

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

# NSW Legislative Council

## General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3

### **Inquiry into Students with disability or special needs in New South Wales schools**

**Submission: - 22/02/2017**

As I will be 19 on the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 2017 I believe I am an adult and can make a submission. I do not wish to make an oral submission. While I want my submission to be made public I respectfully ask that you anonymised my name as I am ashamed about what happened to me and my family. I am still ashamed to be me. I have an autism spectrum diagnosis. I prefer to say I have Aspergers as I am what am called "high functioning". I know it is a disability but my mother always said it comes with gifts too. I am very sad I did not believe my mother until recently because the message I got at school was that I shouldn't have been born. When I was 8 I felt suicidal and this feeling only got worse as nearly every teacher made me feel like I was mistake; a failure ,something not as worth as much as other human beings. I hated my own brain. Do you know how that feels? I hated my brain but it was inside of me .My brain was part of was part of me and every teacher made me feel that my brain was the worst part of me. When I was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and I realised that I couldn't change who I was or have a brain operation I wanted to die. My first 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher Ms MXXX hated me. She told me being a teacher was hard enough without the added burden of having an autistic kid in my class. For years I kept asking my mother *"Am I a burden?"* She always said *"No darling of course not"* and the saddest thing is for many years I thought my mother was lying.

School was hard because I didn't actually know what it was or why I was there. I couldn't talk till I was 6 and so had lots of catching up to do but my teachers did not want to wait while I caught up or help me catch up they just got angry when I couldn't do things and shouted at me to try harder . They were particularly angry at me not *"doing my best"*. They did not seem to know I was doing my best but my best wasn't good enough for them. The worst thing was teachers saying awful stuff about me while I was right there as if I couldn't understand. One day my 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher Ms M XXX, the one who hated me said to my mother *"You do know your child is at the bottom of the class don't you? He will always be at the bottom of the class unless he tries harder"* .My mother said a very strange thing. She said *" I'm proud of my son "* and the teacher made a sound like one of those very small white dogs that snarl if you try to pet them even though they look so cute and said *" You're proud of your son being at the bottom ? "* and my mother said *" Someone has to be at the bottom. My son could not talk until he was 6. He did not walk properly until he was nearly 3 so he has come a long way to be at the bottom. He is my hero"* and she held my hand and we walked away. I remember everything; even the fact my mother was wearing purple pants at the time and had her haircut which I did not like. I was glad my mother thought I was a hero but I knew from the way the teacher spoke that being at the bottom of a class was the very worst place to be. I just thought my mother didn't know. I was too scared to tell her in case I wouldn't be her hero so I just suffered in silence.

That teacher Mrs MXXX decided that sitting me next to my biggest bully a boy called DXXX was a good idea. She told me it was for my own good and that she was teaching me to be "resilient". I did not even know what resilient was. All I knew was that I didn't want to have to sit next to a boy that tormented me and called me "dumb-head" in order to learn how to be it. Whenever I told her all the bad things DXXX was doing she told me to be more mature. She let him mark my work and draw crosses all over it and write bad comments on it. I decided to stop doing school work so he couldn't do this. I just sat there doing nothing and the teacher did not care.

When I ever I got to class and had to sit next to the worse bully ever I felt this terrible sick feeling soak through my bones and into the floor. It took me years before I understood what this feeling was. It was actually two feelings which were despair and humiliation. At the time I didn't have the words to tell people these feelings. I just knew I would be better off dead. I knew what dead was. I felt school was a bad place. I felt my mother couldn't keep me safe. That was a worse feeling than being scared of my teacher.

I was always treated badly by my teachers at school. Some of them were deliberately cruel and unkind but others were just ignorant. From day one I was in trouble for not looking people in the eye. Lots of people with autism can't do this. I would expect a teacher to understand. One thing that really upset me was the way teachers never let my mother explain things to them.

I would ask my mother to tell teachers why I couldn't look them in the eye or stand in front of the class and talk or sit next to people that hummed while they worked but every time my mum would ask they would say things like "I know all there is to know thank you". Which is an astounding thing to say because even Einstein doesn't know everything! Anyway it was also illogical. How could they know all about me? One day in Grade 3 my mother asked my teacher "could I please have a meeting?" The teacher said "When I want a meeting with you I will let you know ". My mother said "But I haven't had a meeting yet "and the teacher said "exactly! ". I still remember that day. My mother did this crunching thing she does with her face when she is sad. People on the autism spectrum have exceptional memories. It is possible you think this is a good thing but it isn't because people with autism have more to be sad about and they remember it all.

One of the worst teachers was Ms JXXX. She was my first kindi teacher and I still have nightmares about her. She used to draw a circle on the class room floor and make the idiots stand in it. I had to stand in the circle every day. She called us idiots and believed I was an idiot until I was 14 when I won the science prize. Two of the children who used to get put in the circle a lot could not speak English. It is quite possible they were smart in their own language.

The worst thing was that teachers put other children in charge of me. In grade 2 the teacher put another Grade 2 girl in charge of me. She was not old enough to look after herself! She dragged me around. She selected all my colours for drawing and would not let me choose. She kept kissing me and all the other kids thought this was hilarious and the teachers found it funny too but there is nothing funny about sexual harrassment. For nearly a whole year this girl kissed and groped me. It was only stopped when she started bringing lipstick to do it and you could see all the damage the lipstick did to my face and shirt.

In Grade 2 my teacher was mean to me. She would grab my face and scream over and over into my eyes and nose and mouth. I was terrified. One day my mother came to collect me early and she saw the teacher dragging me around the room by my chin while all the children laughed. My mother's mouth made a near perfect o and then did that crunching thing with her face. She walked up to the teacher took my hand and said "*I'm going to report you to the Principal tomorrow*" and then we left. The next morning the Principal rushed up to my mother in front of all the other parents and started screaming at her and said "*How dare you come into Miss XXXX class room and abuse her like that*". I was so shocked. My mother hadn't said more than one sentence to the teacher. By the time the Principal finished shouting my mother was crying and I was crying. I felt scared and frightened. There were invisible rules at school that you were always in danger of breaking. If my mother could break them what chance did I have ?

But back to my Grade 4 my teacher the one called Ms MXXX who hated me. She said "*I don't have time for children with autism .I have enough trouble with out all that*". She put up embarrassing signs all over the classroom with my name on it and photo's with instructions like " STEP ONE LXXX OPEN YOUR PENCIL CASE" , "STEP TWO LXXX TAKE OUT YOUR PENCIL " etc I can't express how horrible and unnecessary . I knew these things already. I still get upset thinking about it. She constantly made me stand out the front of the class while she shouted questions at me. When I couldn't answer she would shout over and over "*Answer the Question LXXXX*". All the children would stare at me and I would feel sick.

Every lunch the teachers made me sit with SXXX. SXXX had autism too but a very difficult sort that made him scream and flap and shake. I did none of those things and I was scared when SXXX did it. I cried and cried but nobody cared. I did not know how not to sit next to SXXX. I was a very obedient child. If I was told to sit with SXXX I did it but often the stress of it would make me vomit and then I got to lie down in sick bay away from SXXX which was a relief although I have a horror of vomit because it is unhygienic. It should not have been my responsibility to look after SXXX just because we were both on the spectrum.

So many children bullied me at lunch time I couldn't even tell you how many. My life was a misery. I could hardly wait to get home but when I got home this strange thing started to happen. I'm embarrassed to say but you need to know. I started having these things called "melt-downs". I felt like my brain was exploding I felt as if everything was bubbling up inside me like lava in a volcano. I know my melt down upset everyone but I couldn't help it. The horrible feelings I felt at school only came out at home. I'm still sorry about it. I even had to go to hospital sometimes.

I told my lady psychologist and my man psychiatrist that I needed to repeat Grade 4 because the bullying was so bad I couldn't live any more if I had to be in the same class with the bullies next year. The children in Grade 3 were nice to my brother so I had high hopes they would be nice to me. I just knew I couldn't make it in Grade 5 with that bully DXXX who masterminded more and more cruel things to do to me like it was a hobby of his. My mother told me that the psychologist and psychiatrist would contact the school and it would be o.k. but it wasn't. The day the Principal told my mother I couldn't repeat was a very bad day. It was nearly Christmas. Christmas and the summer holidays were my favourite time of the year but I could not enjoy a single day. In fact it was such a bad time I can't tell you about it because there are no words to describe how bad it was and I like to be accurate.

The day before I had to go into Grade 5 everything crushed me like those movies where the main character is being crushed between two walls and has to make an amazing escape only I couldn't escape. I ended up in hospital. That is all the information I want to give because it was so dreadful it is in the category of private things. Finally after hours of hell a man who turned out to be a psychiatrist said to my mother *"What the bleeping hell is wrong with that school. He needs to be in Grade 4! I was going to transfer him to another unit but I have a strong feeling he is better off with you so if you agree to keep him home until repetition is sorted and make an appointment to see Dr D I will release him into your care."* Just for the record the psychiatrist did not say the word bleeping. That is my choice of substitute for the rude word he actually said because I am scrupulously polite unless I am playing a computer game. The time was nearly 1am in the morning. I know because I saw the clock. As soon as I heard those words I felt better. I was a bit shocked at how late it was but I felt too ill to care much.

Anyway a miracle happened and the Principal let me repeat Grade 4. I had a new grade 4 teacher Ms WXXX with crinkly golden hair who gave me a huge smile. Although I annoyed her she was one of the few teachers who did not hate me or make fun of me. She hated repeating things though. She said I had to learn to listen. Unfortunately I still need things to be repeated in order to process them. Because she would not repeat things most of the time I had no idea what I should be doing. When I brought my work books home at the end of the year they were nearly empty. When my mother cried I thought she was angry or upset with me but she said *"No no .I'm not upset with you darling!"*

Anyway for one week I was so happy I washed the dog and helped with putting my clothes away. I felt like a normal boy. But the principal changed all that. She rang my mother at exactly 8.32 am before school (That is what our clock said any way). I realised from listening in with my unusually acute ears that the Principal was telling my mother I had to go to grade 5 immediately. I couldn't help it. I had a huge melt-down. I think it was the worst I ever had but I don't want to describe it. Finally I calmed down with the special medicine the hospital had given my mother to give me. My mother put my favourite cartoon on which was Samurai Jack and got my favourite blue blanket and other comforts but just as I was feeling better the Police burst into our home shouting "Children at risk from the mother". My mother tried to help the police because she thought they had come to the wrong address and she was worried about the other children but then it got very awkward and peculiar because the Police asked her name and when she said it they told her the principal had sent them. Because I knew for a fact that Police only came for bad people I felt a surge of horror that the mother I thought was lovely was secretly bad. I wondered if she had robbed a bank. For nearly 2 weeks I thought my mother had committed a dreadful crime.

My mother tried to ring the school several times that day but the Principal wouldn't speak to her. My mother cried. It was the worst sort of sobbing I ever saw. It made my stomach hurt. I think she tried hard not to but she couldn't stop. I thought something insider her had broken and sprung a leak.

She wasn't the sort of mother who cries. She is a very hopeful person so when I saw these tears I knew something very, very bad had happened. But after my mother had used up a truly astonishing amount of tissues she said *"Don't worry darling. There has been some sort of mistake and mistakes can be fixed. Even if very big and important people like Principals do something wrong they have to say sorry. It will all be sorted soon."* But although my mother was usually right about things she was very wrong about this. It still isn't sorted and nobody ever said sorry. I simply cannot understand why not. My mother is absolutely rigorous about being "sorry". She is also obsessed with fixing mistakes. When she reads a book with a mistake in it she writes to the editor immediately. In 2015 one of my text books **photographic and digital media -ideas and actions**" from my Long Distance Education Text book had a significant error on page 28 (I have quoted the title as is without the Capital letters it should really have) My mother pointed out that the mismatch between the text and the image was glaring and confusing. The editor was very grateful and wrote back saying all future editions would be corrected. We were both very pleased with such a satisfactory result.

Surely people are more important than books (although books ARE very important) I simply can't understand why the Education Department has refused to correct all the errors and mistakes they have made about me and my family. I am a human being with feelings and an enormous capacity for suffering where as a book have no feelings at all. I think the root of the problem is that the Education Department does not really think of people on the autism spectrum as human. I think they think of us as part human but not enough to qualify for proper treatment or human rights.

Two of the worst errors they have refused to fix are the Principal saying I was suicidal on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2009 (which incidentally was the day before my parents wedding day which as you might imagine was totally ruined. In fact they actually forgot they had been married on that day for 2 whole years until I reminded them. That is how upset they were. When I say parents I mean my step father and my mother) and the other was the Principal saying my mother to Police and everyone else in the school and the neighbourhood (including Coles and our local hairdressers which we then couldn't go to any more), was that my mother was mentally ill and that I and my brother were at risk from our own mother and that she had to get the Police and DOCS involved. This was the most shocking lie I have ever heard in my life so far. It is possible I am yet to hear a more shocking lie but I doubt it. My mother was not mentally ill. In fact she is a very well minded person. You know how some people have words that they use as codes instead of saying the words they mean. I never do this but some people do. I am about 92% certain that when the Principal said my mother was mentally ill it was code for "I don't like Mrs K XXX at all .Anyway because of all the things the Principal did and said my mother had to be tested by a psychiatrist and a psychologist as ordered by the family court in our own home . They conducted some tests and they also watched my mother interact with us .My mother did quite well because she was awarded full custody and sole responsibility which is a very big thing and I was very impressed and pleased. I thought, well the Education Department will have to take notice of her now but they didn't.

After the Principal called in the children from my class and told each one those lies my life turned into a wasteland of despair and loneliness and more bullying. Parents actually crossed the road to scream and yell at my mother. Some children were crying but it is quite possible they were crying because they missed their lunch break because the principal didn't stop for lunch and I think they were hungry and upset about missing their time to play. Her mission was that every child had to know and it took a long time. When it was me and my brother's turn we did not want to go. The teacher's aid had to drag us very firmly but she tried to be kind when we struggled. The Principal made the Deputy Principal tell us what she was telling all the others. From that moment I became filled with a sort of strange terror about her. The kind of terror you get in a very bad dream where you can't wake up and you feel the hot breath of a dreadful monster behind you and you know if you turn around you will be eaten so you have to keep running and running till you wake up. The big problem for me is it wasn't a dream so I've always had the horrible feeling inside me of having to keep running. I can't ever truly relax. From that day I've never really been able to sleep properly. I'm like a haunted house and the Principal is the ghost and all the monsters are the Education Department.

Since I have mentioned the Teacher Aid I would like to mention how very disappointing a teachers Aid is. I thought I was getting one in my new Grade 4 class. That is what I was told. I needed a lot of help so I was very keen but the clue is in the words "Teachers Aid" . It is obvious isn't it? I'm not certain how the confusion began but they are not there to help children. The Aid is for the teachers; to sharpen pencils, tidy up and put things away and fetch paper and take naughty children to the office and such like. Sometimes they tell you to colour in the lines or to stop chattering or sit still and listen but that wasn't the help I was hoping for. One I got into terrible trouble from the Aid because she said "Hurry up we haven't got all year" and I said "actually we have 322 days left which is most of the year" and she said "The thing I hate most is a rude child" and she sent me to sit outside the door which was shocking because I wasn't being rude I was being factual. Any way that is all the help I got.

Anyway after the Principal sent the police into our house my mother wasn't allowed to talk to the teachers anymore which was awful. One day when my mother came to collect me I was surrounded my children blowing snot on to me. Two children had very bad colds and our uniform shirt and short sleeves and they were smearing nasal discharge also known as snot all over my arms and even my face. I was screaming because I am a very hygienically minded child and this was catastrophically unhygienic. The only person my mother was allowed to speak to was the Deputy Principal but he was away. Something very, very bad happened with a bigger boy from a High School in the toilets. I don't wish to discuss it or even remember it. I tried not to go to school but the Education Department told my mother if I was away without a doctor's certificate they would ring DOCS. I did not know how to explain what was happening to me so my mother made me go. When she found out later my mother couldn't stop saying sorry and I got quite a few treats out of it .The Principal knew about the terrible thing in the toilets but she would not take any action because she refused to have anything to do with my mother. She let this horrible thing happen 3 days in a row until the Deputy Principal put a stop to it and told my mother. My mother was scared to go to the Police because of what the Principal had said about her.

Suddenly the Principal left and I had a reprieve for about a year. The terror lifted. I still had a lot of troubles and bullying but it wasn't as bad as being scared of your own Principal. I did suffer a lot of discrimination though. I was never allowed to compete in the talent quests although I am very talented. I actually have a splendid singing voice and some quite good comedy routines. Mrs MXXX the one who hated me was in charge. In front of my mother she said "*I don't want your son embarrassing the whole school*". I tried for 3 years in a row but was rejected each time. That is also how I felt; rejected.

When I went to High School it became a billion times worse and that is not an exaggeration. The Principal of my old school told the Principal of my new school how she needed DOCS and the police and how my mother was mentally ill. I could not believe that it was starting again. My mother had not considered that our old horrible Principal had been transferred to a primary school right next to the High school I had to go to and that lots of children who went there new the whole story because the Principal had blabbered to their mothers . Gossip is a very popular past time where we live so all the children going to High school knew our worst secrets.

My time at high school is just called in my mind "the Horror". I was bullied, bashed, teased, pushed, pulled, and abused every day. I had my lunch stolen .I was pushed on the High way and could have been killed! A very private part of my body twisted regularly to force me to hand over any money I had. I had my clothes taken off and I got stabbed with every ones coloured pencils. I could go on and on with my suffering but it is too upsetting to go into. It should not have happened. When I went to the Principal he said "What am I supposed to do about it?" I was shocked. He is the Principal! How did he not know? I was flabbergasted and discombobulated. My brother was bullied to. He is on the spectrum too. I was so angry and upset I told my mother I was going to call in on the way home and give our old Principal a piece of my mind because she had ruined our lives. I still wish I had not said this because my mother is a kindly person and she did not want me to get into trouble so she said she would write a letter to the Principal instead asking for her help. This was the worst thing my mother could have done. The Police came to our home again and served an AVPO on behalf of the Principal.

We were all so frightened. It brought back very bad memories of the time before. My step father said it was abuse and harassment (He meant the Education Department not the Police. It wasn't the Police's fault. They have to follow their orders.) My mother was so shocked she could not speak or cry. She turned a very odd colour and lay on her bed with silent tears squeezing out of her eyes. It was shocking to see; even worse that seeking an abused dog on YouTube. My younger brother is very smart. He said "*you can't have an AVPO without an act of violence. Don't worry mum you won't go to jail*" and he rubbed my mother's feet which made her smile again. It turns out he was right because the AVPO was chucked out of court but we were all scarred by the experience.

In the end we were bullied so badly the doctor said we could not go to school because it wasn't safe. I thought for sure the Principal would have to listen to the doctor but he didn't. We wanted to go to another school but the Principal wouldn't let us. My mother cried a lot about this but it wasn't her fault. One day she said we had to home-school. I was very surprised but then my brother and I liked the idea. After about a year and a half we decided we would like to go to another school but we couldn't because the Education Department would not help. We got stuck doing Long Distance Education since January 2013. I am doing pathways because doing school work Long Distance takes longer than doing it at school. That means year 11 and 12 will take 4 years. I'm trying not to think about it. Since I have complained a lot in this letter I feel it is only fair to tell you that Long Distance education teachers are much nicer than the other sorts you have in a class room but I still feel I am missing out just not on life but in being alive. I am 19 any day now and I do not know a girl. I can't help wondering about all the romantic opportunities I have missed. I would like to have gone to a party or a school excursion. I feel that my childhood and teen age years were taken from me in an act of great evil. If I think too much about that I feel a bit suicidal again but my mother tells me that good times are coming so I try and believe her but as you now know she has been wrong about a lot of things.

What I want to tell you is that something has gone very wrong with the Education Department if bad things like this can happen to good people who are powerless to stop it. A truth is a truth and a fact is a fact and the Education Department should accept both the truth and the facts about my family. There is a lot of talk about bullying in the media and bullying seems like an epidemic of black plague proportions! I think it is because the biggest bullies of all are in charge of the schools! It is my one true dream that one day my family will be o.k. again. It doesn't seem too much to ask. I want the Education department to say sorry and do the right thing just like they would demand of any student. I want them to correct all the errors and lies about us as if they were marking a student's work in an exam. If they marked all their own horrible documents about us they would get a big fat F with lots of red pen drawn through all the mistakes. They should have higher standards of themselves and demand an A+. I would like to remind the Education Department that all their teachers expected that I do my best and it is only just and fair and right that I get to expect the same of them.