

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

Name: Name suppressed (PC)

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Partially
Confidential



As public school teachers and NSW Teachers Federation members we continue to campaign for the right of every student to receive a public education of the highest quality and for all students to become successful learners.

We are committed to equity and excellence for every student and in doing so assert, as was confirmed in The Review of Funding for Schooling (Gonski Review) that it costs more to deliver on these values for students with disability.

We will not stand by the currently inadequate provision of education to students with disability and the lifelong implications this inequity has.

The National Education Reform Agreement (NERA) and Australian Education Act 2013, acknowledge the requirement for, and commitment to additional funds for students with disability. The NSW government's unwavering commitment to the Gonski funding model paves the way for this investment to be realised.

We stand ready to work with our employer and NSW government in delivering equitable quality education but can only do so effectively when equipped with the necessary tools and supported by a system that is responsive to need.

We offer the following submission as an index of unmet need and a call for equity for every student.

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

I have worked as the school counsellor at _____ and nearby primary schools for 23 years. I am a registered psychologist _____ The school community includes the suburb of Claymore which has frequently been identified in academic research as one of the most disadvantaged communities in Australia (see <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/dropping-off-the-edge-report-highlights-states-most-disadvantaged-postcodes/news-story/ef48d00d217c6297d7b4e91af6c2490d> and <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/years-watching-a-suburb-slowly-die-claymore/news-story/261ae080aee36681c0f734f627f64853>). A Four Corners documentary was made about Claymore children living in poverty in 2012 (see <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/2012/09/20/3594298.htm>). The disabilities and mental health problems experienced by the students are complex, intense and prolonged. Because I have worked in the same area for two decades, I have watched as children who have inherited the disorders, disabilities, diseases and disadvantages of their parents have grown into adulthood and then had their own children, who then experience the same problems. The schools provide an island of stability and care in a community full of extreme stress, substance abuse, antisocial behaviour, crime and violence. School staff, demonstrating extraordinary dedication to their school communities, have achieved great progress and outcomes for their students. However, over the last two decades, the resources provided to the schools to support the learning and mental health of students have always been insufficient to meet the demand. Only a small proportion of the 15% of students who have severe behavioural and emotional disturbances are ever placed in special school learning environment that they need in order to engage with schooling. These schools are located in Liverpool and Campbelltown and, because the student's behaviours make it difficult to get into good travel routines, attendance is often fragmented and poor. Father Chris Riley from Youth Off The Streets has established an alternative school at Macquarie Fields but, because it is a private school, students can be sent back to _____ at any time. The same problems with travelling apply to this school. There are

simply not enough places in these schools to cope with the demand from the hundreds of schools in South-West Sydney that can seek access to them. The population in South-West Sydney, and particularly the Macarthur region, keeps growing but no new special schools for behaviour disorders have been established by the DoE. These students stay in their mainstream schools and cause constant disruption to the learning and mental health of students and staff on a daily basis. They are repeatedly suspended only to return again to their local school because there are no vacancies in more suitable schools. The duration of this ongoing disruption has been prolonged ever since the school leaving age was raised from 15 to 17. The obvious solution to this problem is to establish more special schools for behaviour disorders. In Campbelltown, a ratio of one special school for every four high schools would be needed to meet the demand. Because students would have to travel extra distances to attend these schools, problems of fragmented and poor attendance would still occur. A better solution would be to set up alternative learning spaces within each high school. The physical environment of spaces would be designed to maximise student engagement. Staff would be selected who could work holistically to manage the students' learning, behavioural, social and emotional development. Students could engage in individualised learning using computer technology. Project-based learning strategies could be used to increase engagement. Ray Handley, who worked for 10 years as the Head Teacher at The Campbelltown Suspension Centre before he retired in 2016, has published academic research on this model of schooling (see <http://uow.academia.edu/RayHandley>). Schools such as the Pavilion School in Preston, Victoria, operate on these principles (see <http://pavilionschool.vic.edu.au/about/> and <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-07/pavilion-school-welcomes-communitys-most-at-risk-teenagers/7698290>). Father Riley's school at Macquarie Fields, Eden College, also works in this way (see <https://youthoffthestreets.com.au/programs/eden-college/>). Having such a learning environment within walking distance of the community increases the likelihood that students will attend and thus engage, learn and grow. Support from parents in the community is likely to increase as they will feel their local school is directly responding to their child's individual needs. Providing with funding to set up such facilities and programs within the school, and with ongoing funding to sustain them, would be equitable because it would be meeting the identified needs of the students and the local community. Over the longer term, such facilities and programs could help students to engage and learn more effectively; to recover successfully from their early traumas; and to thus increase their chances of obtaining the employment they need to lift themselves out of the degrading cycle of poverty in which they live.

B) The impact of the Government's 'Every Student Every School' policy on the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in New South Wales public schools.

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Teachers and School Learning and Support Officers perform exceptional work on a daily basis to help the neediest students in the community to engage, learn and behave. The current number of LAST and SLSO's at [redacted] would need to be doubled to provide the individual attention required by our needy students in order for them to engage in learning.

C) Developments since the 2010 inquiry by General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs and the implementation of its recommendations.

At [redacted], the demand to support students with special needs and disabilities has risen since 2010 without any significant increase in the resources to do this. It has been harder to get students placed in the few special behaviour schools nearby, especially as the population in South-West Sydney has grown, thus increasing demand for placement. No new special schools for behaviour disorder have been established in South-West Sydney. The duration of these students' disruption of mainstream classes has been prolonged because of the extension of the school leaving age from 15 to 17 years of age. The decline of the use of the transfer system to staff schools within the DoE appears to have had an affect on the ability of [redacted] to provide the stable and continuous school culture and teamwork required to support students with multiple, complex and ongoing needs.

D) Complaint and review mechanisms within the school systems in New South Wales for parents and carers.

E) Any other related matters.