

**Submission
No 65**

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

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Date received: 15 February 2017



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.

I am special education head teacher who manages a 5 class ED support Unit which is attached to a mainstream high school. The unit is 7 kms from the main school campus and caters for students with complex behaviour and learning needs. All students have diagnosed mental health issues and significant part of the student case load have secondary disabilities such mild and moderate intellectual disabilities or autism. There are also significant parts of the student population who are Aboriginal, live in Out of Home Care and about 25% are active young offenders some of whom spend periods of the year in juvenile detention. Despite its size, the Unit is staffed in the same manner as an onsite unit, managed by myself, a head teacher with 6 teaching staff and 5 SLSOs. We have no clerical support and currently the school counsellor allocation must come from the allocation at our base school. Any on-going funding comes from the base school's RAM and from annual submission to programs such as Link Support and School to Work. Our base school is supportive and gives what it can but funding is always tightly managed leaving little for major building improvements. Students have no access to specialty facilities such as art rooms, kitchens and workshops. There is one large domestic kitchen which was funded by a local NGO. This year, early Access to TVET courses at TAFE for our Year 10 students has been discontinued. Also from 2014, student access to Distance Education, which had been in place since 2002 and was a valuable resource allowing our students to be co-taught by KLA specialist teachers across KLAs, has been restricted to 4 subjects per student per annum in Stage 4 & 5. I feel this decision is at odds with the DoE's Disability Action Plan. I feel our students are some of the most disadvantaged in NSW, given their social disadvantage and trauma backgrounds. They are also disadvantaged in terms of access to resources, particularly since the status of our setting (secondary support unit) does not provide the same facilities, funding and staff support which would be available in a similar size Behaviour SSP. Also, one of the main barriers to success for our students is transport to school. Several are making a 40km round trips to school each day on public transport. For these students attendance can be sporadic and the trip to and from

school is fraught with social problems and anxiety. The guidelines for Assisted School Travel do not recognise the unique needs of our type of students. Individual students may have the skills to be able to travel independently, but do not travel successfully due to their social and behaviour problems. I think this difficulty should be recognised as a category in evaluation an ED student's eligibility.

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 has brought no extra resources to our setting but I think it has been beneficial on the main school campus. The online training in aspects of disability and learning difficulties has been very useful to LASTs and other special education staff as well as raising all staff awareness of the special learning needs of individual students.

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.

Positive outcomes have been: - the ESES initiative ensuring that there a specialist teachers in every school - online training opportunities for teachers - increased training and accountability for mainstream teachers to understand and support students with disabilities - increased understanding by all teachers of students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

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

On the whole. I believe DoE complaint mechanisms are fair and transparent. The annual student review process for all support classes ensure parents are active stakeholders in their student's learning and transition plans. My parent body which includes parents, carers and reps from NGOs are very happy with the processes we have in place for handling complaints and reviewing student progress.

E) Any other related matters.

Currently there is much inequity in how support units in schools are funded across my local area. I am part of an active, local special education network and I am aware that there are huge disparities in how these units are funded according to the discretion of the school principal. This means that there is huge inequities across schools as to the funds available to provide quality learning programs for student with disabilities in high school support units. This very much depends on the integrity and interest of the individual principal. Also, in my unit's case, students referred to my unit mid year do not bring any Aboriginal or low SES RAM with them as they remain dual enrolled at their base school. My principal has to write to the base school principal to ask that funds be released to support distance education. I think it would be far more equitable to have the same per capita tied annual funding grant which follows the student to the new school. Some funding should follow a student that student leaves, I would suggest 100% in Term 1, 75% in Term 2, 50% in Term 3, 25% in Term 4.

Name Robyn Christofides

I am a Teacher

This email was sent from the NSW Teachers Federation website.