

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

My son is a 16 year old boy who has autism and intellectual disability. He is currently 180cm tall and weighs 98kgs. He has acute and complex needs accompanied with very challenging behaviour. Since 2008 he has attended a school in Sydney's north that caters specifically for students with special needs. Since 2012 he has been suspended from his special school on numerous occasions due to outbursts of aggression and property destruction stemming from bouts of acute anxiety, which has put both himself and others at significant risk of harm. It has been made clear to me that on almost every occasion, the decision to suspend my son from school has been based on a clear lack of resources to deal with a situation in crisis, particularly a lack of human resources. Unlike typically developing teenagers, my son has no idea what suspension means, nor does he have the capacity to absorb and be influenced by consequences. For him, the exclusion from school only serves to heighten his anxiety as he is out of routine and away from activities that he enjoys. For myself, as his Mum, the exclusion from school only serves to compound the heartbreak of not only knowing my son struggles with his challenges, but that he has to suffer the discrimination from an environment that is supposed to nurture and protect his right to a consistent education and is supposed to provide for his very specific needs. The school itself has a wonderful team, but it is clear they do all they can to meet the needs of their students. What is also clear, is that whatever funding structure is allocated and administered to my son's school, is seriously limiting the teaching team's ability to adequately meet the needs of all of its students. Surely when funding is compartmentalised and allocated on the basis of secondary needs such as Aboriginality and English as a second language, is it not failing to address the fundamental primary needs of special needs children first, and that is their disability?? My son's school currently has one student of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background, and as for NESB students, well most of the students have such significant needs that they struggle to communicate at all, so wouldn't it be in the best interests of all concerned, to allocate funding that directly addresses the primary needs of special students, many of whom have complex behaviours, and who would best reach their potential through higher teacher to student ratios, and many of whom have complex physical needs, who would best be catered for with more concentrated levels of attention? It is very concerning that the current structure of funding to special schools is a model that may best suit the milder needs of special needs students in mainstream schools, but completely misses the target for special needs students who attend specific special needs schools. It needs to be remembered that the students who require placement in a specific special needs environment are there because their needs are so great and complex, and therefore require a funding model that best reflects those needs, for the sake and wellbeing of all concerned..students, teachers,and families. No student in a special education environment should ever have to be suspended from that environment because staff resources are so stretched trying to manage crisis intervention. No student in special education should have to wait for a nappy change because there is not enough staff resourcing at that moment to lift a 70kg onto a hoist to meet that need. Please give our special schools the model of funding best suited to them, to help our beautiful children to reach their potential.