

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

**Organisation:** Sir Joseph Banks High School (PC)  
**Date received:** 27 February 2017

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Partially  
Confidential

Inquiry into the provision of education to students with disability or special needs in government and non-government schools in New South Wales

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/specialneedsstudents>  
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That General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3 inquire into and report on the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in government and non-government schools in New South Wales, and in particular:

- (a) equitable access to resources for students with a disability or special needs in regional and metropolitan areas
- (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
- (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, and
- (e) any other related matters.

We cannot personally attest to the services provided to students in regional or metropolitan areas, as our school is not located in a regional area however:

- Access to services is a right.
- Provision of these services is necessary.
- Distance is an issue which needs to be provided for.
- Services need to be distributed evenly for example within the Sydney metropolitan area many services are available in affluent areas, these are not always available in lower socio economic areas. Eg Autism Services

The voice of the students and their caregivers is vocal and students, rightly so, are given opportunities to live, learn, function, and be integral members of our school communities. This is wonderful, however along with "voice" come necessary resourcing to carry out the task of supporting our students, without burning out our leaders, teachers and amazing support staff.

Necessary resourcing- is the area neglected. Gonski was designed to assist in this process. However, we are yet to see the benefits of Gonski for students with a disability both in the mainstream and the support unit.

How has the unit personally benefitted?

Not much has changed in the years of teaching at my high school. There are still five classes and still 5 teachers which includes myself as Head Teacher. There are still 5 School Learning Support Officers.

The faculty budget improved slightly in 2016 where I received just over \$5000 to run the faculty for the year. I also received the \$300 to support the classes in a tied grant and I applied for Links Support Funding which employed one person per day for 32 weeks of the year to support the provision of work experience programs for our students with high support needs. I have a possible enrolment of 74 students in the Unit at Sir Joseph Banks High School. This is not much funding to be able to support the learning needs of our students.

It stretches our staff.

No additional funding is given to support these students. The time utilized each day to carry out the Health Care procedures required for these students means that learning support time is removed from the many other students who access the unit.

We as a school need another fully serviced disabled toilet with change table, hoist and the required resourcing. Last week I had a visit from the family of a student who is considering coming to our school in 2018. This child is with a variety of needs. How long will the que for the toilet be in 2018?

These students receive support, some have very similar needs to students in the Unit. Some have a support dedicated to them each day for the full period of the day. How can one child in a mainstream setting, receive a full time SLSO yet another who is in a support unit and requires the same support not?

**School In Local Area Comparisons:** The Unit at Sir Joseph Banks High, operates within the mainstream school setting however runs similar to a school in a special setting. Our Support Unit, which is not much smaller than as the local special education school, does not receive the funding the local special school receives.

**SJBHS Special Education Enrolment 2015 – 67 students - Intellectual Mild and Moderate**

Principal 0

Deputy Principal(s)

0  
 Assistant  
 Principal(s) 0  
 Head Teacher(s)  
 1  
 Classroom  
 Teacher(s) 5  
 School  
 Administrative & 5  
 Support Staff

**School Example 1**

**Local Special Education School enrolment 2015 – 106 Moderate and Severe Disabilities**

Principal 1  
 Deputy Principal(s) 1  
 Assistant 4  
 Principal(s)  
 Head Teacher(s) n/a  
 Classroom 11  
 Teacher(s)  
 School 18.2  
 Administrative &  
 Support Staff

**School Example 2**

**Local Special Education School Enrolment 2015 – 67 Moderate and Severe Disabilities**

Principal 1  
 Deputy Principal(s) 1  
 Assistant 4  
 Principal(s)  
 Head Teacher(s) n/a  
 Classroom 12  
 Teacher(s)  
 School 19.282  
 Administrative &  
 Support Staff

My point in displaying this information is not to take away from the work any of these schools put into their students, it is to highlight what seems to myself as a huge disparity between the leadership, teaching and support staff provided by the government / department in each school compared to the leadership, teaching and support staff provided to the support unit with similar numbers.

The establishment of large units within mainstream settings requires the provision adequate staffing. This is to support the leadership, planning, learning, integration, transitioning and health care needs of students effectively. In many cases and the one to which I am referring, our unit is as big as the two local special education schools who are serviced by a Principal, and two Assistant Principals each, as well as teaching and support staff as per staffing allocation.

If staff and students needs are to be addressed adequately then time / staffing allocation needs to be provided to:

- address student's need,
- provide adequate training for staff working with students,
- relieve staff to attend important meetings
- plan and develop necessary resources to cater for student's needs.

Additionally leaders, ie Head Teacher Support, Head Teacher Special Education, Assistant Principals Special Education, need to be provided with adequate staffing / teaching relief, so that they are able to carry out required duties. These duties include but are not limited to:

- Leading faculty / special education teams, and carrying out the required administration, as well as support for staff.
- Completing necessary administration to meet departmental guidelines completing access requests, developing behavior management / risk assessments
- Planning for and attending multiple meetings with important stakeholders providing support for students caregivers, parents, case teams, NDIA / NDIS Therapists and other personnel, etc
- Providing staff with regular training / strategies in special education, and development and management strategies for students.
- Attending network / school meetings above what is considered the regular norm
- Contributing to the whole school agenda.

The NSW Auditors General's Performance Audit - *Educating Primary School Students with Disabilities* identified that enrolments in support classes in primary schools were declining. As a result of this inquiry Multi-category classes were introduced, an administration system was introduced and classes with low enrolments were reviewed.

As students get older, the need for support increases with the demands of schooling. Even though some students have coped with the curriculum in primary school this is

not the case as students progress through the high school curriculum. Additional support is required.

Ever increasing demands for learning objectives to be met and for students to perform alongside peers who are competing for a regular HSC and the opportunity to attend university means that the support needs for the student with a disability increases. The curriculum has provision for life skills students, how those provisions look on paper and in reality of the classroom are worlds apart. It is impossible practically for a student who is on a life skills curriculum whether it be a full or a partial life skills curriculum to sit alongside a regular student in the same classroom and be expected to keep up with content taught and be expected learn at the same rate. They need support. Similarly, it is unfair to expect a student who is competing for an ATAR and HSC to get into university to be expected wait while our life Skills students get extra help from the class teacher to complete the work. They shouldn't be held back. Teaching to cater for the needs of all student needs to be serviced effectively with enough resourcing to support student learning.

Applications for special provisions are often knocked back and have to be resubmitted 3-4 times to meet red tape demands including gathering of supporting documentation such as OT / Speech/ Psych / Counsellor reports to support these applications, place sometimes overwhelming demands and unnecessary stresses on our students, their families and our staff. As educators we see student stress / anxiety in operation each day and we need the resources to support our students. One cannot be expected to teach the rigorous curriculum expected from NESA, support students through modification of resources for learning, counsel students who are experiencing difficulty, and complete the many other initiatives expected for our schools to be recognized as at the forefront of education.

The levels of anxiety and the demands placed on students and families and schools as teenagers transition into the adult world needs to be addressed through the provision of staff to support our students through these processes.

With the breakdown of the family unit as we have known it and the changing needs of students in society, support needs to be provided to schools through the provision of adequate support staff, teaching ratios, the provision of professionals including counsellors and transition support staff to enable our educators to be able to focus on their job...teaching, modifying materials to support students appropriately in classes. The teaching role has become more than that of an educator. It is a very complex role indeed where teachers are feeling overwhelmed in their desire to provide students with the best possible learning experiences.

I am sure the department is acknowledging this we see it on paper with the introduction of the Wellbeing Framework. We hope they also see the need to provide staffing adequate to support the social, emotional, physical, learning needs of students. Staffing that supports our students at grass roots level. Not administration systems or more work for our staff who are already at capacity.

There were a number of recommendations made as a result of 2010 inquiry.

NCCD has come into play.

There are issues with the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD). Data can be interpreted by individuals in very different ways allowing servicing of individuals. What some perceive as a level of need is not viewed similarly by others. Consistency in the collection of this data needs to be addressed.

One hundred and twenty-two Autism classes were set up, which is wonderful. However, at the time of the inquiry it was stated that there were some 6000 students needing access. Autism classes cater for up to 6 students at a time. We have 3 students with Autism in the unit accessing multi-category classes. Our multi-category classes are full. They service 18 students. How is this fair for our student with Autism? And how is it fair for our students without Autism? If these students can't be resourced with the level of need advised through the school staff who have work with this student and the staff responsible for allocating places, then the government should make available adequate resourcing for the school to be able to support students at the ground level.

We also have students with Autism in the mainstream. These students need to be adequately supported so they can receive the education and transition support they need to access services post school. The low level disability support funding which came about as a result of the 2010 inquiry needs to be increased to maximize the support required to service our student in the mainstream. I am aware that our school is incredibly unique in how it caters for its students right across the school. However, 1.9 learning support staff is not enough to cater for the many students with disabilities who are accessing our mainstream classes.

#### **Services:**

When you enroll a student in a school and they have particular learning disabilities and health care needs, these need to be considered and actioned prior to the student starting. We are lucky to have 2 lifts, and a serviced toilet area for people with disabilities. We are at capacity for these services. I feel we will be at risk should the department enroll more students who have these support needs without adequate resourcing.

I am recommending the following for the Support Unit at Sir Joseph Banks High School as a reasonable request to function effectively to meet the needs of the students and staff:

1. 2.5 teachers to support staffing, Leadership and assist in reducing class sizes based on factor of need.

2. \$250,000 per year – additional funding for extra complexities to resource teaching staff
3. 2 School Learning Support Officers, to facilitate health care procedures (PEG feeding, hoisting toileting), and transitioning for students across the school setting and the support of students in classes.  
\$100,000 per year
4. Upgrade toilets, ground floor and library  
\$50,000
5. Aging school grounds, address cracks etc to ensure safety  
\$10,000 per year
6. Air Cooling (conditioning) , 10 rooms including Support Unit , (for a more conducive environment for epilepsy prone students)  
\$10,000 per year
7. ICT and other class resources  
\$15,000 per year

Total

Staffing: per year \$350,000

Services: Initial outlay \$85 000

Ongoing expenses

Staffing \$350,000 per year

Ongoing services expenses \$10,000

Regards, the undersigned: