

**Submission
No 109**

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

Organisation: Ms Kathryn Deacon

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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.

There has not been equitable access to resources for students with disabilities because of the continued refusal of the federal Coalition government to fund the Gonski Students with Disability (SWD) loading which means a growing numbers of students are not gaining equitable access to education or improved life outcomes through schooling. The federal government's own data collection shows that 13.6 per cent of all students need funded support at school but only 6.2 per cent are getting it. This affects more than 270,000 students across the country. It is essential that the Gonski Students with Disability (SWD) loading is delivered to NSW to ensure that a cascade services for students with disabilities can delivered in regular/mainstream classes, special units in schools and in Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs). SSPs, as one example require additional staffing to ensure that special support and specialised teaching can be delivered. The SWD will provide the injection of funds to enable the SSP students to access enhanced teaching and learning, Additional specialist teaching staff to develop and deliver the programs and provide the interventions required to ensure the quantum shift in learning provision is urgently needed. A resource delayed is a resource denied. The learning adjustments required for students with disabilities require resourcing at a higher level of funding to ensure the complexities their needs are met. These resources cannot be delayed any longer as these students deserve the ability to reach their full potential. The current level of resourcing is inadequate. I was a principal of a public primary school in south west Sydney and I would estimate that at least one third of students required speech therapy to assist them to have the expressive and receptive language skills required to learn to read along with the development of other literacy skills. The lack of resourcing in this example is a demonstration of neglect by those in government to ensure that all students have equitable access to programs and specialist intervention if required.

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.

I was a principal of a public primary school in south west Sydney when the ESES model was introduced. It was flawed from the outset. The specialist itinerant teachers, such as those supporting students with behavioural issues and the Support Teachers Learning and Assistance (STLA), were rolled into a multifaceted role of Learning and Support Teacher (LAST). The LASTs were expected to deal with students presenting with complex issues and the specialisation of support was lost. The quality and the level of one on one support for students was compromised as the specialist teacher roles were abolished. The ESES implementation also saw the abolition of the specialist teachers for students with a mild intellectual disability (IM) in Kindergarten to Year 2. The school where I worked had one such position and this teacher suddenly became an LAST and was expected to work with all students Kindergarten to Year 6. The early intervention from a special teacher was suddenly gone. These positions should have been increased in schools across the state. The mainstream classroom teacher was expected to be upskilled by the LAST and the school was not supported adequately by the Department to identify need and make the learning adjustments and resource the required learning adjustments. The schools established Learning and Support Teams (LST) to oversee and manage the implementation of programs to support students with identified needs. These committees have great potential to support the whole school delivery of educational provision, but this cannot happen to the fullest potential as the services and support available is inadequate. The whole ESES strategy was designed as a cost cutting measure.

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.

There has not been the injection of funding into special education in public schools since the 2010 inquiry. The 2010 inquiry participants argued that one of the major barriers to the effective inclusion of students with disabilities and special needs in the education system is the lack of appropriate funding in both the government and non-government sectors. We therefore call on the NSW Government to substantially increase funding for these students in NSW Government schools, including Schools for Specific Purposes. We need the Gonski Students with Disability (SWD) loading immediately made available so that our collective obligation to enable all students to access well resourced programs is fulfilled.

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

The following information does not relate directly to complaint and review mechanisms but does provide recommendations and commentary made by the Audit Office of NSW and NSW Parliament Legislative Council regarding areas to strengthen parent information, engagement and consultation. The performance audit conducted by the Audit Office of NSW recommended that the Department:

- improve information on its website for students with disability and their families by:
 - developing clearer, more readily accessible information in plain English
 - providing guidance on reasonable adjustments, including case studies on how schools tailor support to meet students' needs
 - provide additional guidance to schools and parents to strengthen their understanding of what effective consultation looks like regarding support for students with disability

E) Any other related matters.

Gonski enables improvements for students with disability. The Gonski SWD loading was due for

release at the beginning of 2015 but has not been delivered by the federal Coalition government. The loading, as detailed in the Australian Education Act 2013, is applied at: a.223 per cent of the respective Schooling Resource Standard for students attending a special school b.186 per cent of the respective Schooling Resource Standard for students attending any other school The full implementation of Gonski – including the Students with Disability Loading – could deliver:

- additional executive release and specialist teachers to support every teacher working with students with disability
- early and ongoing access to specialist support such as speech pathologists and mental health professionals
- time for teachers and Learning Support Teams to undertake collaborative transition planning with students and their families
- adequate levels of targeted provision (e.g. integration funding, specialist placements) based on need
- ongoing professional learning on effective inclusive practice for all teachers.

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I am a Principal