laws with schools or BOSTES. Schools and BOSTES will not give an answer to questions asked or if they do respond the response is only half answered. This needs to change.

Why should families be forced to accept no answer or no proper explanations from schools and BOSTES? Why do your complaints go around in circles and are never answered? Schools and BOSTES are providing government services and all other government departments are required to respond to questions asked. It is not good enough a school/BOSTES can advise the matter is closed when questions still remain unanswered.

Why aren't school leaders who are applying the policies, guidelines and laws not accountable for answering questions? If they don't know answers, admit it to parents, find out, keep parents in the loop and answer the question, like other government departments and professions have to. Why are schools treated so differently?

BOSTES gradually gave my son some disability adjustments with each appeal, but they chose what he could have, not what he was used to using, but not before complaining to our disability advocate, NSW Ombudsman and Australian Human Rights was the first adjustment ever approved. Even doing that BOSTES did not follow their own advice they told Australian Human Rights, Disability Advocates and our family via email.

BOSTES expected my son to learn to use a scribe when medical evidence advised differently and gave reasons why. A scribe being something not even seen in a workplace, why put a student with a disability under further stress, frustration to learn something he will never use again, waste teacher time training the student who would need to be removed from class to learn to use a scribe, waste of tax payer dollars that could be spent better elsewhere than to sit for set of HSC exams. That is not reasonable and does not make any sense. Why does an education providers choose a students disability adjustment, why doesn't the student get a say in what they want to use, why how can schools/BOSTES override medical recommendations that a student needs? That does not happen in the workplace, people choose what works for them and employers do not care as long as the job gets done.

BOSTES seem to continually want to put conditions upon students before they can access disability adjustments, even when medical evidence advises BOSTES reasons for disability adjustments. BOSTES appear to prefer to have a win over a student requesting disability adjustments, than to assist the student with a disability. How is removing a students usual disability adjustments, allowing a student to do his best in an exam and sit an exam independently. Is this following Disability laws and standards?

I wonder how BOSTES/schools and education providers have the authority to over ride medical evidence provided by Speech Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Paediatricians and Clinical Psychologists, when they don't see the student, refusing adjustments under the guise of "fairness" to all students? One has to ask, is it fair a student has a disability and his usual adjustments have been removed?

BOSTES gave reasons for declining requested adjustments of, reading test outside the BOSTES guidelines – question we asked, how can a child's reading comprehension be in the 4th percentile, a lifelong specific learning difficulty in reading comprehension and written expression be outside BOSTES guidelines?

BOSTES advised my son had sufficient time to learn to use a writer, medical evidence advised it takes years to be proficient in using one of these. My son was advised he needed a clinical diagnosis of an anxiety disorder from an appropriately qualified health professional or evidence that demonstrates the student is unable to dictate to a writer, in order to use a computer. Why does he need a diagnosis of anxiety? His handwriting speed, physical pain and email from BOSTES showed what was required for this adjustment, which BOSTES had the evidence supplied. Is Speech Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Paediatricians and Clinical Psychologist not considered to be appropriate medical professional? How do parents know BOSTES medical professionals are appropriate when they will not provide information when requested?

My son also has a working memory in 5th percentile, handwriting speed 9th percentile, pain with handwriting and lifelong specific learning disorder, specific learning difficulties of reading comprehension and written expression. Surely a person who works in disability services should be able to understand that with my sons' disabilities, using a scribe would be difficult for a student with these disabilities? Who does BOSTES consider to be a "qualified" health professional? Are my sons medical professionals not qualified?, I'm sure my sons' medical professionals would appreciate knowing that! Is it BOSTES role to cause further stress and frustration to students who are already placed at a disadvantage?

It makes you wonder what training BOSTES staff and schools really have in disability services. Yes medical assessments can and do come out as average overall, making a student appear there is no disability, but when you interpret testing properly and view the subtest scores, you can clearly see when a student has High/Superior ability in some areas, and disabling abilities in other areas. This creates a lot of frustration for these students at school and this is why they too need assistance. I am not an educator, I understand this, but our schools and BOSTES do not appear to want to listen to parents or medical professionals, we know nothing, even when providing cited documents and websites for them to do their own research.

Transparency with in the school system is appalling.

Schools did not identify either of my children's disabilities (nor gifted) and when given medical documentation, we were brushed off with being told we don't see your child (ren) like that and next to no help was provided for them in the school system, not from lack of advocating for them and trying to get help from inside a school system that is not transparent.

I believe the reason my children were not identified at school to have hidden disabilities, was because for a long time at school they managed to use their intelligence to cover a lot for their disabilities during primary school (except handwriting), teachers saw no issues as they

were passing, even though we questioned and advised the difficulties our children were having at home. It was not until they reached High School their disabilities became much more noticeable and troublesome, and then our children were very embarrassed to ask for assistance for fear of being perceived as “dumb”.

High School requires organisation skills, many class changes, different teachers, many more students than primary school; but for children with attention issues, handwriting difficulties, learning disabilities, written expression difficulties, anxiety, self-esteem issues, being embarrassed to ask questions in class, not answer questions in class because they forget the question when asked, teachers not understanding these childrens disabilities, teachers thinking of them as lazy and unmotivated, no help received in the classrooms makes school life a very miserable place to be.

Teachers never saw or understood my son’s disabilities or understood he really did want to learn but he always felt he wasn’t being taught properly at school. Most likely not taught how he learns best.

My son attended external tutoring, something he requested, as he did not feel comfortable accessing the school homework classes held at lunchtime and after school. His actions of not going to the homework room or asking for help, were seen as no motivation or not wanting to learn which again showed no understanding of my sons disability or a school system willing to listen to a parent explaining their childs needs.

Schools continually tell parents the student must ask for help and this creates stress for the student and family. This has to cease, and the student be assisted as the parent requests, as it is not helping the student but creating more stress and anxiety for the student. It needs to be understood that this is the students’ disability that is causing the problem. Is it any wonder children skip classes, do not attend school, have behaviour and mental health issues and some eventually dropping out of school?

For my children to have their medically recommended disability adjustments implemented at school, I had to find a disability advocate and fight for these adjustments. No parent wants to or should have to go to Australian Human Rights, NSW Ombudsman, NSW Anti-Discrimination Boards to have medically recommended disability adjustments given to their child; disability adjustments that were not expensive and were simple for schools to implement.

Schools and BOSTES seem to be of the opinion that Medical Practitioners, Speech Pathologists, Clinical Psychologists, Occupational Therapists etc., their medical assessments of students are incorrect, that parents can pay many medical professionals to write their child has a disability and requires assistance. In reality how many medical

professionals are going to put their careers on the line for one student and their family? This train of thought needs to change and schools need to use the medical documents provided by families, not just file them away never to be used again often parents having to resubmit to schools on many occasions to again explain their child's needs. Also teachers need to stop seeing disability adjustments as an unfair advantage to students with disabilities.

I believe what is happening to students with hidden disability and what has happened to my children is unethical and is not a school system trying to work with parents to get the best outcome for the student. No student and their families should go through a system that does not value them, does not want to understand them or listen to their parents' pleas for help for their child.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- An external Australian Disability Department for parents, teacher, BOSTES, medical professionals to refer to for advice on disabilities, disability adjustments, disability laws and standards. This should include a website. For this Disability department to be able to tell BOSTES/Schools what they must do for students. Parents should not have to go to continually complain to get what their child needs nor should they have to go to Australian Human Rights, NSW Anti-Discrimination Board and NSW Ombudsman. It could also be used in other community sectors, not just education, but employment, local government etc.
- Remove school autonomy for students with disabilities, so all students with disabilities receive the assistance they need. Allow the external disability department to have input and keep copies of all of the student's disability documentation, that way information is held in the one place and if the student changes schools the information "travels" with them. Schools /parents/professionals should be able to access this information also.
- Mandatory Annual teacher/BOSTES training for disability and disability adjustments, similar to child protection, fire/bomb, security training and a record kept. Could be done online yearly.
- Understand that some students struggle with accepting their disability, they do not like to be acknowledged as having a disability and feel even worse if on the odd occasions they are offered disability adjustments, rather than being required to ask for them a teacher states loudly in front of the classroom "Do you want your disability adjustments". Sometimes it is much easier for the student to say no to save embarrassment or to save-face, schools then interpret that as well he mustn't really need the adjustments so why should we continue to provide them as he isn't using them.
- Cease schools/DEC and BOSTES from wasting tax payer dollars in employing lawyers to fight families so they can try and weasel out of providing disability

adjustments for students. Cease schools/DEC getting lawyers drawing up deeds and forcing parents to sign documents before they will provide students with disability adjustments parents will not discuss their child's disability cases.

- When parents go to Human Rights for conciliation with schools/DEC, parents usually have a disability advocate whereas BOSTES/DEC/Schools employ lawyers. How is this helping a student with their education? Imagine how the student feels with parents having to continually fight to get what they need in a school system. How fair is this on the students and the working family.
- Teachers to accept that sometimes it is the students' disability that prevents them from asking for what they need even in High School. Students/Parents should not be told the student can only have their disability adjustments if they ask for them. Even in High School a student's disability still affects students. It is not the student's fault they do not feel comfortable in asking for disability adjustments.
- Teachers/BOSTES need to understand "smart kids" (GLD) can have disabilities and they also need help in the school system not be ignored. Mandatory teacher training should be provided so teachers are aware that these students exist as per DEC code of conduct, policies and guidelines.
- Cease educators forcing students to carry behaviour books from class to class – some of these students can read what is written and it does nothing to help the student's self-esteem.
- Believe parents when they advise the difficulties their child has, that their child is genuinely upset about not knowing what to do and feels as if he is not being taught properly.
- Teachers aid in all classrooms would be helpful, but should be mandatory in English as this is required for communication.
- Teacher/BOSTES to understand how disability adjustments work for the student, why they have been recommended by professionals and **DISABILITY ADJUSTMENTS ARE NOT AN UNFAIR ADVANTAGE for the student.**
- BOSTES/Schools to advise what is considered an appropriately qualified health professional and this is to be recorded on schools and BOSTES websites and new Australian Disability Website if one is started up.
- Teacher/BOSTES to provide better communication to parents of students with disabilities and be transparent in their actions
- Teacher/BOSTES to respond to all communication within an appropriate timeframe and to respond to **all** questions asked, not half answer or ignore the hard questions.

- Teachers/BOSTES need to understand how to interpret their own policies, procedures when using Government Acts and understand all disabilities when implementing and removing disability adjustments.
- Schools to email details of disability applications sent to BOSTES for HSC Disability Adjustments and BOSTES to email decisions directly to both schools and parents. Schools are to email all correspondence and not slow up the process by posting decisions externally via Australia Post. (i.e. can make the appeal outside the 14 days). Yes this happened to us.
- Teachers/BOSTES to cease expecting a “diagnosis” before disability adjustments are provided and to be able to read medical professional reports, or make contact with medical professionals and try to help the student, not try to disprove what the medical professional has written in the name of “fairness”. Any disability is a disadvantage and should be assisted.
- Medically recommended Disability adjustments should be implemented and schools/teachers/BOSTES/education providers are to cease forming their own opinions over medical professionals reports and recommendations, both can be right. Help the student.
- Allow schools/BOSTES/education providers to use old medical reports and assessments, interpret what has been said, speak with parents and medical professionals, especially when the disability is not going to change, save costs for parents, less stress for students, saves further pull out of classes for students, and saves tax payer dollars. Proper explanations to be provided by BOSTES. Students get tired of being continually tested for disability. No consideration is given to students’ well-being.
- Teachers to cease being vindictive because parents have been advocating for them for so long (although schools say this does not happen – it does)
- Cease continual testing and medical evidence for students who have a long term conditions, understand that students get very tired of all the appointments as often they are doing these on top of a school day, not to mention many years of remedial therapies
- Change processes for HSC Disability Adjustments, involve family members properly and medical professionals, not just Schools/BOSTES.
- Allow Students with disabilities to choose which disability adjustments work for them, not a system decides what disability adjustment works for them. Allow all students to use whatever they need to sit an exam be it pen, computer, scribe or coloured paper. That way there is no unfair advantage.
- Students need to have their disabilities known about before starting school with appropriate screening in place for all students prior to starting school. Looking back now, knowing what I do, if the school psychologist who assessed my son prior to

starting school looked at the discrepancies in subtests on his WISC it should have prompted further questioning of his abilities and disabilities, as it was not it wasted many years struggle for my son and what small assistance was received being delayed.

- For parents of students with disabilities to be allowed to attend “suspension meetings” and/or any meetings in Years 11/12 and for schools to accept that students with disabilities will sometimes say anything just to leave the situation possibly due to their anxiety or misunderstanding what has been said due to language disorders or working memory issues.

Schools often think these students are being non complaint when they struggle to answer questions, don't want to answer questions or don't answer immediately, not realising there is a hidden disability preventing the student from expressing his point of view.

- For schools, BOSTES and education providers to be held accountable to provide the services for students that they advertise in their brochures, websites and propaganda for students with disabilities. For parents to be able to question these documents, through an external agency, not school/BOSTES or Government related. Something similar to Financial Services Ombudsman, Telecommunications Ombudsman so families are not told by government departments that they can only look at certain areas of a complaint, someone who can tell schools and education providers what they should be doing, so as not to hold up the process of students with disability obtaining what they need at school.
- Confirmation of what the NSW and Australian Government considers BOSTES (or NSW Education Standards Authority) to be i.e. an education provider, educational authority under both NSW and Australian Laws and how they fit into the Disability Definitions to cease schools/BOSTES and education providers from arguing that they are not an education provider, or education authority so they can weasel out of providing disability adjustments.
- Schools/BOSTES to acknowledge Gifted Students with Learning Disabilities and provide an appropriate curriculum for them

Attached an appendix of what we have experienced in schools. Also there are copies of letters and emails in regards to the hoops, difficulties and barriers that BOSTES and schools have put us through to access disability adjustments.

What some schools do to students with a disability, it makes a mockery of Every student every school, Disability Discrimination Laws and Standards, both Federal and State and other laws that schools/BOSTES/education providers should be following. It appears all of these are just lip service for GLD students in the NSW school system and I know there are issues Australia wide, and similar things have happened to other GLD students.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to make a submission. I sincerely hope that there is a huge change in our school system for students with hidden disabilities. Our experience is minor in comparison to other issues, but my children's well-being and education has been affected by the current school system, ignorance of hidden disability, ignorance of GLD and ignorance of disability laws and standards.