

**Submission
No 249**

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

Organisation: Ryde Macquarie Teachers Association

Date received: 26 February 2017

NSW PARLIAMENT
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL INQUIRY,
STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR
SPECIAL NEEDS.

Submission

Ryde Macquarie Teachers Association,
New South Wales Teachers Federation, NSW Branch AEU.

Introduction

Providing quality education for all is an important and complex task that has fallen too often on individual school communities and teachers, teachers whose

health and workload are unsustainable, in the absence of systematic support, safe work environments and increased funding.¹

Students with a disability are a diverse group within themselves². Young people with a disability in NSW Public Education settings could be students;

1. With a severe disability who require intensive therapies to stay alive,
2. gifted students who experience high levels of anxiety,
3. students with dyslexia
4. Students with conduct disorders who cannot understand social conventions,
5. students with mental illness,
6. Students with autism who have sensory processing difficulties.

These students can be enrolled in;

1. mainstream classes
2. support classes
3. or special settings such as a SSP
1. **Integration funding.**

The allocation of allowances and diagnosis of students is not clear.

Members of our Association ask you to consider the following.

- A member of our Association described a situation in which year 11 students with great need, some how were not eligible for funding. The matching of student need with some theoretical rubric is out of touch with reality.
- Another noted that student with a physical disability is more likely to be allocated funding than those with cognitive difficulties or mental illness.

¹ NSW Teachers Federation, Special Education Paper 2014

² NSW Teachers Federation, Special Education Paper 2014

- ❑ A student allocated an aid in year 11, no longer had this assistance in year 12. The reason! A budgetary decision by the school.
- ❑ Some parents do not agree with a school labeling their child with a condition or implying that they need assistance. The convener of this submission recalls a young man with autism. His mother did not recognize this. Many situations arose in which he had to fend for himself, with teachers giving up lunch time or free periods so that Bob could sit in a room in a safe and relaxing environment
- ❑ The assistance available to students with a disability varies enormously from school to school.
 - One school may hire teachers' aids, another will not. The support for students confined to a wheelchair is not only used to meet their needs, but is 'spread out' to fill in gaps.
 - The parents of one school in our Association have taken on the responsibility of hiring teachers aids themselves.
 - A student with autism in our Association received assistance from a teachers aid for only two weeks.
 - Some members of our Association discussed the need for classroom teachers, dealing with students with a disability or special needs need to have more say in the allocation of funds. They understand the complexity of a student confined to a wheel chair enrolled in a class of thirty students. Teachers are aware of the pressures and workload of having to make adjustments, deal with the anxiety or depression of some students, while meeting the needs of other class members. Such professionals should have a say in the allocation of funds.
 - Reports are written and submissions made with little understanding of the pressures faced by a student, their peers and their classroom teacher.
 - As a classroom teacher, I received a list of students whom the Welfare Committee deem need adjustments to their learning in accordance with NCCD. A quarter of the students I assist in

Junior Science appear on this list. If one were to create a stereotype of these students, they would be;

- Twelve years or older
- Disengaged
- Possess poor literacy skills
- Come from homes of a low socioeconomic income.
- The list contained 25 names. Every student of an Aboriginal or Torres Straight background that are in my classes, are named in this list.
- Most on the list are not identified as Life Skills Students and have 'no diagnosis' that may shed light on their learning difficulties.
- The allocation of funds seems to depend on the ability of an individual school to 'talk the talk'. One must know the how to fill out an integration report, which boxes to tick, etc.

- a. Members have advised our Association that the allocation of support classes need to be non-discretionary responsibility of schools where the need exists.³
- b. Processes need to be set in place to review the closure of any support class and not be left to the discretion of individual schools.⁴
- c. Members have advised our Association that students requiring a support placement are being denied this position. In addition when such placements are made, extra resources are not

³ Claudia Vera, November Council

⁴ as above

provided.⁵

- d. Members have advised our Association, that placements decisions need to be made and communicated to schools by term 3 of each year to allow necessary planning.⁶

2. Timely access to specialist support.

- a. Our Association notes that schools have employed speech therapists, physiotherapists, additional counselors, teachers' aids and additional tutors. These positions have been funded due to additional Gonski funding.
- b. We note that this funding is denied to 368 000 missing out from disability loading, nationally, due to the appalling policies of the Federal Government

3. Equitable allocation of resources to SSP

- a. It is the understanding of our Association that the failure of the Federal Government to fund the Gonski loading for students with a disability is in part, a stimulus for this upper house inquiry. In particular, our members at Karonga SSP have discussed how they

⁵ Claudia Vera, November Council

⁶ Claudia Vera, November Council

do not receive a disability allowance.⁷ The plight of staff in such schools is dire;

- i. They face physical threats on a daily basis.
- ii. Their hearts are broken as they see post secondary infrastructure such as TAFE courses cancelled, offering no future path for their students.

On behalf of the Ryde Macquarie Teachers Association, I would like to thank you for convening such an important inquiry.

Adrian Sarroff
President,
Ryde Macquarie Teachers Association
Sunday, February 26, 17

⁷ December Association Meeting, Karonga SSP

End of Submission

Ryde Macquarie Teachers Association