

Submission
No 188

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Definitions

For definitions of **Inclusive Education, Universal Design for Learning** and **Ableism**, please see *Inclusion in education towards equality for students with disability Issues Paper*, written by Dr Kathy Cologon, Children and Families Research Centre, Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University (http://www.cda.org.au/_literature_159457/Inclusion_in_Education_-_2013_PDF)

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

The aim of 'Every Student, Every School' is to provide professional development and expert support to teachers to better cater for students with disabilities.

I see little evidence of this in the mainstream setting my child is enrolled in.

I have found that the use of experts has had little or no impact on ensuring my child is included and at times has even been detrimental to her learning.

What I witnessed in the first year my child was in a mainstream classroom was systematic exclusion. No attempt was made to adapt lessons, activities or homework to suit my child's specific learning needs. Instead she was excluded from all activities, sitting at the back of the classroom with the Learning Support Officer forming a barrier between her and the other children, working on material that had no connection to what the other students were doing and a classroom teacher that relied exclusively on material prepared by the learning support team teacher. This resulted in my child becoming oppositional, unhappy and progress in her learning was minimal.

Because of this experience, I decided to invest a lot of my own personal time in school life to bring about much needed change.

It took a leader (the principal) willing to listen, and many meetings and conversations to move towards a better model for my child.

Amongst other things, I introduced the principal and teachers to the concept of Universal Design for Learning. This concept is key in ensuring students with disabilities are fully included in all aspects of learning, yet I found knowledge in this area was lacking, even among those who were supposed to be the experts.

In her fifth year of schooling, for the first time, we have a teacher who is familiar and comfortable in including my child in all aspect of learning and has no trouble understanding differentiation and Universal Design for Learning.

Quality education for my child shouldn't be a lottery. Neither, should I have to invest so much of my own personal time providing guidance and support to teachers.

I would like to see all teachers and school leaders better prepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. In particular I

would like to see all teachers develop a deep understanding of Universal Design for Learning.

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

There doesn't seem to be an independent review mechanism in place to keep schools and the Department of Education accountable.

For example, the onus is entirely on parents to advocate for their own children and ensure Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) are implemented. IEP meetings are gruelling for families as the parents are on their own representing the interest of their child against a panel of five people representing the interest of the Department of Education – the teacher, a member of the learning support team, the school counsellor, an executive representative and the Educational Services Advisor. This is hardly an equitable process.

I have often felt immense distress after attending IEP meetings for my own child. I fight hard to keep my child's learning in perspective, ensuring expectations are kept high. However, there is nothing in place to ensure a school implements goals and strategies once agreed. It is up to us parents to probe and investigate.

As a single full time working mother, time with my children is precious. But this time is often taken away by the advocacy role I have to take within the school system.

I would like to see the government fund an independent body to accompany the parents and represent the interest of the student with disability and that this body be given the power to investigate and discipline employees should they fail to meet their obligations under the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*.

Other matters

'Special' vs inclusive education

There is now over 40 years of research available in the area of inclusive education. The evidence is clear. Students with disabilities perform better in inclusive settings than in segregated settings.

"No review could be found comparing segregation and inclusion that came out in favour of segregation in over forty years of research."

- Dr Robert Jackson, *Inclusion or Segregation for Children with an Intellectual Impairment: What does the Research Say?* http://www.include.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Inclusion_Seg.pdf

The Department of Education has put considerable effort in the area of evidence-based practices. Yet the number of schools for specific purposes and support units is growing despite all the evidence demonstrating that students with disabilities performing better in an inclusive setting.

Should the Department of Education close all schools for specific purposes and support units, it could redirect funds to better support students in inclusive classrooms and thus have all students benefit.