

**Submission  
No 185**

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

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A

- Students do NOT receive adequate and timely access to equitable support. The processes and administration required to access funded support prohibits timely access and sometimes access is denied.

- Classroom teachers do not feel equipped, confident and supported to provide the level of support that is required to meet the needs of every student.

- The lack of allocated funds for all levels of student need, along with the additional staff and resources required to meet that need, inhibits access to the level of support I feel should be provided.

- Students do NOT receive adequate and timely access to in school specialist support. Although teachers know how to access this support and feel that their professional judgement is acknowledged, we find there is not enough specialist support available within the school to match student need. The specialist support teachers we do have are too few in number to effectively support need. This results in allocation of support not matching the level of need and therefore being far from equitable.

- Students often do NOT receive adequate and timely access to Integration Funding support. The process of applying for the funding is onerous and time consuming. With limited funding available, we find the process to be competitive and not based on actual need. Instead, it appears to be unfair in distribution - with many applications denied or the level of need unmatched by the amount of funding granted, which means either the school has to find a way to utilise its own resources to match the need or the students go without the support they actually need. Support placements are very limited and highly competitive. The application and administrative processes are onerous and time consuming, with input from teachers, counsellors, support staff, medical staff and parents required. Panels then determine if placement is granted based upon the very limited numbers of vacancies, NOT on actual need. Parents who do not understand the process sometimes cause delays in placements or refuse them once granted. Schools are left to try and cater for need when placements are denied, or parents do not understand the system, with no extra funding or teacher training, apart from what the school can source and pay for from its own budget. This is far from equitable, unfair and is denying students the quality education they deserve to match their level of need.

- Students who require specialist equipment and/or environmental adjustments only sometimes receive adequate and timely access to this support. Teachers know how to access equipment and have their professional judgement acknowledged, however, lack of school funds may prohibit the purchase of items required to meet need. While waiting for funds to purchase equipment, students with unmet need are left in mainstream classrooms with the school and/or teachers doing their best to provide what they can. If environmental adjustments have to be made, the administrative processes required can cause lengthy delays – with the result being student need remaining unmet and schools/class teachers having to cope without the equipment or environment that best suits the student need.

- I believe it is essential to have genuine, ongoing consultation with parents and carers. The time constraints required to meet with parents, the administrative and financial burdens of purchasing time to do so and the cost of hiring interpreters to ensure that consultation is meaningful, is all borne by the school. With no allocated funds for this, or if interpreters can not be purchased, the process relies on the good will of the school and staff. Many meetings occur in personal time and many interpreters are teachers who volunteer their time. This is unfair and inequitable. It is also not a sustainable system that ensures consultation is ongoing.

- I feel that we can identify the needs of and necessary adjustments for students, however, the adjustments are subject to the availability of funds and staff. I endeavour to provide the required reasonable adjustments to students but this is often left to my good will and hard work. Although teachers do the very best they can, funding levels and specialist teacher resources are far too low for the required reasonable adjustments to be provided consistently and equitably.

-The school does the best it can to run an effective Learning and Support Team but again, this is dependant on funding. The level of student need far outweighs the number of specialist support teachers and support resources the school can purchase.

- I am provided with limited time to develop personalised learning and support plans. It is common to find teachers completing these processes in their own time once the allocated time with funding has run out.

- The school tries to provide teachers with access to specialist support and special education expertise but the availability is limited. If students are undiagnosed or unfunded, there are very few experts to utilise, unless school networks assist or unfunded support is accessed through teacher and school good will.

- Although the school endeavours to provide teachers access to relevant professional learning, we find that this is inadequate in regards to need. Every class has students with unmet support required for need. We simply do not have the funds, nor access to enough professional learning, to up skill every teacher to be a special needs teacher.

- The school attempts to provide teachers access to in-class support and the process is done as fairly as possible, however, the high level of need far outweighs the level of support available. This means that student need is identified but the specialist teachers are not enough in number to meet the need. We have too few and they are spread thinly across the school, or the needs are ranked and only the highest needs can be supported with others going without anything other than class teacher support.

- All teachers and the school try to provide every student with equitable access to teaching and learning, via adjustments and differentiation of the curriculum. This, however, is often unsupported by funds or specialist expertise, making the onerous task fall upon individual teachers. Personal time, the cost of personal resources and huge workloads result, making this unfair and inequitable – if one class has higher needs than others, that teacher has higher workloads and administrative burdens to cope with.

- Processes to engage in effective transition planning for students vary from year to year. It is an unfunded process, so is dependant upon teacher good will or school budgets allocating time.

## B

The implementation of ESES in NSW resulted in:

- increased classroom teacher workload through the expansion and implementation of online training modules for teachers, in order to meet the high need of students not being met by specialist support.

- making the school responsible for accessing specialist courses for teachers when funding allocation did not provide the specialists required.

This has resulted in:

- teachers being left to make adjustments to support the individual learning needs of students with disability or learning difficulties without the support they require or the professional learning they need.

- the school being forced to create and maintain effective collaborative partnerships with parents and other professionals, in lieu of special education personnel being responsible for this.

- many teachers struggling to feel equipped to understand and meet the learning and support needs of the full range of students in their classrooms.

- an adequate level of specialist teacher presence in our workplace to effectively support the high level and varying degrees of student need.

- only some Learning and Support teachers at the school being a specialist

- access to additional support within the school to meet the educational needs of students with disability or difficulty not being met

- teachers and the school being responsible for the timely and proper use of the Department's Personalised Learning and Support Signposting Tool (PLASST).

- teachers requiring training and time to feel better equipped with the PLASST to identify the strengths, abilities, skills and learning needs of students with disability. This training and time requires teacher good will or school funds to be used – again another inequitable and unfair burden on schools with high numbers of new teachers and LBOTE parents/students.

- specialist support for students with disability not always being accessed due to lack of funds or lack of specialist teachers/resources/placements.

- a reduction of staff placed in schools as specialist support or the collapsing of specialist classes, placing students with special needs back into mainstream classes without specialist support

- reduced resourcing from the department for students with more severe disabilities.

- reduced capacity by the department to meet obligations to students under the Commonwealth Disability Standards for Education 2005, however, the burden of responsibility being placed on individual schools and teachers.

- the devaluing of students with a disability or learning difficulty, which does not promote the system-wide recognition and understanding of the rights of students with disability.

C

I do NOT believe that the NSW Government substantially increased funding for students with disabilities. Reduced specialist teacher numbers, the collapsing of specialist classes and the withholding of GONSKI funding allocations for students with disability prove that this has not occurred.

Students whose disability and level of need is unlikely to change dramatically in the space of a year still have to reconfirm their disability status on an annual basis in order to receive disability funding. The need is not matched by funding and the funding is reviewed annually. This increases teacher workload and uses the time of support teachers, taking them away from actually supporting students in my class. This annual review wastes time and resources and should cease. Allocation of funding per student need removes this waste.

Although the Department implemented PLASST as a tool to be used to inform decisions about access to disability funding, I do NOT feel it has further enhanced educational outcomes for students with disabilities and special needs. The lack of funding to match the identified need in my school precludes the enhancement of student learning outcomes. The Department of Education has NOT acknowledged and accepted that there is widespread concern about the unmet demand for special education places in NSW Government schools. It has NOT increased the number of special education places and classes to ensure that there are adequate places to cover demand for all students with disabilities and special needs and it HAS dissolved language support classes. This goes directly against the recommendations.

Although the Department of Education worked towards ensuring that all school learning support teams include at least one member who holds a special education qualification, many more qualified staff are required to meet the needs of our students.

The recommendation that the Department of Education provide additional resources, including relief time for teachers to develop Individual Education Plans has NOT been followed. Time allocation comes from school good will (where existing funds are allocated by the school for this purpose). Extra funding is NOT provided for this in budgets and many teachers end up spending their own time working on these plans.

The Department of Education has NOT worked towards assisting all School Learning Support Teachers to obtain a special education qualification. PL to up skill teachers comes from school allocation of other funds, not from disability allocations. No other support teachers in our school have obtained Special Ed qualifications.

D

Our school works hard to establish meaningful relationships with parents/carers of students with disabilities or learning difficulties. We commit ourselves to working with and consulting parents/carers of students and respond to concerns and complaints raised by parents/carers of students in a timely manner. However, we do all of this off our own backs, without the direct support of resources or allocated funding from the department. We utilise school budget funding for other purposes or we rely on teacher good will and use personal time and resources to implement this.

E

To deliver equity and excellence to every student, our school needs the full GONSKI allocation of funding for students with disability.

We need dedicated funding for Teacher training – every single teacher has students with specialist/high needs in social, academic and behaviour domains, however, we can NOT access training. We also need programs with targeted support and the funds to match the needs of every student – so it must be an allocation per student need, not a pot of money.

Our school requires more Counsellor time and qualified counsellor personnel – student need requires this to be fully qualified teachers who are counsellor trained, so that they have the understanding and expertise required to make recommendations and implement programs that will target student needs and support teachers with an understanding of educational settings.

41% of our students have refugee status, 98% identify as LBOTE and the community has been identified as low SES every year since this practice has been used by the department. These unique circumstances mean we consistently require resources, specialist support and funds to meet the level of high need. We currently receive allocation for EALD and low SES but we need dedicated funding for specialist support teachers and resources for students with disabilities and learning difficulties in order to deliver equity in education.

As a teacher within the school, I require funded and dedicated time to complete administrative tasks, the funded support of specialist teachers and counsellors to implement educational programs that match need; and the funded professional learning required to plan, assess, program and deliver the best possible learning outcomes to all students in my care.