

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
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As public school teachers and NSW Teachers Federation members we continue to campaign for the right of every student to receive a public education of the highest quality and for all students to become successful learners.

We are committed to equity and excellence for every student and in doing so assert, as was confirmed in The Review of Funding for Schooling (Gonski Review) that it costs more to deliver on these values for students with disability.

We will not stand by the currently inadequate provision of education to students with disability and the lifelong implications this inequity has.

The National Education Reform Agreement (NERA) and Australian Education Act 2013, acknowledge the requirement for, and commitment to additional funds for students with disability. The NSW government's unwavering commitment to the Gonski funding model paves the way for this investment to be realised.

We stand ready to work with our employer and NSW government in delivering equitable quality education but can only do so effectively when equipped with the necessary tools and supported by a system that is responsive to need.

We offer the following submission as an index of unmet need and a call for equity for every student.

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

I work in a Support Unit. Access to such classes is generally insufficient to meet demand, especially for students with autism who are very often enrolled into MC, IM or IO classes rather than specialist AU classes. New IM classes are not allowed to be established, leading to less diversity and opportunity for students and a lack of suitable places for students who would benefit from being moved to a school closer to their home. There are nowhere near enough placements available to students with mental health/ED/BD disabilities, particularly if they also have intellectual disabilities. The Access Request process to apply for Support Unit places is cumbersome and difficult for parents and staff. A request for placement will often take months to be met, if it is met at all. Parent and student choice is seriously limited - other children have the chance to apply for the school of their choice but students with a disability do not. Schools with Support Classes do not attract more counselling time, so the school counsellors are stretched very thin due to the high volume of testing and assessment required for students to maintain placements.

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.

ESES has done little to increase my students' access to specialist support. In recent years, there has been less and less support for staff available from regional level. Changes to staffing practices there have meant that experienced support staff have been moved out of jobs and are no longer available to support school staff. Inconsistencies in the provision of funding make it hard for Support Units to employ extra SLSOs. Whilst special schools have become centres of expertise, there is no time or money available for staff at regular schools to access these centres of expertise. Increased reliance on online learning limits the collaboration and professional dialogue that is so critical in the education

of students with special needs.

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.

I have not seen evidence of many of the recommendations of the 2010 inquiry being implemented. Some examples of this follow: I have not found the assessment tool PLASST to be especially helpful in enhancing educational outcomes for students with disabilities. I have not found there to be a greater supply of appropriate places for students with disabilities overall. In particular, I see a large unmet demand for autism and ED/BD places in high schools. With regard to the role of SLSOs, if such a statement has been issued then it has not been well publicised because I have not seen it. (and yes, I do check the weekly Schoolbiz.) Similarly, I am yet to see guidelines on the development of Individual Education Plans for students with disabilities and special needs published and distributed to parents and I certainly don't get relief time provided by the Department to prepare the 46 IEPs I have to develop each year for the Support Unit. Our school has just under 1000 students and 1 counsellor, so the ratio of 1:500 is not met. SLSOs still have no requirement for formal training. These are just a few of the recommendations that have not been addressed.

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

I work very hard to establish meaningful relationships with parents/carers of students with disability, work with them and respond to their concerns and complaints but I feel totally under-resourced and unsupported from outside my school when trying to do so. For instance, I had a student with a disability who was pregnant and wanting to continue her education. It took me a number of weeks and multiple calls and emails to the Department to find that there was pretty much no support for her, her family or me as her teacher. There wasn't even a policy for this. I have had the same problem with responding to parents' NDIS issues, TVET problems, travel issues, placement concerns... Regional Learning and Wellbeing staff work very hard to try and provide support but there are too few of them, each juggling too many roles, and their ability to support students has been seriously eroded in recent years.

E) Any other related matters.

This email was sent from the NSW Teachers Federation website.