

**Submission
No 178**

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

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Addressing the chronic underfunding of the education of students with disability is not about the purchasing of resources but the acquiring of time. Teaching time. Learning time.

Educating any and all students is of course primarily a matter of teaching and learning. Such time is not the same as the amount of hours at school. It is about student access to teachers.

There are not enough educators – too few people – to providing the teaching needed for all students – all students – to learn. This is because currently there is not near enough funding to employ the number of people needed.

The Gonski disability loading is very important not because it provides money but because it purchases time for the students with the greatest need for more learning and teaching time.

The greatest material way in which the educational needs of students with disability differ from students without disability is in the amount of teacher time they require to learn. The amount of time relative to students without disability is likely to be greater, and can be considerably greater.

Time is always a limited resource in a school day and setting. The first consequence of the need for additional learning time, is the need for additional teachers to provide the teaching time.

There is no getting around the fact that the primary means of gaining this additional time in classrooms for teaching and learning is the funding to employ additional teachers.

Currently there are too few teachers and support staff to generate the teaching and learning exchanges that students with disability require to learn all they can learn while at school.

Any suggestion that the size of the class is not relevant is wrong. Such suggestions when made appear to assume that there are no students with identifiably higher learning needs in the class. It is an exclusive view of schools and schooling.

The assumption that the range of learning needs in any classroom is broadly ‘manageable’, irrespective of the level of learning need, reflects an exclusive and potentially prejudiced conceptualisation of who – which students – deserve to be in our classrooms.

Stating that class size does not matter displays an ignorance of the increased time demands of the focused student-teacher individual interactions that are necessary as student individual learning needs increase.

It is important to consider that time in the context of schooling and the life of students is limited. These are pressing concerns – the students cannot simply wait to be taught at the pace at which they we can fund them to learn. They cannot be provided with more and more time in the school day. The school clock will in effect is ticking faster students with disability unless the funding level is significantly increased.

For this reason, in addition to a significant increase in focused learning time provided by additional teachers, the importance of teachers being able to use the time available as efficiently as possible is heightened. That is, the ability to meet the full learning needs of students with disability is related to both the time teachers have to interact meaningfully with students along with the efficient – effective - use of the time that is made available.

Because of the need for more time, the issue of the expertise that teachers hold, acquire and access is also crucial. The equitable access to resources to support students with disability is about not only adequate time through additional teachers, but also expertise.

The most common method for addressing this expertise is professional learning (PL), both pre-service and in-service. In-service PL must be increased immediately in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of learning for all students in every classroom.

PL requires additional teachers. Existing teachers currently work full time, meaning they do not have 'spare' time for significant additional PL. Additional teacher time structured into the school day – through the employment of additional teachers - is central to quality teacher PL.

In addition, however, schools - teachers and principals as educational managers – need access to education professionals from beyond their individual schools. There is a need to provide each school, as is necessary and in a timely way, additional personnel with significant specific expertise in the teaching and learning of students with disability.

The provision of these expert teachers and other staff is a systemic responsibility. To leave this work to the school directly reduces the valuable time available for the teaching and learning exchange.

In recent years there has been a reduction in the focused expert support for students with disability. The cuts to the Department of Education and Communities (as it was called when this occurred in 2011-2013) to so called 'bureaucrats' has resulted in cuts by stealth to this support.

Many non-school based teaching positions have been cut not only in a direct and identifiable way, but through the increasing of responsibilities for the staffing positions that remain. Adding responsibilities, such as for student attendance, to those of disability support has resulted in a de facto reduction in the support available from these additional specialist expert support teacher consultants.

The restoration of those positions cut and the increase in the number of disability teacher consultants is vital to providing teachers in schools with quality support for their professional learning. It is also vital for the managerial and administrative support required to ensure that school time is not diverted away from teaching and learning.

All students in a class will have varying learning needs. Students with disability are usefully a distinct group of students to discuss in so far as the focused time required for them to learn is identifiably higher. Therefore the funding mechanism and quantum to buy that time must be explicitly recognised and made available. The under-resourcing of education of students with disability is unacceptable.

The phasing in over six years of the full Gonski funding for all students, coupled with the additional SWD loading mechanism and funding cannot wait – because waiting means our students in schools now literally run out of time to learn.