

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

**Organisation:** Rooty Hill High School

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Partially  
Confidential



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.**

**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.**

**E) Any other related matters.**

Every school in Australia faces the challenge of providing adequate support for all students, particularly those with a disability or special needs. Every school must meet the learning needs of all students, and students who are considered to be at risk can often have complicated and individual issues that need to be addressed. We would consider students who are 'at risk' to include those with physical and mental health issues, those in Out of Home care, those with learning disabilities, those who are socially isolated, and those experiencing trauma, including violence or serious parental illness. There are a growing number of at-risk students enrolled in the education system, with some reports indicating that as many as 30% of all Australian learners are 'at risk' at some point during their schooling lives. In some communities, that number could rise as high as 70%. These numbers

pose a challenge to schools attempting to include at-risk students in a mainstream environment, and schools are forced to examine how they can best support the learning of all students in an inclusive way. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities specifies in Article 24 that children with disabilities should be able to access education on an equal basis with all other children. Our own Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) makes it a legal requirement that students with a disability are not discriminated against in accessing the same education which is available to other students. Therefore, Australians have a right to expect that students with complex needs and challenging behaviours which interfere with their own learning or the learning of others have the right to equality and inclusive education in all our schools. As teachers, we have a moral contract with parents, students and the community to provide quality education to each student, assisting each individual to achieve their personal best. This is taking an increasing amount of time and funding. At Rooty Hill High School, we have adopted a personalised learning approach, using universal, targeted and intensive programs, and have found this instrumental in supporting students with a disability or special needs. Principal Christine Cawsey defines this as "more than a whole school approach to knowing every student and designing universal, targeted and intensive programs for learning and support. It is also a commitment and way of thinking about learners and their complex learning needs". At Rooty Hill High School, each student has a personalised learning plan, detailing their progress against ACARA capabilities, strengths, health issues and their goals for learning. Some students also have health plans, Out of Home care education plans, learning support plans, behaviour management plans, and in the case of EALD or ATSI students, Personalised Learning Pathways that respond to cultural and linguistic diversity. These plans require significant time and resources, as data is collected from feeder and non-feeder primary schools, as well as detailed enrolment interviews. To create an effective culture of personalised learning, it is essential that schools have access to sufficient funding, allowing release time to increase teacher expertise, and to compile the plans themselves. Teachers have access to significant amounts of information about each student, and can use this information to inform their classroom practice. Students take an active role in creating their personalised learning plan, and therefore have greater control over their learning choices. The result of this approach has been that students with a disability or special needs have access to resources that will improve their learning outcomes. Our students have seen a measurable improvement in attendance, progress, and ability to transition into tertiary study or employment. As a school community, we have been able to achieve significant improvements for all our students. This is as a direct result of the funding we receive. Rooty Hill High School receives funding to support 8-10% of our students. We believe that up to 30% of our students would benefit from additional support. These funds have been used to implement a personalised learning approach, which has been vital in engaging all students, particularly those with special needs. With the new guidelines for the HSC in mind, and knowing that all students are expected to meet a minimum of band eight levels of literacy, it is essential that schools are given additional funding to design purposeful programs to assist those in need. In 2017, our funding to support students with special needs was \$59, 193. The school has prioritised supporting students with complex needs, and has allocated additional school funds to implement our personalised learning approach. If the government was to commit to funding students as recommended by schools statewide be given access to adequate resources in order to see all students given enough support to experience success in their education. As a large mainstream high school, Rooty Hill High School has worked hard to embed an inclusive culture of personalised learning for all students from Year 7 to Year 12. We submit the following as an inventory of the provision of equitable access to education at Rooty Hill High School, which exemplifies the high levels of expertise, time and professional development required to achieve inclusive education for all students. A few years ago, one of our students with complex needs tried to enrol at a local senior campus to complete his HSC. This campus refused to accept him without additional funding and he returned to us. The school funded and provided the significant support with the adjustments and accommodations he needed to successfully achieve his HSC in a mainstream setting. Our school continues to fund support for all senior students to ensure they can reach their potential. For inclusive education to be a reality, additional funding support is required to ensure that the NSW education system offers quality education to all students. What Rooty Hill High achieves at

present Students who need additional support, including teaching, learning and assessment. • collect data from feeder/non-feeder primary schools, interview all parents and students enrolling, create Personalised Learning Plans, Individual Learning Plans, Health Plans and Behaviour Plans, distribute information to all staff within the school • adjustments and accommodations both for lessons and assessments made by teachers to cater for students' need - professional development needed to develop necessary expertise. This requires time for release from class and funding. • liaise with outside agencies eg FACS, hospitals, OTs, physiotherapists, speech therapists to provide background and strategies • purchase of equipment needed for health issues eg special furniture, devices • provide access to computers, specialised devices and equipment • support students with universal, targeted and intensive strategies - requires professional development to increase teacher capacity • provide in-class universal and targeted support and withdrawal in groups for intensive support • implement individual transition strategies for students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder or Anxiety Disorder School specialist support • twice yearly interviews with all students (1000+) to evaluate achievement of goals and set new goals in their personalised learning plans for the following semester. This ensures inclusion and has increased engagement and achievement at RHHS but requires release time for teachers, Year Advisers, EaLD teacher and Aboriginal Coordinator to conduct these interviews. A culturally sensitive approach for ATSI and EaLD/Refugee students further promotes inclusion for these students with complex needs. • counsellor support. There is an increase in mental health issues in the community at large and therefore in schools as well with anxiety disorders occurring at a younger age (primary school). • members of our refugee population and students from families who have experienced physical, mental or sexual abuse suffer PTSD after traumatic events have access to in-school counsellors • strong welfare system to ensure students feel connected to and included in their school community, to build resilience and ensure students can focus on their learning. This requires professional development for Year Advisers and release time to support students. • Learning and Support teacher - professional development, program design, supporting and working with students, working with classroom teachers on strategies and interventions • Itinerant Teacher support for hearing- and vision-impaired students. Some support provided according to need allocated around the region. The school provides all further support and interventions. An example of current support for RHHS student with a physical disability The Government should ensure that available technology designed to make education accessible is available for students in a timely manner. Universal design for learning as a concept promotes planning for inclusive education from the outset. Preparation time for teachers includes considerable thought, preparation of content and adjustments with often limited resources. When there is widely available technology that can provide solutions to accessibility issues, students should not suffer with unrealistic waiting periods between trials and becoming eligible for devices that may support their learning. Teachers too should be supported, by funding devices and initiatives in their efforts to ensure accessibility to students with disability. \*\*\*\*\* was a bright, eager and enthusiastic student in History who has a significant vision impairment. As part of her Individual Learning Plan, Teachers are required to enlarge text and ensure appropriate accommodations could be made. Using technology in the classroom, with platforms like Google classroom made it easier for \*\*\*\*\* to enlarge text as needed but when researching using books and other texts in History, accessibility was an issue. Working closely with a Vision Teacher, \*\*\*\*\* was able to trial the use of a Prodigy Connect 12 device to enlarge text during a period of the semester. This enabled \*\*\*\*\* to independently find and analyse historical sources and take ownership in her learning. This was an immediate, transformational shift in her motivation and ability to undertake historical inquiry. .... was more engaged, sought feedback on her wider reading that increased her historical understanding and had and improved her ability to use a wider range of sophisticated historical terms and concepts in her writing. What was disheartening, was watching the struggle for \*\*\*\*\* when the Prodigy Connect 12 was removed, following the trial period. Progress with new vocabulary became slower when her agency was removed as she could not always access articles of interest due to her vision. Effectively, it narrowed the very transformational agency back to limitations due to her vision impairment. Confidence was lowered and there was a significant wait for \*\*\*\*\* to receive this device. Progress, followed by hindrance was witnessed so immediately due to the wait times associated with

application and funding of this solution. The Government should consider how procedures should be enhanced in order to ensure a student's potential is not limited by months when it comes to accessing available technological solutions for vision impairment. Integration Funding and Support Placements - collecting data and completing Access Request Forms • RHHS provides maximum intensive level school-based support for the student- adjustments/accommodations to class programs, access to Learning and Support teacher, SLSOs and counsellor, behaviour support programs • if additional support is needed - collect assessment data and other information from all subject teachers. Year Adviser, Learning and Support Team Coordinator, Counsellor, Itinerant Support AP, DGO and Principal complete Access Request forms and submit to Region. This requires a considerable amount of time to complete. • Limited places are available in the regions and there is competition for these - some students in need miss out and mainstream schools must continue to cater for student need even when this may not be the best option for the individual student's learning. • Students' behaviour which interferes with their own learning or the learning of others constitutes a disability and may require an alternative setting to achieve equitable access to education. Relationships with alternative/non-departmental schools such as Blacktown Youth College allows some students to better access education in these settings. Gonski funding is needed to provide additional professional development, release time to implement interventions and the extra positions necessary as a minimum requirement. The ability of schools to purpose-design the support needed in their own context is also essential to provide the best inclusive education which is the right of all our children. What we still need to achieve Further Gonski funding is needed to provide as a minimum requirement: • additional professional development to increase teacher capacity to cater for individual student needs within a mainstream classroom • release time to plan and implement necessary interventions and support student welfare. Year Advisers - training needed, time to overview their year group regularly and make contact with those in need, liaise with counsellor, classroom teachers and Deputy Principal • the extra staff positions necessary to carry out interventions To adequately provide inclusive and personalised learning, more Gonski funding is needed to provide: • Further targeted and intensive programs in literacy and numeracy to provide for the approximately 30% of students who still need this support • The ability for schools to purpose-design the support needed in their own context to provide the best inclusive education which is the right of all our children • Ensure adequate counselling services are available as the increase in adolescent mental health issues increase. RHHS received an additional day of counsellor support in 2016 but this has been reduced to a half-day in 2017. An increase in mental health problems requires an equal increase in counselling services - not a decrease. It is also absolutely imperative that funding for alternative educational settings continue or increase as needed so that they can remain an available resource for those of our students whose needs are best met in these settings. In order for Australia's population to have an educated and productive 21st century workforce and for all young people to fulfil their potential, schools require our governments to provide adequate funding and resources for this to be achieved.

**Name** Rooty Hill High School

This email was sent from the NSW Teachers Federation website.