

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

Name: NSW Secondary Principals' Council

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NSW SECONDARY PRINCIPALS' COUNCIL

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

The NSW Secondary Principal Council continues to support the right of every student to receive the highest quality education and for all students to become successful life-long learners. It is also important to note that it requires more resources, both human and non-human, to deliver on these values for students with a disability or special needs.

Both 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 commitment to the Gonski funding model is and continues to be imperative for this to be fully realised.

The NSWSPC offers the following submission in response to the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3 terms of reference.

a) Equitable access to resources for students with a disability or special needs in regional and metropolitan areas

NSWSPC members are aware of the requirements under the Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and the associated Disability Standards for Education (2005), to ensure that every student with a disability is able to access and participate in education on the same basis as students without disability. This includes requirements to make reasonable adjustments to the student's learning program and/or environment based on their assessed individual needs, and for students and their parents and carers to be consulted about the adjustments that will be provided.

It is understood that students whose disabilities and/or special needs require 'extra' support, provide a diverse, complex and unique range of difficulties that can only be addressed adequately on a case-by-case basis.

Under the Department of Education's Resource Allocation Model (RAM), the equity funding for low level adjustment for disability provided all mainstream NSW public schools with access to a specialist teacher and flexible funding. The resource supports the needs of students who have additional needs with or without a formal diagnosis of disability.

"Over 780,000 students are enrolled in NSW public schools. Around 15% of the total NSW public school population, have adjustments to their learning due to disability and/or difficulties in learning or behaviour. This is an increase of 3% since 2012. The majority of these students are enrolled in regular classes and many have low level additional learning and support needs." *Department of Education, School Planning and Reporting – Equity Funding Support Package. Using equity funding for students requiring low level adjustment for disability. Revised 2016*

In general, equitable access to resources for students with a disability or special needs in regional and metropolitan areas is varied and complex. As noted in the categories below access can be influenced by various conditions:

Specialist Treatment – in certain areas of the State, particularly rural areas, access to specialist treatment is problematic and severely disadvantages students. It has been noted by a rural member "that it is almost impossible for students to be assessed for a first or updated diagnosis as there is virtually no access to Department of Education personnel, psychologists or other medical specialists." Transport to and from remote locations is also problematic as specialist centres can be over three hours away.

Access to professional support and services, particularly in the country, is far too limited in terms of availability and range of services and expertise. Medication reviews with medical specialists can take up to six months waiting time and during this time, staff must continue to support the student who may be experiencing escalating behaviours or other health concerns.

Placement

- Process - not all students can be managed and learn effectively in a mainstream environment. Once students are assessed and schools have addressed, implemented and exhausted a range of options in a mainstream setting an Access Request may be completed for placement in a support class environment.

- In most school circumstances the Learning and Support Team (LaST) is responsible for completing an Access Request. The Access Request can be for integration funding or for placement in a specialist support class. The Access Request is completed online with input from the School Learning and Support Team, school counsellor/psychologist, District Guidance Officer (now Senior Psychologist Education), the parent/carer and finally the school principal. When the parent/carer and the principal have signed it is submitted to the relevant placement panel (aligned in Educational Operational Directorates). It can take weeks for this process to be completed and then there is no guarantee that a placement position is available. The process is time consuming, demanding and complex.

Currently the placement process is under review by the Department of Education as it varies considerable across the State. Presently placement panels meet once or twice a term depending on the Operational Directorate and there are seldom placements offered out of this cycle because there are limited places available.

Whilst it is acknowledged that there needs to be a process to manage placements in support classes the current process is cumbersome and in many instances delays access to the most appropriate support for the student.

- Availability - our members have also noted concern that placement positions are limited and do not meet the current demand. This is particularly relevant for behaviour placements. Members of the NSWSPC Student Wellbeing Reference Group also note that placement positions at behaviour settings are being held for students who are over 17 years of age and who are not attending.

NSWSPC principals have raised concerns about the placement of students in Out of Home Care or in kinship placements. One principal commented, 'we have had a number of cases where we have had serious child protection concerns about our students placed in care. The local Community Services office do not respond quickly to these serious cases as I feel it may be too difficult for them to find alternative or even short term carers for students in distress. One of our students has lived with multiple carers, some of whom have been high risk, but under their policy of kinship placement, this student has been placed with carers unable to cope with the challenges of a student with moderate to severe intellectual disability. Therefore, the placements are for very short times and the student is very transient within the town. This severely affects her education as she is so unsettled'.

Qualified Teaching Staff – students with a disability or special need can be disadvantaged in terms of qualified teaching staff. Not only is it relevant in metropolitan areas but in rural and remote areas of the State it is very difficult to employ qualified, quality staff with any real experience with students with disability and/or special learning needs. As noted by a rural member: "Teachers with the skills we need are virtually unattainable for rural areas as they are in demand in what would be considered more favourable areas. I believe there needs to be an incentive package available for us to attract teachers who have high level skills'.

In rural communities there are also limited resources for students to access, particularly for transition from school into the community. There seems to be very few opportunities for parents to have comprehensive and organised support. There are limited respite centres in reasonable vicinity of schools. This makes it hard for parents of students with high needs to have respite.

Assisted School Travel Program – concerns have been raised by NSWSPC principals that the assisted school travel program could be in conflict with the Disabilities Standards for Education. The problem exists that mainstream students have freedom to attend the school of choice if there are no zoning restrictions. In an example given, a principal commented 'our town has no zoning restrictions but has two high schools in the area. For students with disability, they must attend the school closest to their home if they are to receive assisted travel. I see this as an equity issue for students with disability. Particularly if they have siblings attending the school more distant from their home'. Other principals commented that they had concerns that assisted travel was not available for students with a diagnosis of a disability but on integration funding support.

There is also an issue around access to transport during Higher School Certificate examinations. Schools are unable to obtain a variation of the travel to enable students to be transported home at the end of their exam, so must stay the entire school day when their fellow students have been able to return home.

Equitable access to resources for students with a disability or special needs in regional and metropolitan areas will now be addressed according to differing levels of support.

- For students who need **additional support, including adjustments** to teaching, learning and assessment activities:
 - Since the introduction of Every Student Every School and requirements of the National Teaching Standards, teachers have become more attentive of their responsibilities under the legislation. Differentiation has been a focus for professional learning at many schools. Teachers are in the best position to determine if students require

learning support. If teachers action their initial concerns through differentiation, then students may receive timely access to the support required.

- Teachers are feeling more informed and supported to provide adjustments however professional learning should be ongoing to keep staff focused.
- Access to this support relies on teacher professional judgement and/or parent feedback and also the willingness of the student to accept the support being offered.
- For those students who need access to **in school specialist support** (i.e. support from Learning and Support Teacher, School Counsellor/Psychologist, School Learning Support Officer, Learning and Support Team guidance/intervention):
 - Most schools have their own referral system or procedure to access support from the school's Learning and Support Team (this may involve allocation of the Learning and Support Teacher or additional school resources funded under the RAM, for example, Learning and Support Officer), and/or school counsellor/psychologist.
 - Access to this school-based support can be inhibited by the level of teacher knowledge and understanding; varying degrees of teacher professional judgement; and inability to refer the student using school procedures.
 - NSWSPC members have noted that 'access to school counsellors/psychologist, in both metropolitan and rural areas continues to be a significant issue as there are still a number of positions unfilled due to lack of suitably qualified staff'. The impact for students is that they may have limited or no in-school specialist support.
- For those students who need **Integration Funding** support:
 - Access to this support is via schools submitting an Access Request. The NSW Secondary Principals' Council suggests that schools bear the brunt for supporting students until the Access Request is approved and funding is transferred to the school. The approval can take a few weeks but the funding can take many weeks before it is in the school account. There is also no guarantee of how much funding will be approved.
 - In most schools it will be the principal, senior executive, Welfare/Wellbeing Head Teacher or Coordinator, school counsellor/psychologist and the Learning and Support Team that would be aware of this funding. Classroom teachers may be aware that a student or students they teach are supported with integration funding but generally this would not be their focus.
 - Integration funding is generally used by schools to employ additional support for the student eg a School Learning and Support Officer or additional LaST. Schools would find this support effective if the right personnel were employed or appropriate resources were utilised.
 - It is generally accepted that the professional judgement of school staff directly involved with the student, is acknowledged and respected when accessing this support from DoE Educational Services personnel.
 - The time to complete the Access Request by school staff, time to process the Access Request by DoE personnel, uncertainty of funding amount approved, time for the funds to be in school account, availability of suitable and experienced staff, availability of specialist services and support (particularly in rural, remote and low socioeconomic areas) can all inhibit access to this support.
 - Maintenance of Integration Funding - If a student accessing integration funding is placed for a period of time in an alternate school setting the integration funding ceases and has to be reapplied for when the student returns to the home school. This process is cumbersome and the loss of funding occurs at a critical time hindering appropriate transition support.
- For those students requiring a **support class placement**:
 - Whilst DoE schools are able to make application for a support class placement for students with a disability or special need there are simply not enough available placements thus access in this area is problematic. This is particularly relevant for behaviour placements. Where an Access Request has been made and no placement is available there is rarely follow up support offered. It should be noted that prior to an Access Request for a support class placement schools have implemented and exhausted numerous strategies to support the student.
 - In most schools it would be the principal, senior executive, Welfare/Wellbeing Head Teacher or Coordinator, school counsellor/psychologist and the Learning and Support Team that would be aware of this application. Classroom teachers may be aware that the school is making an Access Request for a support placement as they may have been asked to provide data.
 - In general, the professional judgement of school staff directly involved with the student, is acknowledged and respected when accessing this support from DoE personnel. However, schools report being frustrated when the student is not offered a placement because there are no vacancies/placements.

- NSWSPC members have cited incidences of school personnel being asked to resubmit Access Requests, re-assess the domain level for the student and/or make changes that do not reflect the professional judgement of those directly involved with the student.
 - When students have not been deemed eligible or suitable for a support class placement, schools have not always been provided with a timely and satisfactory rationale for the decision and alternative support to meet the students' needs at their current school. It is also noted that when a placement is not offered the school can be contacted and asked to resubmit and change the provision requested to integration funding.
 - There are incidences where students have been deemed suitable and eligible for support placement and not been offered a placement. The length of time before placement is made varies considerably but some students have never been offered a placement. Once again the support offered was integration funding or the support of an Assistant Principal Learning and Support. There are also incidents of students transitioning to high school where there are no placements available but the students were already in a support setting – this is particularly relevant for autism.
 - Some schools that have support units have requested additional classes or are willing to expand the number of classes. Not all the requests have been successful.
 - Inadequate support class placements, inconsistency in placement panel processing inhibits access to this support.
 - In rural or remote areas and low socioeconomic communities limited access to specialist services has required school personnel to provide 'additional, necessary and costly support... in order to have students assessed' and increased the need for 'extra school counsellor/psychologist and School Learning and Support team intervention to support applications for integration funding support'.
- For those students who require **specialist equipment and/or environmental adjustments**:
 - Access to specialist equipment and/or environmental adjustments once again relies on an application process that can inhibit timely access. This can be an issue in the transition of students from different educational settings. Communication and planning, between the sending and receiving schools, must be carefully undertaken to ensure success. Ideally the student (depending on age and other factors), parents/ carers, DoE Educational Services personnel must be involved. It is imperative that the equipment and/or environmental adjustments are in place prior to the transition. In the instance that the school transitioning to will require major environmental adjustments eg access ramps, lifts etc then the process must start in ample time for the adjustments to be completed before the transition.

In instances where an application may involve access to minor equipment, such as a laptop, schools will usually meet this need until the resource is provided.
- For those students whose needs **require support and intervention from the relevant personnel in the Educational Services team**:
 - Support for students who fall into existing disability criteria are usually well catered for in government schools with their needs established at funding review and appraisal meetings, professional information exchanged, additional transition activities provided and additional support sourced.
- **Do schools have adequate resources?**
 - The demands on School Learning and Support Teams have escalated over the past five years as more students present with special learning needs. Thus leading to an increase in individual learning plans and regular meetings with parents/carers. Schools would report that there is simply not enough time for the Learning and Support Team to address all the requests that are referred to them – this could be for individual student support, professional learning for teachers, meeting with staff for individual students where a plan has been prepared and the teachers need to be made aware of the plan and strategies to be implemented. The LaST and Learning and Support Team do not always have the expertise in the particular area required to support a student.
 - The explanation for professional learning funds in the 2017 Planned School Budget Allocation Report states that the allocation is based on staff FTE (teaching and non-teaching) with school type and location factored into the methodology. This allocation supports the professional learning of all staff, teaching and non-teaching. Given that the funding for professional learning has increased little since the \$700/teacher allocation in the 2004 Professional Learning Policy, there are limited financial resources to provide quality and adequate professional learning for staff to best support students with disabilities or special needs.

A NSWSPC principal commented: "I have calculated that based on the PL funds allocated to my school and the staffing entitlement I have, that I will have approximately \$600 per staff member. Casual relief at \$500 (teacher) and about \$275 (SLSO) means that staff will only be able to access one day of training and this does not take into account any travel or accommodation that may occur, only professional learning costs and casual relief.

- There is great concern over managing the more complex anti-social and/or challenging behaviours of students. Increased workload in the form of multiple reporting for the same incident to Safety and Security, Health and Safety, Family and Community Services, police, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) etc; development of quality behaviour support plans, risk assessments and exemption documentation creates a significant burden on the workload of principals and staff. It has been noted by NSWSPC principals that they are aware of schools that no longer report all incidents because of the time and workload pressures.

Since the 2010 report there has been increasing prevalence and complexities in the nature of mental health and the incidents of physical threats, assaults, verbal threats and abuse towards both staff and students. One school that caters for students with challenging behaviours and emotional disturbances collected data over a two-week period about the frequency and nature of physical threats and abuse in the school and due to the significantly high rates (>1200 incidents) did not use the reporting system as it is too time-consuming.

The DoE system for sharing information about these incidents would mean that many principals or their nominated executives would be on the phone constantly making reports. But if we don't report then DoE doesn't get an understanding of the extent to which the incidents occur.

- The wellbeing of staff and other students is of concern when dealing with the more complex anti-social and/or challenging behaviours of students. CAMHS will not often admit a student with challenging behaviours even if requested by police or ambulance with the reason given that behaviour is not a mental health concern.

Schools are then left to deal with the situation without further expert support. A Pathways to Care document developed between SchoolLink and Education is not consistent across the state. This document can provide feedback to principals and counselling staff on how to best support students who have accessed CAMHS.

- Whilst progress has been made in professional learning for teachers, principals report that school staff still have inconsistent access to resources to support the learning needs of students with a disability or special need and their families.
- Students with additional needs who do not fall into one of the disability categories are not well catered for due to a lack of access to funds and support networks. These students may have an undiagnosed learning difficulty and transient anxiety.
- Families of students with special needs are often unaware of the funding and support available to support their children through the transitions from primary to high school and school to work. Most rely on the support and information provided by the school/unit their child is enrolled at. Most parents are overwhelmed during these transition periods.
- Schools with students with high support needs, in particular Schools of Specific Purposes, require a staff entitlement for specialists such as Speech Therapists, Occupational Therapists, physiotherapists, and nurses where there is a large percentage of students on medication, to meet the needs of their students. A NSWSPC principal noted that they have spent 50% of their global budget to employ three therapists for two days a week.
- Principals have identified that there are inconsistencies in the quality of support services from other sectors i.e. OOH providers.

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 NSW public schools.

1. Professional learning for skilled and knowledgeable teachers

The DoE online training modules have had positive feedback from school staff. Schools report improved teacher understanding and support in making adjustments for the individual learning needs of students with the disability highlighted in the module completed. To have a thorough understanding of the different types of disabilities or special needs of students, teachers will need to continue professional learning in this area so that the full range can be covered. In a mainstream classroom it is a reality that there will be more than one student with a disability or special need and more than

likely they will be very different, so teachers cannot rely on the knowledge, understanding and skills gained from only one online module.

The number and range of online training modules can be expanded to cover the full range of disability or special needs. It has previously been suggested that the development of scenario type resources would provide guidance for schools and other agencies aiming to support students with a disability or special need. This could also cover the diverse range of disabilities and special needs.

2. Support for students with disability in regular classrooms

Although ESES established a level of specialist teacher presence in DoE schools, there is still an issue of adequacy and whether the level of support is effective based on individual student need. In many schools the Learning and Support teacher has adequate qualifications and/or experience to provide direct and timely specialist assistance to students in regular classes with additional learning and support needs. However, this is not the case in every school and as stated previously there is a shortage of specialist teachers and teachers with relevant qualifications or experience, especially schools in rural and remote areas or areas of the state that are difficult to staff.

These additional roles have caused more complexity in the management of staff and teams, which are unwieldy or split in most schools. Many NSWSPC principals are struggling with the best way to manage Learning and Support Teams and Welfare Teams given the extra layers. This also creates structural complexity related to planning, data collection, classroom professional learning and support.

ESES funding to schools has facilitated improved access to additional support within schools to meet the educational needs of students with a disability or special need. But the immediacy of the support can be inhibited by the increased number of students being referred to the School Learning and Support Team, and/or the development of appropriate individual education/support plans.

3. Special schools as centres of expertise

There is limited awareness of schools benefiting from a network sharing the knowledge, expertise and specialist resources available in Schools for Specific Purposes (SSP). That does not mean however that information is not shared across professional networks and schools when requested. In addition, there are professional learning events/courses offered by schools and/or teachers in SSPs for teachers, Learning and Support Teachers and Learning and Support Officers.

This avenue of support should be explored further by DoE and be coordinated by each of the four Operational Directorates.

Significant funding was provided to SSPs in 2014 and 2015 to develop a project around specific areas to support staff and students. Projects have all been completed and a report completed by schools and sent to DoE State Office, but a summary of the projects has not yet been distributed across the State which would enable schools to touch base with project leads and implement strategies, templates and access the websites created.

Traditionally Schools of Specific Purposes (SSP) were established to cater for students with physical and intellectual disabilities. Currently these schools are managing these students and additionally students with challenging behaviours, and emotional disturbance. A change to the profile and subsequently the access to appropriate resources, both human and physical, needs to be reviewed to best support the needs of the students attending these schools.

4. Understanding and assessing learning and support needs

Implementation of ESES raised awareness and use of the Department's Personalised Learning and Support Signposting Tool (PLASST) however it is not being utilised by most schools. Thus the profiling of students is being completed using other means developed by schools rather than the PLASST tool. More development of the tool is required to convince school leaders and Learning and Support Teams of its suitability in assessing learning and support needs. More structured professional learning is required for teachers and schools to feel confident in its use and to understand not only its advantages but also how to interpret the reports and how to develop individual learning plans from this data.

A significant gap in PLASST is the lack of linking strategies and ideas for staff to access once the report has been generated.

5. Access to information and expert support

The reallocation of nine categories of support teachers to the single role of Learning and Support (LaS) Teachers enabled mainstream schools to have support provided directly to them in the form of staffing and flexible funding. Schools previously were not always successful in gaining the support, when required, from the previous model. This did mean however that any external support was then limited to APs Learning and Support who were not experts in all areas, nor did they always have recent school experience which can be an advantage in understanding context.

The issue with using the Student Learning Needs Index based on NAPLAN results to allocate flexible funding and LaS Teachers is problematic because it is only one form of assessment. It doesn't take into consideration the complexity of issues that impact on students with a disability or special need. It should also be noted that parents of students with a disability or special need will often withdraw their child from the NAPLAN testing or the student does not attend on the testing dates.

Students with low level needs attracting less than \$6400 in Integration Funding are now catered for by the Low Level Adjustment for Disability Resource Allocation Model Equity Loading.

Schools have to devote additional staffing above establishment to manage NCCD and other aspects related to ESES. One NSWSPC principal stated that the Learning and Support staff do not have the financial capacity or knowledge to manage the SLSD budgets especially with additional RAM allocations.

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 table below contains the 31 recommendations made by the 2010 Inquiry. In responding to this term of reference, consider your workplace's experience/view of how – if at all – these recommendations have been implemented?

Recommendation:	
1	<p><i>That the NSW Government substantially increase funding for students with disabilities and special needs in NSW Government schools to ensure all students have equitable access to education.</i></p> <p>Under the RAM funding model most DoE schools have increased funding to support students with low level disabilities through a staffing allocation and flexible funding. For some students with a diagnosis, integration funding is provided. For students with high support needs and/or challenging behaviours there is still a need for more support classes and further funding to provide the specialist support these students require.</p>
2	<p><i>That the NSW Government, in its submission to the Commonwealth school funding review, advocate a transparent funding mechanism to meet the need of students with disabilities or additional learning needs.</i></p> <p>The guide to reading the RAM funding model outlines how the funding for individual students is calculated. There is also a factsheet explaining how the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services Allocation 2016-2018 has been calculated. This can be found on the Wellbeing for Schools website.</p>
3	<p><i>That the NSW Government address the current anomaly in which Schools for Specific Purposes are staffed and funded on a primary school formula, even though they cater for a large number of high school aged students.</i></p> <p>This has not been addressed. SSPs are still staffed and funded on a primary school formula even though enrolments may include secondary students. Primary schools generally receive less funding and staffing entitlement than high schools, therefore the high school aged students attending SSPs are staffed and funded at a lesser level. This anomaly reduces these schools base funding and staffing, executive support allocation and teacher preparation time in release from face to face allocation as it is used to cover the shortfall for these students. This model also inhibits access to secondary curriculum options and specialist resources and staff. For example, most SSPs do not have a science laboratory, a technology facility or a teacher with this expertise. Thus SSPs with secondary enrolments are restricted in the support and educational provision they can provide that will allow students to participate fully.</p> <p>One NSWSPC principal of a large rural SSP has noted that three quarters of the 120 student cohort are secondary. The teachers are all primary trained and there are no specialist rooms such as visual arts, science laboratories or food technology kitchens to use so the teachers have to use their classroom. 30% of these secondary students do not have an intellectual disability and should be accessing mainstream outcomes but up until 2015 all students were placed on life skills because of the staffing and resource inadequacies. Since 2016 a move has been made to ensure that these students are now accessing mainstream curriculum which is differentiated, but this has placed a significant workload on primary trained teachers without the necessary knowledge or equipment required to deliver the course. These students have all previously accessed mainstream school, but due to mental health conditions such as anxiety/depression and self-harming; trauma, and autism diagnosis these students were unable to maintain their enrolment.</p> <p>This situation has been compounded since the leaving age has been raised and there is an increase of secondary students staying on until the age of 17.</p>
4	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training examine ways to reduce the requirement for those students whose disability and level of need is unlikely to change dramatically in the space of a year to reconfirm their disability status on an annual basis in order to receive disability funding.</i></p>

Recommendation:	
	Annual reviews on suitability of placement takes place but we are unaware that disability status is confirmed on an annual basis. Some school teams annually review mental health disability confirmation. There is no clear understanding or common practice.
5	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training investigate ways to communicate the outcome of the disability funding assessment process to families, carers and schools in a manner that is clear, timely and sensitive.</i></p> <p>This recommendation still requires attention. There are inconsistencies across Operational Directorates as to the process used. In some, it is left to the school to inform parents and teachers about the outcome of the panel process and the school is not always the best agent to explain the exact nature of the reasons for the determination.</p>
6	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training move rapidly towards the development and application of a functional assessment tool which has been independently monitored and assessed. This tool should be used to inform decisions about access to disability funding and to further enhance educational outcomes for students with disabilities and special needs.</i></p> <p>The Personalised Learning And Support Signposting Tool (PLASST) is a web based tool designed by the Department to assist teachers and learning and support teams to identify the functional educational needs of students who may benefit from personalised learning and support. However, as mentioned previously, few schools are accessing the tool so further development and linked strategies is required.</p>
7	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training facilitate the provision of satellite autism classes in country areas to ensure children with autism in these areas have appropriate access to these classes.</i></p> <p>The NSWSPC is aware the DoE has facilitated at least one of these classes in the Wagga Operational Directorate, however information about how to access this type of provision is not readily available.</p>
8	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training:</i></p> <p><i>acknowledge and accept that there is widespread concern about the unmet demand for special education places in NSW Government schools undertake an immediate investigation into the level of unmet demand for special education places and classes and publish the results of this investigation increase the number of special education places and classes to ensure that there are adequate places to cover demand for all students with disabilities and special needs abandon plans to dissolve existing language support classes.</i></p> <p>The NSWSPC is unsure whether the results of an investigation were published and if there is indeed any data.</p> <p>The DoE certainly has assessed the demand for special education places support and will manipulate the moving on one class from one location to another, or from one classification to another. The fact still remains however that there is still an unmet demand for special education places.</p> <p>Between 2010 and 2013 there was a modest increase in special education classes with these predominately being multi-categorical classes. However Special Schools and classes for students with mild intellectual disability remained the same. 2016 data is not currently available.</p> <p>Discreet language support classes no longer exist. There were 68 language and reading classes in 2010 but none were reported in the Special Education Classes and Provisions information sheet in 2013.</p>
9	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training publish details of its response to the Auditor General's 2006 report in relation to the Regional Placement Panel process, including a timeline for the implementation of this revision.</i></p> <p>The DoE is currently reviewing this process across the State and it is our understanding that a suggested model will be trialled this year.</p>
10	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training conduct a comprehensive evaluation of behaviour schools and learning centres. This evaluation should examine access to secondary curriculum, student/teacher ratios, the impact on students of spending extended periods of time in behaviour schools, as well as the adequacy of places available to meet demand.</i></p> <p>The NSWSPC is unaware of a comprehension evaluation being conducted. The NSWSPC would support the fact that there is an unmet demand for places in this specialist setting and that enrolment places are often held for too long a period for students who do not attend and who are over 17 years of age. Advice to SSP principals is conflicting and there is no consistent procedure for exiting students who are post-compulsory school age and not attending school. One principal has been provided with advice from a Learning and Wellbeing Advisor that they are not to remove or expel students who are post-compulsory even though this would enable other students, with greater need, to access the support class. This is contrary to the information in the Suspension and Expulsion of School Students – Procedures 2011, where students who are post-compulsory can be expelled for unsatisfactory participation in learning.</p>

Recommendation:	
11	<p><i>That the Minister for Education and Training and the Minister for Health publish the report of the Expert Advisory Panel on the future of Dalwood Assessment Centre and Palm Avenue School as soon as it becomes available.</i></p> <p>The Expert Advisory Panel report 'Strengthening services to students with complex reading difficulties in rural and remote areas of NSW' is available on the NSW Centre for Effective Reading.</p>
12	<p><i>That the NSW Government ensure that the Dalwood Assessment Centre and Palm Avenue School and associated residential service continue to deliver its valuable service for students with complex reading difficulties from rural and regional areas.</i></p> <p>The NSW Centre for Effective Reading has been established to strengthen services previously provided by the joint health and education facility known as Dalwood Assessment Centre and Palm Avenue School.</p>
13	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training require all mainstream NSW Government schools to establish or be resourced by a school learning support team.</i></p> <p>Through ESES the intent is for all mainstream schools to have a learning and support team. Due to the increased workload for learning and support teams and the coordinator, the NSWSPC supports the creation of a staffing position within schools for this critical role of coordinator. LaSTs are in high demand and often a teacher or executive member takes on the additional role of Learning and Support Team Coordinator.</p>
14	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training work towards ensuring that all school learning support teams include at least one member who holds a special education qualification, if necessary, by providing funded professional development opportunities to existing school staff.</i></p> <p>This is not always the case and nor has DoE made this a requirement. If this was a requirement than not all schools would be able to conform.</p>
15	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training publish guidelines on the functions and outcomes of school learning support teams, including the role of parents in these teams, for distribution to school communities.</i></p> <p>The NSWSPC is unaware of this being conducted.</p>
16	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training support the maintenance and expansion of the Learning Assistance Program.</i></p> <p>References to Learning Assistance Program were removed in 2012 and replaced with the phrase Learning and Support.</p>
17	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training include a clear statement on the role and appropriate use of School Learning Support Officers (teacher's aides) in the proposed guidelines on the functions of school learning support teams.</i></p> <p>There is a clear role statement which is available on the Human Services website.</p>
18	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training conduct:</i></p> <p><i>a formal independent evaluation of the trial of the School Learning Support Program in the Illawarra and South East Region one year after the commencement of its operation and publish the results of this evaluation further consultation with key stakeholders before any decision is made to further implement this program.</i></p> <p>An evaluation of the School Learning and Support Program trial in the Illawarra and South East Region was conducted and the program was then implemented across the state. The NSWSPC is unaware of a published evaluation.</p>
19	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training commission an independent review of the School Learning Support Program online training course, and in doing so, consult more widely with local academics and experts on the content of the course.</i></p> <p>The NSWSPC is unaware of an independent review of the School Learning and Support Program online training course.</p>
20	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training increase resources for students with identified disabilities in mainstream classes.</i></p> <p>There is funding, through RAM, for students with identified disabilities through low-level adjustment. However this current funding and resourcing does not meet the needs of these students.</p>

Recommendation:	
21	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training coordinate multi-disciplinary teams on a regional level to deliver professional and allied health support services to students with disabilities or special needs in NSW Government schools.</i></p> <p>The NSWSPC is unaware of a multi-disciplinary team delivering professional and allied health support services.</p>
22	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training take immediate action to increase the number of school counsellor/psychologists in NSW Government schools with the objective of increasing the ratio to 1:500.</i></p> <p>Under the \$167.2 million Supported Students, Successful Students initiative, there are 236 additional school counselling service positions, including an additional 20 Senior Psychologists, Education positions. However, recruitment is ongoing as approximately 100 positions are unfilled. The ratio of 1:500 however has not been attained at this stage. Most secondary schools with enrolments in excess of 500 have only one school counsellor/psychologist. The NSWSPC would suggest that the demands on school counsellor/psychologists has escalated considerably and that the ratio of 1:500 should continue to be addressed.</p> <p>The ratio for school counsellors in SSP settings is also of concern as many of our most vulnerable students attend these schools. An example of a current ratio for a rural SSP is two days a week for a notational enrolment of 670 students. To date this position has been unfilled so students with emotional disturbance and who have faced significant trauma in their lives are unable to access appropriate and timely support. This will have an ongoing impact on society as these students reach adulthood and may not have had access to psychological support.</p>
23	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training:</i></p> <p><i>Publish the terms of reference and timeline for its review of counselling services in NSW Government schools consider alternative models for delivering counselling services in schools as part of this review complete the review by June 2011.</i></p> <p>The terms of reference and timeline for review of counselling services was published with a timeframe for 2011.</p>
24	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training publish guidelines on the development of Individual Education Plans for students with disabilities and special needs. These guidelines should:</i></p> <p><i>include information on when an Individual Education Plan is required, who should be involved and what it should contain be distributed to the school community, including parents of students with disabilities or special needs.</i></p> <p>The Personalised Learning And Support Signposting Tool (PLASST) was developed for this purpose. Professional learning was provided widely for school Learning and Support Team members to understand whether Individual Education Plans/Personalised Learning Plans were required or not.</p>
25	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training provide additional resources, including relief time for teachers to develop Individual Education Plans.</i></p> <p>NSW DoE does not provide additional resources for this purpose (particularly relief time). School would have to use their own resources and this can also mean that the teacher required to complete this task is taken off their timetabled lesson. So the impact is felt by more students who do not have their regular teacher.</p>
26	<p><i>That the Minister for Education immediately pursue with the Federal Minister for Education the inclusion of Life Skills as an essential component of the new national curriculum.</i></p> <p>Life Skill outcomes and content are included in the new national curriculum.</p>
27	<p><i>That the NSW Institute of Teachers review the content of pre-service teacher education courses, including:</i></p> <p><i>the mandatory unit in special education incorporating additional content regarding teaching strategies and practical skills to cater for the learning needs of students with disabilities or special needs embedding special education throughout pre-service training.</i></p> <p>This recommendation is critical as more and more students with special needs and disabilities are enrolled in mainstream classes. If teachers have a better understanding of differentiation and how to meet the needs of students, then more timely access and support can be provided. It should not be left up to schools to complete this training for teachers coming straight from university or retraining programs.</p> <p>The NSWSPC support the view that special education need not be delivered in a single unit but rather 'integrated throughout the education of the pre-service teacher'. This would support the need for differentiation across all aspects of teaching.</p>

Recommendation:	
28	<p><i>That the NSW Government promote through the national reform agenda that special education be embedded throughout pre-service teacher training.</i></p> <p>The NSWSPC is unable to comment about this recommendation.</p>
29	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training work towards assisting all School Learning Support Teachers to obtain a special education qualification.</i></p> <p>The NSWSPC is unaware of the Department of Education assisting LaSTs to obtain a special education qualification.</p>
30	<p><i>That the Department and Education and Training offer additional opportunities for teachers to undertake retraining programs in special education facilitated by the Department.</i></p> <p>The Department of Education promotes scholarships for teachers. Up to 25 full-time special education sponsorships are available each year with teachers achieving a Master of Education (Special and Inclusive Education) and guaranteed permanent employment.</p>
31	<p><i>That the Department of Education and Training review whether there is a need for formal training for School Learning Support Officers.</i></p> <p>The NSWSPC is unaware of the whether the Department conducted a review. There are professional learning events offered but formal training for SLSOs is optional.</p>

d) Complaint and review mechanisms within the school systems in NSW for parents and carers, and

All DoE schools must adhere to the DoE's complaint handling policy and procedures, including the suggested timeframes.

NSWSPC believe that parents of students with disabilities need to be heard, however advocacy and serial complaining is proving to be an incredible burden on schools both in terms of human and fiscal resources expended, often to the detriment of the other students enrolled in school.

That parents who are not satisfied with school responses to questions or demands often escalate these issues to Directors, to whom the Principal must respond, and when still unsatisfied to Executive Directors, to whom the Principal must respond, and when still unsatisfied to Ministers and Members of Parliament - from whom we get a please explain, and if still unsatisfied they often go to public forums such as the media or social media where they denigrate schools and teachers with impunity. Whilst I agree that parents can and should have the right to question and complain about schools, this cycle is unsatisfactory in the time commitment and workload created.

A NSWSPC principal commented that 'some parents take up 95% of my time (and their children do not present as requiring that time or level of complex management) whilst some students with truly complex needs are left wanting because the time and review process fall away as we answer yet another complaint. I am concerned about the impact that parents, who are serial and unrelenting complainants, have on the mental health and wellbeing of our staff, particularly our principals, and on the reputation of our schools'.

e) Any other related matters.

Despite the additional funding to support schools in the provision of education to students with disabilities or special needs there is a growing number of students with diverse disabilities being integrated into mainstream schools and thus teachers find it difficult to cope even with the additional resources. Teachers put the education of their students first but they are finding it more and more difficult to cope with the multiple numbers of students with disabilities or special needs in each of their classes. This is exasperated when schools that have integration funding or other funding sources available cannot find the Learning and Support Teachers or Learning and Support Officers to assist the students and staff. It is not always the best option to employ someone who may be available but does not have the necessary understanding or training.

School Learning and Support Teams bear most of the responsibility; they are comprised of teachers and staff who have only gained experience through their own involvement and little or no access to expert support. They continue to work outside their timetabled lessons to complete programs, individual learning plans, risk assessments and Access Requests for students with disabilities or special needs without themselves having any experience in the area of disability. This, along with more parents acknowledging that their child has a special need, is putting more demand on the Learning and Support Team. Schools are required to use their resources and programs to support more and more students with diverse needs than ever before with a community expectation that we are able to cater for each individual. In some schools the Learning and Support Team coordinators could be employed fulltime with this sole responsibility.

This also places greater demand on the school counsellor/psychologist. Once a teacher refers a student, the Learning and Support Team discusses support strategies to be implemented. There are still concerns then in most instances the school counsellor/psychologist needs to undertake an assessment process. This can include medical reports and carrying out standardised testing and observations, and then if an Access Request is recommended the school counsellor/psychologist or other relevant teaching staff has a role to complete in that process as well. With the increase of students with special needs, integrated in mainstream settings and/or support classes in mainstream schools the demands on school counsellor/psychologists are incredible. This also needs to be considered in association with the school counsellor/psychologist's other roles and responsibilities e.g. there has been a significant increase in the number of student referrals to the school counsellor/psychologist for anxiety, mental health, sexuality issues, social relationships, family issues/concerns.

Some schools have been creative in their use of flexible funding allocated for low level disabilities (and other RAM funding) and have employed paraprofessionals to support students. Whilst this initiative is wonderful it is not always affordable or accessible for all schools and ignores the fact that all students should have access to such services. DoE and NSW Health could work together to supply this support.

Funding needs to be at a level that will allow the best practice to occur and the application of funding needs to be more flexible and responsive to the available human resources in a given environment.

It is also to be noted that some students with disabilities or special needs find it difficult to engage in the curriculum because they cannot remain on task without individual and/or specific instruction; require specialist or professional support to manage their challenging and/or anti-social behaviour; and they are unable to establish satisfying social/emotional relationships with peers without individual, informed assistance in classrooms and playgrounds.

We reiterate the NSW Secondary Principals' Council statement made in 2010 that "access to professional support and services, particularly in the country, is far too limited in terms of availability and range of services and expertise". It is challenging for some families/parents to access professional support particularly for the following reasons; economic costs, no services are available locally, little or no transport.

DoE Access Requests can only be completed by the 'home' school. There are some circumstances where schools have to complete an Access Request for students who are not currently enrolled at their school. This occurs when a student attending a non-government school has been assessed and diagnosed with a disability or special need and the school decides that they would be best to gain access to Distance Education thus they 'turn up' at their local DoE school and insist on the school completing an Access Request. In these instances, the school can spend numerous hours gaining information on a student that is more readily available through Learning and Wellbeing personnel. It would make sense that the DoE Learning and Wellbeing Officers have access to the "Access Request" system so that they can adjust or complete as necessary rather than the back and forth action that currently occurs. The movement between sites requires a 'case manager' who has the appropriate expertise to assist the receiving environment. The student and family also need such a support person to address their concerns. Time to communicate effectively with families and staff across all sites is needed.

It is imperative to understand that schools continue to fund students who are not functioning within the mainstream setting but who cannot gain a clear diagnosis.

Finally

This submission has been compiled by NSWSPC on behalf of its members. Thank you for this opportunity to continue to address issues related to the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs.