

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

Organisation: South Western Sydney Primary Principals

Date received: 26 February 2017

Provision of Education for Students with Disabilities or Special Needs

2017 Submission to Parliament

Sydney South West Primary and SSP Principals

Recommendations

Primary Principals in Sydney South West call on the New South Wales government and the New South Wales of Education to for fill their legal and ethical responsibilities to:

- Enable all students with disabilities a special needs to effectively access the curriculum and participate in our nurturing, safe, development environment i.e. stop breaching the Disabilities Discrimination Act (DDA).
- Increase the number of places available in special schools. There is a great need in South Western Sydney. Construct additional schools to meet local demand.
- Be open and transparent about the number of children who are not able to gain placement in an environment of first choice (where their needs can be met). Make plans to ensure that those children are appropriately placed.
- Give expert advice to physical resources required by students and provide them in a timely manner.
- Increase school counselling services to ensure that the ratio is decreased and school with larger numbers of children with disabilities/special needs are supported with more counselling time.
- Provide adequate relief time for executives in special schools and support units to for fil their role and obligations.
- Provide administration time for the great demand placed on schools with support units.
- Increase the Learning and Support program in mainstream schools to adequately cater for the many learning needs identified by the NDSS.

- Assist schools to support parents to access therapy services for their children.
- Provide funding to support the professional learning of support staff who works with children with disabilities/ special needs every day.
- Ensure that transport services are provided to students in a timely manner.
- Make provision to ensure that Early Intervention units comply with the standards for all other Early Childhood services, including appropriate levels of counselling.
- Overhaul and improve the access request process so that is efficient.

Organisation

The Sydney South West principals are well aware of the impact of government policy on the provision of education, resources and opportunities for children and young people with disabilities or special needs. This issue is one of greatest importance to principals, teachers, parents and community members, and students.

Many principals witnessed the introduction and changes initiated by policies such as every student, Every School. Many believe that the changes do not meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our society.

The following submission reflects the combined frank and fearless information and advice provided by principals of mainstream schools, mainstream schools with support units, and schools for specific purposes (SSP's).

Context

The South Western Sydney Principals represents 212 public primary schools and SSPs in 7 local Council areas, with the highest concentration of students from a low socio economic background as measured by the NSW Department of Education's Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI).

The provision of education and service delivery by the South Western Sydney Primary schools is to over 70 000 primary students with the highest population of students from a non-English speaking background and refugees, and an ever-increasing rise in students with disabilities alongside the increase in population.

The South Western Public School Principals are pleased to make this submission. The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) and its associated Disability Standards for Education 2005 (DSE), are the primary legislation that embodies the rights of students with disabilities to have access to the provision of education in our schools with reasonable adjustment to the same unless there is unjustifiable hardship.

Under the DDA and DSE, our Principal colleagues apply the following processes for students who present themselves for enrolment or a disability is confirmed during enrolment by medical practitioner:

- consultation with the student (and parent or guardian);
- consideration of whether an adjustment is necessary;
- if an adjustment is necessary, identification of a reasonable adjustment;
- making the reasonable adjustment.

In a school context, this means:

1. Risk assessment based on all available data
2. Parental and student discussions with keystakeholders (Principal / Learning Support teachers / School Psychologist) about the need for a reasonable adjustment

3. School based reasonable adjustment or online Access Request application for mainstream support class placement, SSP placement or additional school based resourcing.

The current process of students with a disability accessing a Support class or an SSP varies from the 4 Department of Education (DoE) Operational Networks in NSW. Within Sydney and surrounding areas, Macquarie Park and Ultimo have varying procedures despite all schools having the same online access request forms to complete after 4 years of Every Student Every School.

The online access request form is slow, requires on average at least a day (at best) for teachers to collate data and evidence, write the access request and upload evidence while navigating the site.

After DoE receipt of the access request application from schools, placement panels consisting of principal and DoE Learning and Engagement Officers meet during various weeks in the school term to prioritise students and offer places where available in Support Classes or SSPs. Students who miss out on places continue at their local school with support or no support provided by the DoE.

The fundamental issue associated with this process is that students are constantly missing out on **appropriate** placements in Support Classes or SSPs as one component of the reasonable adjustment despite following all the requirement of the DDA and DSE with supporting evidence adhered too at the local primary school.

For example, In Term 4, 2016, 22 students in the DoE Parramatta and Holroyd network requesting placements for Emotional Disturb / Behaviour support classes missed out on placement as there were no vacancies. No waiting lists for these students are ever created so the true extent of the number of students missing out on placement as their first choice is never transparent to the wider community. It is only through Principals that are prepared to share their individual stories that this information can be accessed.

The South Western Sydney Principals fundamentally disagrees with any assertions that no child with a disability misses out on placement, when requested, and that all children with disabilities have the available resources to make the reasonable adjustment to the same under the DDA and DSE.

Background

The government school system currently caters for the great majority (89%) of students with disabilities and/or special needs across NSW. Some students are located in mainstream classes with individualised funding, others are supported by a set sum allocated to the school and divided amongst targeted students, and yet others are enrolled in support classes as one of a fixed formularised number. The most complex students with multiple needs and/or disabilities are enrolled in special schools.

Currently there are in excess of students requiring funding support and or placement in Support classes or SSPs as part of their reasonable adjustment but are not receiving it. This is in line with the National Consistent Collection of Data for student with disabilities and the Productivity Commission Report 2015. Students with a confirmed disability in mainstream schools, support units and special schools and 55,000 with special needs and/or disabilities in mainstream schools (i.e. 12% of the school population).

Funding support for children and young people with special needs and/or disabilities in mainstream schools varies greatly. Some may receive as little as \$400.00 Per Semester i.e. a few minutes per day for a school Learning Officer (SLSO – Teachers’ aid) for a diagnosis of autism and others with an arguably more impacting disability receives sufficient to maintain a fulltime SLSO e.g. a child with spina bifida who is confined in a wheelchair. These children learn alongside their able peers in a regular class of 30 students (Years 3-6)

Student numbers in support classes are as follows:

IM – Mild Intellectual Disability

IO – Moderate Intellectual Disability

IO/AU – Moderate Intellectual Disability and Autism

S – Severe Intellectual Disability

ED/BD Emotionally Disturbed / Behaviourally – ED/BD

AU – Autism

Please note the following

Student numbers in support classes are fixed as follows:-

Mild Intellectual Disability (IM)	1 teacher	:	18
Moderate Intellectual Disability (IO)			10
Severe Intellectual Disability (S)			6
Emotionally Disturbed (ED)			6
Conduct/Behaviourally Disordered (BD)			6
Autism (A)			6

Please note the following:

An average person has an IQ score in the 90 – 110 range.

A child/person in the **IM** category has an IQ score **less than 75** (lowest 4% population).

A child/person in the **IO** category has an IQ score **less than 55** (lowest 0.1% population).

A child/person in the **S** category has an IQ score **less than 40** (less than 0.1% population).

Students who have more than one disability may not receive additional / or sufficient support for their second/third problem.

E.g. a child with autism, a mild intellectual disability and behavioural disorder will be provided education resourcing for autism only. Schools may undertake a laborious process to apply for additional funds. The result is usually tardy and inadequate e.g. \$400 per semeste

Survey for Principals: (Conducted February, 2017)

Provision of Resources for students with a disability or special needs.

Please note that your responses are anonymous and protected by parliamentary privilege

School Network:

Please give your school name if you are happy for us to contact you: _____

1. Do you have children with disabilities (emerging or higher support requirements) in mainstream classes for whom no or inadequate funding is provided? Yes / No

Examples: _____

2. Do you have students with multiple disabilities or special needs who receive funding for the primary disability only? Yes / No

Please provide examples to indicate how these children are funded and supported (or not) by NSW Department of Education.

3. How would you rate the adequacy of funding levels for students with disabilities/ special needs?

Very Good

Good

Adequate

Poor

Very Poor

4. Does the funding allocated to your school through the Integration Support model provide sufficient assistance for your moderate and lower support needs students? Yes / No

Comment: _____

5. Is the allocation of learning support teacher sufficient to meet the needs of lower support needs students in your school i.e. Children with autism, language disabilities, behavioural issues, learning difficulties and mild intellectual disabilities. Yes / No

Comment: _____

6. What is your current school counsellor allocation?

What is your school enrolment? _____

What is the number of special needs students? _____

What is the number of students with undiagnosed disabilities? _____

7. Other Comments/Additional issues:

8. If you have a support unit in your school please answer the following:

Types of classes: _____ Number of classes: _____

9. Do you have difficulty with the enrolment formula when students have more than one disability? Yes / No

Examples: _____

10. Are there some students in your support unit who would be more suitably and equitably resourced in a special school? Yes / No Number: _____

If so, how?

Examples: _____

11. Is there an adequate amount of RFF time allocated to your support unit leader- Assistant Principal or Deputy Principal?

Does it enable them to lead and develop their team, as well as, complete the multiple administrative tasks associated with a support unit: Yes / No

Comment: _____

12. How would you rate the application process and starting times for transportation of children with disabilities?

Very Good

Good

Adequate

Poor

Very Poor

Comment: _____

13. Please comment on any additional challenges you have identified.

Results

The following trends were clearly identified:

1. Breach of Australian Disabilities Standards for Education 2005

The Australian Disabilities Standards were constructed by the Attorney General to support the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1992 and came into effect in August 2005.

The education standards provide a framework to ensure that students with disabilities are able to access and participate in education on the same basis as their able peers. The DDA makes it unlawful to contravene a disability standard.

The Sydney South West Principals survey of government schools conducted in February, 2017 revealed that breaches of the DDA occur on a regular basis.

- There is frequently inadequate funding to support a child with disabilities/special needs in mainstream, support units or special schools.
- Inflexible staffing formulae result in inadequate teaching/learning opportunities for children with disabilities / special needs.
- Often a child's primary disability only is recognised and funded/resourced. Other disabilities are not.
- Some class sizes are excessive and do not allow teachers to sufficiently implement individualised learning programs. The children are then restricted from accessing the curriculum.
- There are insufficient places available in SSP's and support units. Consequently students are placed in classes where the teacher is not sufficiently qualified to teach a child with disabilities/special needs and the resources are inadequate to meet the child's needs. At times, a child's safety may be at risk due to an inappropriate placement.
- There is insufficient counselling support e.g. a school with 530 mainstream students and 80 students in a support unit may receive only 4 dpw school counsellor.
- Schools have little opportunity or funding to access professionals/experts needed by child with a disability/special needs to assist their learning, mobility, communication etc.
- Principals are sometimes placed in a position whereby they feel compelled to enrol a child with a disability/special needs knowing that they are not able to provide the necessary supports and resources that a child requires to fully access the curriculum. The pressure to do so from NSW Department Education personnel is significant. Parents are sometimes forced to accept enrolment placements that they know are not sufficient for their child due to a lack of special placements available. They are usually given no better alternative.
- Parents are also compelled by DOE staff to complete requests for resources that are totally inadequate for their children e.g. A parents may be told to ask for Integration

Funding support (i.e. money to support a mainstream placement) when the child requires a special school.

2. Adequacy of Funding

- All school surveyed indicated children with a disability/special need in Sydney South West government schools receive nil or significantly inadequate levels of funding to address their learning/social /behavioural needs and enable them to participate effectively alongside their more able peers.
- Principals, who have support units or lead special schools report 100s of multiply disabled students are resourced for one disability only.
- 89.7% Principals rate the adequacy of fund for child with a disability/special need as either poor or very poor.

3. Adequacy of Places

- 10 principals leading special schools and support units report that there are insufficient places available for child with a disability/special need.
- Principals report that they have children waiting for placement. Department of Education refuses to construct waiting lists and then deny having any.

4. Inadequacy of Staffing Allocation

Principals of special schools and support units report:-

- Insufficient release time for Deputy and Assistant principals to fulfil their duties. Both roles are expected to teach a class fulltime, complete the additional load of administration tasks associated with Children with Disabilities and Special Needs, develops the professional learning tasks of up to 14 personnel and contribute to or lead curriculum development, student welfare, parent engagement and extra-curricular activities.
- Fixed formulae for enrolment result in ignorance or exclusion of our most multiply disabilities complex students, some of whom require 1: 1 or 1:2 assistance to function and be safe.
- The Quality Teaching Successful Students policy discriminates against executive staff in special schools and support units so that they have less time for the duties listed above.
- Schools with support units and special schools receive inadequate and inequitable administration support.
- Schools with support units and special schools are not recognised as having additional staff (SLSO's) who require professional learning. The funding provided is negligible.
- There are no therapy services within Department of Education to support Children with Disabilities and Special Needs. E.g.: behaviour, speech, physical.

5. Learning and Support

- The cost neutral program resulted in the collapse of the following facilities:
- The current school learning assistance program- 1,300 positions;
- The support classes language-43 classes for the most language disabled children in NSW:
- The early school support program-65 teaching positions allocated to young children (K-2) with a mild intellectual disability;
- The outreach program for children with challenging behaviours and those with autism;
- The funding for children with disabilities included in mainstream classes who attract less than \$6,000 per annum (i.e. the majority) and
- The closure of intensive reading classes where eight students, usually with dyslexia, receive expert tuition from a specifically qualified teacher for one school term.
- The funding and teaching positions were then amalgamated and redistributed to schools as a new position, the School Learning Support Co-Ordinator, supported by a sum of money.
- The Learning Support Teachers with just 110 hours of online training are expected to meet the needs of children with:
 - Literacy difficulties
 - Dyslexia
 - Autism
 - Behavioural challengers
 - Language disorders; and
 - All other disabilities
- Principals are of the opinion that this program is a retrograde step and is inadequately resourced. The loss of specialist facilities and staff when children need more rather than less is negligent. They also believe that The Learning Support Teacher cannot address the needs of so many disabilities following the training. It is disingenuous and misleading. Current 'experts' in specific disabilities have developed the skills and knowledge over many years with input from tertiary education courses.
- Principals consider that it is an impossible ask to expect that any one professional could address the full range and variety of all special needs and students with disabilities.

6. Access to Education, Funding and Resources

- Principals report that the submission for physical adjustments and provisions of the department required for Children with Disabilities and Special Needs take many hours to write and expertise is lacking from Department Of Education to facilitate the process. Often the approval to construct is given after the student has left the school i.e. 18months-2years later.
- Early intervention units do not meet the standards for Early Childhood facilities.
- The access request process for the provision of placement and resources is repetitive and lengthy. Furthermore the inadequate software program further inhibits the process i.e.: one section cannot be attempted without the prior one being completed. This results in no 2 people being able to work on the document at the same time. When adjustments are required a regional administration person is required to "undo" the document.

- The provision of technology for special schools and support units is based on the number of enrolled students rather than classes. As a result there is inadequate technology support for access to learning.

7. Professional Learning

- Principals report that the provision and quality of professional learning for teachers, principals and support staff is totally inadequate.
- The online module learning varies in quality from limited to poor.
- The lack of Department of Education expertise results in schools seeking expert (and expensive) advice elsewhere.
- Support staffs receive no allocation for professional learning-they are working with Children with Disabilities and Special Needs every hour of the school day.

8. Transport

- The organisation supporting the provision of transport for Children with Disabilities and Special Needs is lacking. Each year, students are left without transport for weeks. Changing a child's route due to a change in parent's circumstance is lengthy and laborious. Success of application sometimes varies despite legitimate reasons for request.

9. School Counsellor Support

- 82% principals reported that school counselling services were so inadequate (1 counsellor per 1500 students) that frequently the only tasks completed were those related to assessment / testing rather than therapy or support. Some of the students with greatest needs) e.g. emotionally disturbed / mental diagnosis) have access to a school counsellor less than one day per week.
- Principals of school that have an Early Intervention service, i.e. a preschool facility for young children with diagnosed disabilities report that the school counsellor allocation to their schools has reduced.

10. Occupational Health and Safety

- A lack of supports and resources results in unsafe workplaces for teachers and classrooms for students. If a student is extremely violent, weighs more than 100kgs and requires restraint every adult and child in that environment is unsafe.
- Principals observe that special educators are of significant risk of physical and mental harm than others. Teachers report physical incidents and are reluctant to report ones that affect their mental well-being.

Evidence

The following Areas were Identified and subsequently under Every Student, Every School

What are the outcomes from?

1. The trial on new approaches around the use of specialist assistive technologies?
2. The trial on new models for supporting students with disability who have high and complex health care needs?
3. The strategy to better support students who have additional learning and support needs and their families living in rural and remote communities, in collaboration with other agencies?

Evidence (Small snapshot of some of the evidence gathered from schools)

Public School (A)

We have a total of 15 students with significant additional support needs or confirmed disabilities. For these students adjustments need to be consulted on and implemented. For 4 of these students the funding is inadequate and we move funding from other areas of the school budget to cater for them. For the remaining 11 students there is no funding provided for them. We have a student in Year 2 with Oppositional Defiance Disorder and ADHD with very high support needs in the areas of mental health, behaviour and retention of concepts. All academic work needs to be adjusted to a ES1 level, he requires consistent feedback, promoting and breaks to prevent extremely physically violent outbursts. These regular outbursts include significant physical and emotional harm to executive, teaching staff, SLSOs and other students as well significant damage to school property. His class teacher needs a full time SLSO, plus additional release time for professional learning, meetings with external support providers and writing and reviewing risk management plans. The whole school requires training in non-violent crisis intervention training to support this student. The teacher requires extensive specialist training and in class coaching and mentoring. He requires daily executive support. We are funded for 2 hours a day SLSO support. He also requires additional 1:1 support on the playground. We have a student in Kindergarten with a vision impairment and intellectual disability. She requires full support for toileting prompting to go, to get onto the toilet, to undress/dress and to wipe, to wash her hands. She requires 1:1 support to engage in any academic class supports. She has low muscle tone and can not hold a pencil, cut or glue. She has extremely high separation anxiety and will not leave the teacher or SLSO's side. She requires texts to be enlarged, visuals, timers and both verbal and physical prompts for all tasks. All academic tasks need to be adjusted. We have a student in year 2 who has Congenital Chloride Diarrhoea she is unable to sense or control her bowel movements and she requires full toileting assistance to change her pull up. She requires a SLSO to support her with changing and if she requires showering of a full change she requires 2 SLSOs at times. We receive funding equivalent to 3 hours of SLSO support a day. This is inadequate to cover all of the toileting support, the teacher release for meetings and writing of health care plans and for the planning and implementing supports. A student in Kindergarten who does not have diagnosed disability but is exhibiting high anxiety and resulting in outbursts of physical aggression. He has bitten, kicked, struck out at teachers and students on at least 15 occasions in two weeks. He will abscond from the classroom. This student does not attract any funding. We have a year 4 student with Autism Spectrum Disorder who has an IQ in the gifted range.

He exhibits highly oppositional behaviours and has major anxiety attacks where he can throw furniture, class objects and hit and kick students and teachers. This student has an enormous fear of failure and any tasks that require talking or performing in front of others can trigger outbursts. His class teacher needs a full time SLSO, plus additional release time for professional learning, meetings with external support providers and writing and reviewing risk management plans. The whole school requires training in non-violent crisis intervention training to support this student. The teacher requires extensive specialist training and in class coaching and mentoring. This student requires executive support daily. We are funded for 2 hours a day SLSO support.

Our flexible funding is totally insufficient at \$10000 to meet the needs of our moderate and lower support needs students. To ensure we are meeting our obligations under the disability standards we need to meet with our families a minimum of 2 times a year to consult regarding student's adjustments and individual learning plans. For the students in the mainstream that funding would equate to 1 teacher day a year for each student in the mainstream. This money would almost cover 1 school learning support officer for 1 term. This funding is inadequate to support the students with disabilities across the school that require adjustments but do not meet the departments definition of disability for funding purposes. This funding is inadequate to support the ongoing crisis management involved in implementing risk management plans for students with physically violent behaviours. This funding is inadequate to support the 7 students with disabilities who are enrolled in our support classes but require 1:1 support on the playground to prevent harm to themselves and others and to support toileting. Our staffing formula for these classes doesn't stretch to support these students. This funding is inadequate to support the additional professional learning needs of staff and SLSOs to ensure adjustments are in place. including the Performance Development Plans for SASS staff.

The school has a 0.4 LAST entitlement. The school has funded from other sources a full time LAST position to attempt to ensure our students are accessing the curriculum on the same basis as their peers. We have 49 students on individualised plans. We are required to consult with families, external service providers and all school staff on all of these. Within that group there are 19 students on Risk Management plans who pose a significant risk of harm to them self or others. We have 8 students on health care plans and 3 students on emergency care response plans. Each of those plans requires the LAST to assist teachers with the planning, implementation, trial, review and evidence collection on each adjustment required. Most students would have more that 15 significant adjustments to the content, environment or the instructional strategies used. The LAST should be working in classes to support the implementation of the adjustments for these students on a daily basis. It is impossible to do on a 0.4 allocation.

There is a massive funding discrimination for students with disabilities and additional needs. Our current funding system does acknowledge disabilities as defined in the Disability Discrimination Act or the Disability Standards for educations. It is discriminatory in itself. Many students with high support needs do not even qualify for funding according to the Department of Education. The National Consistent Collection of Data on students with disabilities and the level of reasonable adjustments finally provided a model of data collection which could remove the discrimination and fund students based on level of support need. We would also like to comment on the trauma that families and students face regarding student placement into supported settings. The transition into Kindergarten for students with disabilities and the transition from year 6 into year 7 is particularly traumatic. Families are usually notified very late in Term 4 that their child qualifies for an enrolment

in a support class Autism, or a support class for Autism/Moderate intellectual Disabilities. These families often approach schools in term 1 of the previous year. Many families miss out on the orientation sessions for Kindergarten because of the late notification. These some of the most vulnerable students in our schools who require longer and supported transitions. Other families report going to their local public school and being turned away because the school does not have the resources to support their child. Other families are reporting having their child enrolled a mainstream kindergarten classes where the parents have to pick their child up at lunch every day because the school doesn't have the resources to support them.

In addition to the staffing formula there isn't adequate resourcing for teacher release for meetings with families and service providers, for support with challenging behaviours, for toileting support so that students are not left unsupervised or left alone with one adult to be dressed, showered or wiped. Funds are regularly moved from other areas to purchase technology supports for communication, access equipment for toilets, resources to support the sensory needs of students, to create visuals and social stories.

Public School (B)

Students with mental health needs who are either unable to get a placement in an ED/BD unit due to limited spaces, or due to the complexity of family circumstances eg. OOHC. Also, students who have an intellectual delay and not yet 8yrs old, and therefore unable to be in an IM setting.

In 2013 the school had a 3-class Support Unit but this has increased to 5 classes in 2016 and a 6th class in 2017 - however there is no increase in the School Counsellor allocation. The workload for the School Counsellor has increased significantly over this time, without adequate support available at a regional or local level (which is also experienced by other schools). With the additional support classes, the school has had siblings change to MPS also, who have as yet undiagnosed but evident learning needs requiring full assessment.

Our Support Unit has increased from 3 classes in 2013 to 6 classes as at the beginning of 2017 and yet our School Counsellor allocation has not increased. The addition of 3 classes to the Support Unit has significantly increased the annual workload of the School Counsellor and also added to the welfare load of the school executive who support these students in an inclusive setting.

Public School (C)

Students with severe language problems that effect all areas of development receive no funding. We are seeing an increase in mental health not meeting guidelines for additional funding or not enough places available in specialised settings. Students who are currently accessing specialised settings are often not getting any support when visiting their home school or some students being sent back into mainstream before they are ready.

The fact that 7 classes in a SU - gets a DP however, this is not class free. With the growing complexity of Support Units really more like SSPs the Deputy Principal needs to be class free to deal with: outside agencies; parents; Drs; other medical specialists; transition programs; transport; review

meetings; discussion with counsellors; developing and running special programs for students that require more intense support...just to mention the obvious, 7 classes is the size of many SSP schools.

People who have never seen a complex student in the school setting on a regular basis, judging a student's future based on an Access Request - a piece of paper that gives minimal space to portray the full picture of a student- then to have an Access Request rejected because it did not contain enough information about accommodations made for the student to go into an SSP. Students who are placed in the wrong setting are frustrated because it is not completely meeting their needs and then they have the challenge of then being moved to another setting (that's if there is space), while they 'tread water' waiting to get that placement.

Advice given to school's when completing Access Requests that there is no room for that signoff eg: Behaviour/Mental Health but there is for Autism so do a request for an AU placement - wrong placement = frustration for the child and everyone involved - we are letting the student down.

Public School (D)

The flexible funding provided does not cover the ever growing number of students who enrol with increasing complex needs. Mental Health (although hardly ever diagnosed due to their age), behavioural issues, Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD - especially when parents opt not to medicate, post traumatic stress disorder (increasing with the Refugee population), intellectual disabilities eg: IO but parents refuse placement. Needs of students are complex due to students often having more than area of need - takes a long time to process Access Requests to get support placement or even more discouraging no placement at all due to no availability. Although clearly extra funding is required after submission of an Access Request - schools will be told that Access Request doesn't meet the threshold or there were students with higher needs.

Public School (E)

One student in Yr.5 has both an ODD and ADHD diagnosis and is funded at \$9,500 for the year whilst awaiting possible ED/BD placement, but this is not enough for the level of support required to maintain safety. Additional support is funded through MPS RAM. Currently 4 students on shared enrolment with ED/BD SSP placement, however there is only a maximum of 2hrs SLSO support (fortnightly or monthly) provided through the SSP setting. Any additional support required is RAM funded through our school.

Public School (F)

Just as important is the fact that students are receiving placement in a Support Unit under a signoff eg: Autism Spectrum Disorder but they also have a Mental Health 3 signoff - and will be placed in an Autistic class which does not accommodate the MH3. This is increasing because of lack of appropriate placements available so students are put in a SU class that has a vacancy, hence, overlooking the fact that MH3 is the stronger disability. Then the student does not cope and MH is further escalated and placement in an SSP is not available to accommodate the students real needs. Increasing numbers of students with Autism Spec Dis are place in a Support Unit Au class however, the Autism is so severe that they should be placed in an SSP - however, there are not places available. In essence, Support Units are really attempting to function SSP without the proper support and resources.

Public School (G)

An example of one student: intellectual disability, mental health and high order complex challenging behaviour who has caused severe and ongoing emotional and physical injuries to both staff and students. Has no additional funding to support them, but has been the cause of excessive spending of the school budget, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of herself, other students and staff.

Public School (H)

Student has Au diagnosis and IM- for transition to high school we need to choose the 'best' signoff to get her into a support class.

Public School (I)

In the AU class of 7 we have 2 with significant mental health issues & history of violence.

Public School (J)

We employ 8 SLSOs this year, but the flexible funding pays for less than 2

Public School (K)

We employ 8 SLSOs this year, but the flexible funding pays for less than 2.

Public School (L)

We have received flexible funding to the amount of \$54 000 which does not even allow us to employ one full time SLSO. At this stage we need four full time SLSOs to support the students with disabilities.

Public School (M)

The small amount of money we receive has to be stretch for a variety of students who have disabilities, speech problems, mental health, emotional and behaviour issues. The bucket of money is not enough to cover the needs of these children adequately.

Public School (N)

We received \$31000 to support students with autism and other disabilities. When calculated, the funding equates to one School Learning Support Officer for three terms only. some of our students need the support daily.

Public School (O)

144 students identified on NCCD in 2016, student enrolment has increased by almost 50 this year but allocation still the same, two extra classes. Identified need to employ a full time SLSO for safety net class.

Infants School (P)

2 days a week is insufficient to address student needs and have any recognisable or measureable impact on student achievements at all.

Public School (Q)

What the department needs to understand is that if students with disabilities all tried to get into support classes, the financial impact would be enormous. Schools are doing a wonderful job supporting students but it does not reflect on the student to teacher ratio. e.g. an autistic student in a special class may have a 1:6 ratio (with an SLSO). If they stay in a mainstream primary class, there is a 1:30 ratio without a full-time SLSO. The maths is clear - it is hard work for the teacher in a mainstream class where they may have 1,2 or even 3 special needs students, without even bringing the non-funded/undiagnosed students into the mix.

Public School (R)

We do not have a Deputy. The Assistant Principals are entitle to 2 hours release (like any other classroom teacher) which is not adequate time to meet their own class needs, supervise and mentor staff and complete administrative tasks.

Public School (S)

Students are unable to access equity funding for additional needs based on their factor of need allocated which greatly restricts the ability of schools to support additional programs.

Transport often has unreasonable turn around times for simple changes to family situations. We have had students sitting at home for days while transport processed simple changes.

Public School (T)

Newly placed students are waiting up to 20 days for transport applications to be processed. A change of address variation, to an adjacent suburb, took 10 days to process.

Public School

Often the approval process can take up to and over a month. This can and does result in lost schooling time.

Public School (U)

The access request process requires an administrative overhaul and places should be allocated based on need not supply. We would not deny mainstream students from enrolment in their local school however we are happy to deny students with disabilities enrolment in appropriate settings.

Public School (V)

Trying to get support from ED services is a joke. APL&S only advise you on the online courses, IFS is never enough and completing an AR for a small school is a joke when you have limited personnel. Why don't the personnel from ED services come to school and do observations and assessments and determine the level of funding and placement rather than principals trying to complete the forms and getting teachers off class to do the AR.

School (W)

Students are unable to access equity funding for additional needs based on their factor of need allocated which greatly restricts the ability of schools to support additional programs.

Primary Schools in the Macarthur Area

Student with significant emotional/ behaviour needs who took six months to be placed into an ED class was in a mainstream kindergarten class with no funding, resulting in a teacher taking stress leave after being assaulted and a number of other students either directly assaulted or frightened. A student with Down's syndrome, significant behavioral issues and a moderate intellectual disability placed in a mainstream kindergarten class due to parent choice. Funding levels do not cover the cost of an aide beyond 17 hours per week. It is the school's responsibility to meet his needs in an individual program with a change of activity every 2 minutes from our own funding.

Not only are the funding and support inadequate but the process of accessing support is far too labour intensive, drawn out and slowed by red tape.

While students with disabilities should be welcomed in the mainstream setting, there are some cases where a specialist setting would be far more appropriate. Parental choice should not be the final determining factor, as a mainstream setting cannot offer

- Principals and teachers are untrained and unprepared to assist parents in implementing/ supporting the National Disability strategy.
- Support for learners with additional needs in the middle years of schooling. Where is it?
- The extensive program of induction training and ongoing professional learning to support school leaders, specialist teachers, classroom teachers and support staff. Where is it?
- More schools being informed by expertise and resources developed in specialist settings. Where are they published? Where is the website?
- More students benefitting from teachers access to expertise available in out specialist schools. Schools have no knowledge of this expertise or its availability.
- Develop a standards framework and best practice guide to support to the development of personalised learning and support for students with disability, in line with the State Plan NSW, 2021. Where is it?
- Where is the partnership with Sydney University regarding their research on support for students with complex reading difficulties and their teachers?

What are the outcomes from?

4. The trial on new approaches around the use of specialist assistive technologies?
5. The trial on new models for supporting students with disability who have high and complex health care needs?
6. The strategy to better support students who have additional learning and support needs and their families living in rural and remote communities, in collaboration with other agencies?

Impact

1. Children Young People with Disabilities and Special Needs

- Students with disabilities / special needs enrolled in mainstream classes, who have attracted inadequate funding, struggle with all aspects of school life.
- Depending on the nature of the need / disability students may be unable to:
 - Engage in the full curriculum because they cannot attend or remain on task without individual and / or specific instruction.
 - Manage challenging and /or anti-social behaviours without specialist / professional support and / or smaller class sizes.
 - Establish satisfying social / emotional relationships with peers without individual / informed assistance in classrooms and playgrounds, or
 - Access a relevant and challenging curriculum that is appropriate to meet their learning needs.
- Students with disabilities enrolled in support classes in both mainstream and special schools are frequently unable to fully participate in school life. They are impeded by:
 - A lack of recognition for any additional disability (beyond the identified 'primary' disability) so that assistance / professional expertise is not made available to the child, e.g. speech pathology, occupational therapy, paediatric specialist;
 - A rigid teacher formula that does not recognise the multiplicity or complexity of individual children's disabilities. Simply stated, some students require far more individual attention than others; and
 - A lack of curriculum for intellectually disabled students results in inconsistency and relevance of delivery, and potential frustration for the child.
- Many children are affected by a significant lack of school counselling services in NSW government schools. Inadequate time allocation to schools results in extended waiting time for student assessments, communication with medical personnel and applications for classes / funding. Limitations of school counselling time also results in no provision of therapy services and counselling, both of which are much needed by students with disabilities.
- Many children with diagnosed disabilities wait for extended periods of time for placement in support classes or special needs. Most special schools and support units are full. The effect of waiting in a mainstream or a support class is devastating for the child's self-esteem and progress, the teacher's ability to manage learning programs, behaviour and emotional well-being and the parent's confidence in and satisfaction with the government school system.
- The inappropriate long term placement of special needs students also has a negative impact on all other students enrolled in the regular class.
- Similar the placement of a child with disabilities in the wrong setting also has a negative impact on the child and other students. Most often, this occurs when special schools are full and a support unit is the alternative.

2. Teachers

- Teachers are constantly encouraged to 'increase their capacity'. Principals believe that it is unreasonable to expect teachers to effectively implement the learning programs required by all students (the academically gifted, the average, those with learning difficulties and students with a range of disabilities) without sufficient funding, resources and professional support.

The effects on teachers are obvious:

- The workload of preparing individual learning programs for indigenous students, students with a language background other than English, students with learning difficulties and those with disabilities (up to 30 students) is insurmountable and overwhelming.
- The frustration of dealing with a range of challenging behaviours including active and passive aggression, withdrawn and reluctant participation is extremely demanding.
- The lack of curriculum support for students with intellectual disabilities means that teachers have no professional guidance and are constantly manipulating and adapting the mainstream curriculum.
- The breakdown of good relationships with parents is frequently experienced when teachers become the 'scapegoat' for frustration and anger due to insufficient resources being provided for the child with disabilities.

3. Parents

- Parents of children with special needs and / or disabilities are usually unprepared for the complex labyrinth of assessments and applications required to gain support, resources or placement.
- Empowered, confident parents are usually more successful in their ventures than parents who may have a disadvantaged background. Some, who have sufficient affluence and knowledge, will seek medical and legal support in their advocacy for their child. They more often gain the resources required to adequately support them in the classroom.
- The pathway for parents is rarely clear and simple. As a result, frustration and anger become common place.

School personnel, who rarely create any impediment, are often viewed by parents as responsible. This can result in adversarial, potentially aggressive relationships. The frustration continues when transition points approach and the need for re-assessment and re-application occurs (e.g. from primary to secondary school)

