

**Submission  
No 183**

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

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The views outlined in this brief submission are my own and I share them in my name and my name only. They are informed by time studying to be and then working as a special education teacher in the public education system in NSW, followed by my time as an Organiser for the NSW Teachers Federation with carriage of special education matters state wide.

I chose to study to be a special education teacher because I wanted to be the best teacher I could be and from the outset understood that my capacity to engage students in and equip them for learning was only as good as my commitment and ability to reach and teach the most disengaged and disadvantaged of learners. Today I adopt the language of those of greater experience than mine in acknowledging this as the vital capacity to teach from the margins in.

I could not think of a better life pursuit in which to invest my high school academic achievements; complemented by my honours thesis research looking at the participation of parents/carers in the education of their child with disability. The limited value placed on, structures to promote and power and influence afforded to the view and empowerment of parents/carers to drive the education of their children is a finding that has influenced my teaching, politics and organising since that time. It stands second only to the limited value, recognition and agency afforded to people with disability in Australia – a great shame of this fairness loving, first world country.

Public education has the potential and responsibility to lead and create the necessary change to deliver equity for people with disability and for genuine worth to be placed on their contributions. As in broader Australian society, despite the necessary progress made toward the valuing of diversity, and the promotion and protection of the rights of people with disability, the public education system in NSW is not yet equipped with the resources, learning design and underpinning values to ensure that every child with disability benefits from and develops through schooling.

From the moment I started my pre-teacher training, I was made aware that teaching and learning of students with disability was not held to the same standard of academic rigour, effective practice and accountability as that of students without disability.

From the moment I started teaching I experienced first-hand that any targeted specialist resources required to respond to the complex needs of students with disability had to be fought for on an equity, industrial and work health and safety basis, through sustained action from union members in schools. There was not a term that went by where I did not have to join with my colleagues to achieve betterments, many of which went to meeting the most basic of needs for students and teachers to be safe and supported in their working and learning environment.

From the moment I started organising I realised that progress toward equitable access is stunted by

- lack of political leadership, will and care toward improvements to the lives of people with disability
- lack of government action toward early investment for economic growth and savings in the long run

- lack of advocacy from those in positions of leadership and power, including senior officials of the Department of Education, to expose deficiencies and discrimination and call for change
- systemic and attitudinal deficits in the education system allowing for the inferior educational outcomes of students with disability to continue unchallenged and unaddressed
- a fragmented partnership between those that teach and those that raise and care for children and young people with disability
- and a failure to listen and respond to the voice and needs of people with disability themselves

I stand ready to offer to the Committee an array of direct experience, observations and future projections for how we could and should improve the educational landscape and as such the lives of people with disability. Until then and beyond I remain committed to challenging the status quo, striving for radical betterments and in doing so improving our educational mandate as teachers for every student in our care.