

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 26 February 2017

Partially
Confidential

This submission is in essence a reflection on my many years as a teacher in a learning support role in NSW Government, as a volunteer on committees such as the Professional Association for Learning Support Inc , The LD Coalition and as a member of the community who through family and friends have a wide appreciation of the needs of students with a disability.

A) Equitable access to resources for students with a disability or special needs in regional and metropolitan areas

One of the many challenges facing parents in the challenge of finding a suitable place for their child who has a learning difficulty. This is often compounded by the “refusal” of many Principals to accept students. I will quote four stories to illustrate this point..

Family One

A family of two boys the older being diagnosed with ADHD and the younger on the Autism Spectrum but with no behaviour issues. The older child is accepted in to the local Catholic School but when the time came to enrol the younger child they were told very clearly that the school cannot meet the needs of your child. The parents enrolled their student in a nearby government school

Family Two

A family of two boys on the Autism Spectrum. They are enrolled in the Catholic school just a block from their home. The boys do not have any behaviour issues. The Principal summons the mother to the school one day. The mother who is in the middle of treatment for breast cancer is told by the Principal that the school can no longer meet the needs of her boys. She enrolls them in a school distant from their home.

Family Three

Their youngest son has a severe hearing loss but with the aid of a cochlear implant is able to communicate effectively. They want to enrol him in their local government high school . The Principal tells them they cannot meet the needs of the student. They have to enrol him in another high school with a Support unit.

Family

The eldest son has reading difficulties and behaviour problems and is enrolled in the local Catholic school for Year 7. After a refusal by the school to attend a detention the family are told there will be no place for him in Year 8. He is not expelled or suspended just told he would not be welcome. Their son enrolls the local government school. This placement is not successful and the child leaves school early. He later completed a TAFE course in Building and now works as a builder.

In all of the above instances the families have been forced to move their children. In all cases it added extra demands on the families with increased travel time and the horrible reality for both children and parents that in the age of the Disability Discrimination Act that Principals can and do refuse placements to students without any attempt to make reasonable adjustments. All families would be loath to add to their stress by taking legal action and that be difficult for their children. The stories above are known to me through my community links.

The other reality is that parents would be wise not to send their child to a school where the Principal has such an attitude. My teaching experience has highlighted to me and the research will bear this out that the attitude of the Principal has an incredible impact on the attitudes of school personnel with respect to inclusive practice.

E) Any other related matters.

In 1972 I took up my first placement in a specialised role that would be now known as a Learning and Support (LaS) teacher. Before taking up the position I received in addition to the Special Education qualification in my Diploma of Education training for six weeks in teaching literacy and numeracy.

My first teaching appointment involved the withdrawal of students to work on their literacy skills. This later evolved to working with whole classes in a team teaching role. There was little commitment by classroom teachers in improving the literacy and numeracy skills of their students. Their role as they saw it was to teach the content of their subject. Students with intellectual problems were not generally enrolled in regular schools. In those days any student outside the norm was likely to be in a support unit or special class.

Gradually things changed and with whole school literacy and numeracy policies and programs like ELLA and NAPLAN and the Disability Discrimination Act schools have moved to a more inclusive approach.

However, Classroom teachers skills in adapting curriculum and in effective teaching practices have not significantly changed. This lack of skill and understanding by classroom teachers have increased the pressure put on LaS Teachers as collaborative practice is difficult when the teaching partner is resistant or has to be upskilled by another teacher who is in many cases not as senior as the teacher they are working with. This is compounded when the LaS teachers lacks the skill, experience and knowledge to work effectively in a collaborative team.

It was only in my later years of teaching after having completed the following courses did I feel competent in providing professional development to classroom teachers

Master of Education (University of Sydney)

Certificate of Learning Difficulties and Integration Studies (UNSW)

Post Graduate Diploma of Special Education (Macquarie University)

It was the last of the courses that was most effective in upskilling me for the position and it involved practicums in a variety of settings. It would be the course I would recommend for all LaS Teachers. I would also recommend that ALL teachers complete some of the units in the course particularly those on Instructional Practice and Behaviour Management.

One constant frustration throughout my teaching career was the lack of Promotional opportunities for teachers in my role. I saw many effective teachers leave the role in order to further their career. Most promotions positions relating to the role in government school go to primary teachers. There are few positions in secondary schools that teachers can apply for.

My teaching experience also made me appreciative of the power of a framework such as Response to Intervention though it was not a framework recognised at the time. In one school where I felt I worked very effectively we used many of the elements of the framework. This was borne out by the ELLA (The English Language Literacy Assessment) the assessment program before NAPLAN. The cohort was tested in year 7 and 8. In Year 7 39% of the year were in the top band for reading. In the following year that had increased to 63%. In the lowest bands in Year 7 we had 12% in the following year it was reduced to 5%. This came about as we (classroom teachers and myself) collaborated on improving the reading of all students not just those most at risk. I withdrew the students most at risk from at least one lesson of each of their core subjects. I worked on the language/vocabulary for that subject. Volunteers worked alongside me giving individual attention to the students who needed it. There was constant monitoring of their progress. Working so intensively with the Year 7 cohort meant that I was able to determine their learning needs and planning for their future years in high school was easier. I would recommend such intervention for all Year 7 groups in both literacy and numeracy.