

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 18 February 2017

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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.

Resources are always an issue for meeting the needs of any student. Prior to the LSLD framework, it was much more overt and evident as to which funding was available to student under the flexible funding model. It now seems to be less clear-cut with regard to meeting the needs of many students who do not attract individual funding.

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.

The impact of the ESES policy has been significant in raising awareness of the needs of students with disability in our schools. However, the identification of these students has increased exponentially as we understand that a broad range of students are affected with at least one disability at any point in their time as students. In my experience as an LST coordinator and a LaST, the answer is not as easy as making adjustments and producing a document for staff to use to assist here. Many teachers need substantial time and assistance to adequately ensure that adjustments can be made. The expertise of LaSTs and significant financial support to equip staff in dealing with these students is required. However, the NCCD collection of data has, I believe, led to a decline in such support on the ground. LaSTs are spending time creating such learning adjustment documents which is impacting on time with the students and staff. More and more we see students with disability. In a school of approximately 1200 students at least 250-300 students at any one time require support and the staff that teach them. The quota of LaSTs for a school of this size equates to 2.6 staff. This is hardly equitable or reasonable. Whilst some staff professional development has been devoted to skilling staff into catering for these students, it is not a substitute for timely and expert intervention. Much of my time and energy as HT was taken applying for additional funds for students with disability which

is an extremely time-consuming process which requires one to paint a desperate situation for the child concerned in order to even be considered worthy of going to panel. In the interim we run the risk of the child completely disengaging as resources are not, and may never be available to assist with any degree of success. As Professor Barry Carpenter evoked in his visits to DET personnel in 2012, we are facing a 'tsunami' of dealing and teaching students with multiple and complex needs of the like we have never seen before. We are ill-equipped to deal with the magnitude of this and this is apparent in our schools now.

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.

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

The school should always be able and open to parents and carers who need to have those conversations with key personnel about their child for any reason. A strong Learning Support Team is the first point of contact when working with parents/carers of students with disability. These conversations should be invited as a proactive measure. Reacting to situations when problems arise is to be avoided as the schools should have good systems in place to identify students with disability in the first place. The Learning Engagement Officer is always a useful person to have working with staff and parents/carers when required early on. Communication is vital to understanding. On enrolment, processes should be clear on identifying students' strengths and particular issues paving the way for successful integration to school. As for current mechanisms, there is the standard protocols which tend to be reactive rather than proactive.

E) Any other related matters.

Teachers are struggling to deliver the curriculum when there are so many competing initiatives we have to meet. Social ills are impacting significantly in all areas and now is a time when we are under pressure like no other time. We are faced with the complexities of the 21st Century learner in Australian society where public services are under pressure to deliver on reduced funding. The devolution of state-wide services, less federal intervention and concern for equity points to an increasingly disillusioned work force of teachers who will be directed to do more and more with much less.

This email was sent from the NSW Teachers Federation website.