

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

**Organisation:** Special Education Principal's and Leader's Association (SEPLA)  
NSW

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# **Inquiry into the provision of education of students with a disability or special needs in government and non-government schools in New South Wales.**

## **Organisation- Special Education Principal's and Leader's Association (SEPLA) NSW.**

This submission is a collation of responses and concerns raised by members and the executive members of SEPLA. SEPLA represents over 100 Special Education principals and leaders from across NSW. SEPLA represents members from IO/IS intellectual disability schools, behaviour and emotional disturbance schools, hospital schools and support units in mainstream schools.

Special education leaders and members of SEPLA were surveyed at the end of 2016 to determine the factors that impact on their work in supporting the learning of students with the most complex needs in our system. Feedback from this survey as well as feedback from network meetings and the SEPLA executive has the provided evidence and information included below.

Terms of reference-

### **1. Equitable access to resources for students with a disability or special needs in regional and metropolitan areas.**

SEPLA NSW strongly supports the rights of children with disability to have equitable access to quality educational provision and resourcing regardless of the educational context. Students with disability and special needs in NSW schools are currently placed in classes in a mainstream school, with or without support, or a support unit in a mainstream primary school or a School for Specific Purpose (SSP).

#### **Availability of Additional Programs.**

Currently many programs offered within New South Wales to support student attainment are not available within many settings that support students with disability. Currently SSP settings have no access to an Instructional Leader, a Learning and Support Teacher (LaST), reading recovery teachers, careers advisors or Early Action for Success funding. The availability of these programs would support student success, engagement and attainment in the same way that it does for peers not in these settings.

#### **Availability of Equity Funding.**

RAM Equity funding in New South Wales is allocated on student numbers based on Socio-Economic Background, English Language Proficiency, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Background and Low Level Disability. RAM funding does not cover students with a disability above a low level.

Given the smaller number of students in all special classes, the schools that provide resources to these classes of students and their teachers are less able to provide an equitable level of support. Principals of SSPs and leaders in support classes have indicated that applying a student's factor of need that determines their enrolment, rather than just their number, would allow for a meaningful and equitable level of support to these students.

#### **Availability and Consistent Application of Long Term Funding for Students with Life Long Complex Needs.**

Students with disability or an additional learning need have access to an inconsistent level of funding dependent upon the operational area in which their school is located.

Student Support Funding is funding allocated by operational directorates to support the additional needs of students on a short term basis, beyond what can be supported by the school. This funding can be accessed for a range of needs including complex medical needs, health care needs and behaviour support needs. Given that the nature of many students needs in specialised placements is life long, members of SEPLA have expressed their opinion that there should be a mechanism to allocate this funding in an ongoing way while these students remain in schooling.

## **Funding of SSP students and QTSS**

SSP schools continue to be staffed as primary schools, despite the number of secondary students in these schools. This has a direct impact on the way that these schools are staffed. Currently schools with students of a primary age are funded through QTSS funding in SSPs. This program is designed to support the professional development and guidance of teachers to enable the provision of high quality teaching and learning programs. This funding is not allocated for any of the high school aged students in an SSP setting. Even though many SSPs cater for the learning needs of students 7-12, they do not have the staffing allocation in line with that of a high school, nor the relevant Head Teacher – Special Education teaching load.

### **2. The impact of the Governments “Every Student Every School” policy on the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in New South Wales public school.**

Learning and Support Teachers (LaSTs) have been allocated to mainstream schools and between mainstream schools. The role of LaSTs and the role of the learning and support teams has seen a renewed focus on planning and support for students with disabilities and special needs in schools.

SSPs did not receive Learning and support teacher’s allocations.

SSPs were funded in the short term to provide projects (The ESES projects) that would enhance opportunities for students in their own schools as well as enhance the opportunities for learning in all schools through networking. Each SSP completed a project, provided evidence of its completion and took part in networking opportunities to support other schools, particularly primary and high schools with support units. Many leaders in SSPs believe that the focus of these projects lay too heavily on the support of students in other schools, rather than the schools provided with the funding over the two years.

Network Specialist Centres have been established across the state to support an interagency approach to address the needs of our most complex students. Principals and leaders in SSPs and across support units are reporting limited access or knowledge of this service.

### **3. Developments since the 2010 Upper House inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs and the implementation of its recommendations.**

- The funding has increased for some students, however for many of the most complex students it is inadequate to meet their educational needs and they do not have access to education on the same basis as their non-disabled peers.
- Students in SSP that are of secondary age continue to be funded as primary students. Staffing allocations to teachers working with secondary students remain at the Primary level.

- Students present with violent or aggressive behaviours toward themselves, staff or students, however there is no long term additional funding to support safety and wellbeing. Students with these behaviours have a profound impact on the safety, learning and wellbeing of the entire school community. The current funding for these students is inadequate to meet the lawful work health and safety requirement. In SSPs where there is a high concentration these students enrolled, the risks in managing these student's is significant.
- The role of SLSO is critical in ensuring best practice in supporting students with disabilities in schools. The Department of Education model of professional learning funding is based on the number of teachers in a school, so whilst there has been a name change from "Teacher professional learning funds" to "professional learning funds", in reality the number of SLSOs has not been factored into the professional learning budget.
- Non-teaching staff in NSW schools are required to complete a PDP facilitated by other school staff as of the start of 2017. The intention is to support the professional learning of SLSOs and their service delivery to students. Primary schools and SSPs will need to manage this process within existing resourcing. In SSP settings, this cohort represents 50% of staff. There has been no funding allocation to SSPs to meet this requirement and provide time, to plan, review and monitor SLSO performance. SSPs will be required to do more within existing resources, proportionally less than mainstream schools of equivalent class numbers.

#### **4. Complaint and review mechanisms within the school systems in NSW for parents and carers.**

Schools, parents and our communities are supported through processes and policies available under the NSW Department of Education Employees, Performance and Conduct unit. Schools also have access to legal Unit that provided timely advice and support to schools in managing complaints and parent matters. SEPLA NSW members are satisfied with the implications with this support and processes.

#### **5. Any other related matters.**

### **Behaviour, Learning and Work Health and Safety**

The challenge schools face in managing and supporting students with high levels behaviours is significant. In a majority of SSP settings and some support settings staff have been trained in responding to complex and challenging behaviours. Regardless of this violent and aggressive behaviours often result in significant injury to staff and students, both physical and psychological. Staff in these settings, while resilient, underreport injuries and the impact of these personally.

The impact of high level behaviour is immense for parents and students in a school setting. This is particularly apparent in a SSP setting, as there is no process to request a higher level of support once this placement has been made. Principals are faced with their moral obligation to support the families and students that they work with, maintaining Department of Education Health and Safety policies for safe work and learning environment and the need of the student and their right to an education.

Often the highest levels of violent students are placed in SSPs alongside the most vulnerable of medical students.

Workplace injuries and notifications resulting from violence and aggression are significant and impact on teaching and learning. The "Suspension and Expulsion of School students

Procedures” is used to engage families and seek resolution following serious incidents. Funding to support these students in SSPs is often non-existent above existing staffing. Staff are also often asked to perform complex health and personal care procedures to support the ongoing education of children in their schools. This complexity not only has an impact on the educational time spent with each student but also on the support received by all students in a class and focus on learning.