

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date received:** 27 February 2017

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Partially  
Confidential

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the *Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in government and non-government schools in New South Wales*.

We live on the Northern beaches and I have a seven year old son with intellectual disability and global developmental delay. He attends a needs satellite class at a catholic school. This is staffed and funded through the Aspect Vern Barnett school and classes are held in a demountable and not integrated with the mainstream classes. We are desperate for truly accessible and inclusive education options and there is mounting evidence showing the benefits of full inclusion in a mainstream school to give him the best start to becoming part of his community and living independently in the future, and also beneficial to other students as well.

We found that when we wanted to enrol him in a public school, the publicity and information on the government web site was in stark contrast to our experience. Below are examples of what we heard from the schools we approached:

*"We cant say no, but as a parent you would be doing the worst thing by him sending him here"*

*"The P&C will have real problems with this, we have to think of the other parents"*

*"If he does come we cant guarantee he will get any additional support in the classroom, we get a general pool of money and it its mainly for our curriculum support and teacher training"*

*"The teachers complain because they didn't choose to be special needs teachers, and we are so short staffed in the playgrounds he will get bullied"*

*"We have a class for kids with behavioural problems, not intellectual, so unless he can read and write to kindy standard we cant help,"*

And the worst was the attitude of some schools where it was insinuated there was no point offering him an education given his disability. We have seen him achieve so much, more than we dreamed, and cant see any reason why one day he could not live with some assistance independently and have a job so he is contributing and part of our community.

We persevered for a while, there was the paper work, opaque system, the hoops, the referrals, the regional wait list, waiting, attending meetings, referrals, assessments, trials and waiting, for the same end - non inclusion and schools that didn't feel they had the resources or culture to offer him an education. In following up our complaints, the staff were very professional and approachable at the regional special education unit, but were unable to change the system or advocate on our behalf, they were only really able to listen with sympathy and outline the current system to us again, which was not offering education options to our son.

The only option we had was to pay private school fees and enrol him in a segregated satellite class in a Catholic school. However the satellite school only goes to Year 2 and there are only a small handful of Catholic schools miles away that offer classes beyond this. So next year? I am worried we will face the same merry go round hoping to get a place in another satellite class with private school fees, and hope for transport support and a driver to

take him there. Or we visit every school in Sydney until we find one with the right culture of inclusion and move to that suburb, no matter what the cost to our other son and our jobs.

I don't think the growing collective experience of individual parents across the State is being heard. If every child has a right to an education, and every child has immense potential we can surely take another step in the right direction and mirror the NDIS - that we assume people with disabilities are and should be part of our community - and early investment will pay for itself tenfold in the long run.

I hope the inquiry can specifically set up mechanisms to investigate how to achieve the following:

1. establish a parent advisory group that guides quality improvement in inclusion in mainstream public schools, especially to remove red tape and have transparency around what support is available
2. put a basic step by step map on the Department of Education's web site for parents on the process for enrolling a child with special needs, what support is available and how to access this.
3. revise the University curriculum so training for teachers assumes they will have children with additional needs in their class room and this is touched on in every part of the curriculum
4. schools have to report annually on how many children with disabilities approach them to be enrolled, were not able to be successfully enrolled and why
5. all families with children registered on the NDIS (there is already a government list linked to MyGov ) are sent an information pack from the Department of Education when their children are 4 explaining options, how to enrol and what to expect. This HAS to be developed with a community panel of parents with children with disabilities.
6. the Department of Education work with the NDIA to forecast the needs of schools in geographic areas
7. a cost benefit analysis on long term benefits for children with disability of investing in curriculum alone or investing in curriculum AND in class support
9. fully investigate transition satellite classes in **every** public school
10. a right to education charter for children with disabilities

I am sure parents of children with disabilities would also have more fantastic ideas, and I encourage a full consultation with them, not just peak bodies, to review the current system.

Thank you,