

Submission
No 223

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 21 February 2017

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.

The Department of Education through its Every Student, Every School policy mandates that students with a disability or learning difficulty will have access to a wide range of specialist services and programs for periods ranging from short term to ongoing support. This policy states that a wide range of specialist services and programs have been put into place to provide support students in all school settings. In regional areas, due to isolation of schools, students requiring additional support depend on a reactive model. Firstly, where Support Class placements are required, students are dependent on school's Learning Support Teams meeting and lodging an Online Access Request for placement. The department's Placement Panel process and the reduced number of support classes in rural areas, means many of our students are not offered an appropriate placement and they wait for lengthy periods (in excess of 6 months to a year) before being offered a place in a support class. It is my experience that mainstream teachers do not have the qualifications, expertise or time to provide effective support to students presenting unique challenges and learning needs. In Regional areas schools depend greatly on Support Class teachers (where available) and the School's Learning Support Teacher who is responsible for the running of School's Learning and Support Team, coordinating School Learning Support Officers, providing learning adjustments and programs supporting a large number of students requiring learning adjustments. In addition it is expected that the role of the Learning Support Teacher is to team teach, support the development of Personalised Learning and Support plans for more than 10% of our school population. Lack of access to specialist services e.g. psychologists, speech therapists and paediatricians inhibit and provide a major challenge to our teachers and school counselling staff. Families are having to wait for prolonged periods of time e.g. more than 6 months for confirmation of diagnosis and access to support services. This lack of services places additional stress and demands on teachers who are unable to implement a proactive model of support. Confidence levels of teachers supporting students with autism and complex needs are being eroded as staff struggle to cope with children not receiving support from external services.

Additional pressure on teacher and lack of services available to families result in parents questioning and being less confident in teacher's ability to teach their children. Students not receiving appropriate support lead to increased levels of stress, anxiety, depression and mental health conditions. Students with additional learning needs require flexible and individually tailored educational approaches, which requires teachers to have an array of adjustments and resource options which can be implemented both in and outside the classroom environment. This requires the input of a multidisciplinary team which includes educational specialists and allied health professionals. In rural areas lack of allied health services means teachers rely on some professional development rather than support from appropriate specialist staff and allied health professionals.

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.