

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date received:** 24 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.**

Students requiring additional support come with a variety of needs. Classroom Practices can support most needs, however with increasing numbers of students arriving with multiple diagnosis, it is imperative that Classroom Teachers are granted time to receive adequate training and ongoing professional development to adequately and reasonably do their jobs. This would ensure the equitable access to all students with a disability. Some of the classes, due to that specific cohort may have a large number of students requiring specific management. Smaller schools like ours tend to attract students with disabilities as families and professionals commonly report that smaller schools provide a safer environment for children with disabilities to receive an education. In our present environment, there is not a class that doesn't need support of some kind from a specialist whether that be an SLSO, the LaST or the school counsellor in terms of upskilling or providing information and support. Parents using outside agencies request collaboration with their child's Classroom Teacher to benefit from their expertise and provide recommendations to be used with that student in the classroom. We have over 400 students at our school with an allocation of one day a week for the school counsellor. There is a wait time to see the counsellor as counsellors have to test students. This can take up to two days, followed by report and parent reporting time over the following two days for one student. Integration funding / Access Requests take staff time with parent collaboration to complete the forms for each student. Due to the small numbers within the counselling service, children who require assessments but who would not meet criteria for integration funding miss out. This is problematic as we are learning that parents can't afford private assessments especially in Sydney. Wait lists for community services are long and the introduction of NDIS means disability services are no longer an option in obtaining assessments free of charge. Support Placement can be requested but placements can be full so wait time can be problematic. Funded students can be spread across the grades so using SLSO time in the classroom setting can be problematic in terms of servicing these students equitably. Our school runs additional programs such as MiniLit and other

standardised programs that need staff and takes away time from other services.

**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.**

The implementation of ESES granted the allocation of Learning and Support Teachers to schools based on a formula. This translated as anywhere from one to five days. Most schools were allocated either a two day LaST or a three day allocation ( on average) The LaST was to build capacity of the Staff at each school. Principals and Executive supported the LaST to be allocated to their schools as directed by need. Some Teachers were used to do "STLA" type of work , some were there to support Teachers in team teaching support. Every school designed the role of the LaST to support the school in the way that best served that specific school population. There is a higher incidence of children now presenting with a behavioural , learning or emotional condition . Sometimes diagnosis is delayed due to finances or a parent's ability to accept the potential of a diagnosis. Some schools use funding to allocate extra days for their LaSt's out of school budgets to service their specific students needs.

**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.**

It is important to remember that when change is required , it takes time to fully integrate into a system. Moving from one model to another takes time , patience and perserverance on the part of all involved. With changes to staffing happening frequently , this affects the ability for change to sometimes take hold. Changing people's attitudes and managing new expectations takes time to support with all staff. Staff are also under alot of pressure to adopt the new mandatory curriculum changes while making adjustments for their students. New professional performance measures also add to the responsibility list of all Teachers. The timing of all these changes have to be managed in a reasonable way so that Class Teachers do not become overwhelmed with the changes they face. Sometimes learning and upskilling can take a secondary position to the other demands that the Class Teachers face. New Teachers need to be ready to learn about Disabilities while they are teaching . This can be challenging as well.

**D) Complaint and review mechanisms within the school systems in New South Wales for parents and carers.**

The complaint process can be a difficult challenge for parents and carers.To establish meaningful relationships with families in this predicament, schools need to ensure balanced communication ( including positive feedback) provided in a face to face meeting or in written form. It means additional meetings and communication with all stakeholders involved in the child's care such as government and nongovernment organisations. It commonly requires networking with families to external support services. Families can become frustrated and time poor in this process and complaints can be made if conflict arises. Sometimes parents feel threatened or fearful about dealing with the situation directly so they may overlook the school and make a complaint to the Department to get their needs met. Sometimes this can require mediation and support to work through an issue.

**E) Any other related matters.**

it is increasingly difficult to receive funding for students with Disability as the criteria has changed and funds once available have been reduced. The support documents required for Access Requests are not always available to be attached as evidence to support the request as the family is not able to

access the outside agencies and their reports or Paediatricians that may help them build a case for their child due to finances or time restraints. The waiting lists for Government agencies can be up to and over one year for services like OT or Speech therapy. Parents don't always have extended families to help take children to appointments required outside of school. Paediatricians are quite costly , some up to \$700 per visits and charges for reports as well as charges to re-evaluate medication . Some Doctors take time to fully assess students who may start out for example, with a diagnosis of Sensory Disorder and a year or so later , end up with a diagnosis of Autism . This may be due to age of the student or the information given by parents and professionals to guide the process.