

Submission
No 323

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 25 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.

There are increasing numbers of students needing individualised adjustments. Some students arrive in class with no advance notice to the teacher and little critical information on their specific needs. There is a pattern of mobility (movement from school to school) for some of the families in this region. Contact with parents is often difficult and lacking in clarity and transparency. There is a pattern of increase in social issues leading to emotional, psychological, behavioural and intellectual needs that one teacher in the classroom cannot meet. There is currently a support process in the school but it appears to be poorly resourced. There is only one Learning Support Teacher for the whole school. There is one school counsellor who is not full time and a welfare team that meets in its own time. The team, however, has little time to do other than identify issues and communicate them via reports on the school intranet as there is no money available to communicate with staff more effectively. As a consequence, there are many restraints on teachers supporting students in a timely and effective manner. Having a number of students with needs in the same room compounds the issue and this has a knock-on effect of not only disadvantaging students who want to learn but also leading to some of these students reacting and leading to further behavioural issues in the classroom. Teaching becomes more classroom management than effective pedagogy. The process of identifying students with needs is slow. Referrals can be made daily but they are only considered weekly. There are a limited number of SLSOs and they are often tied up with students whose needs are considered to be more serious. The allocation of time left over is, therefore, limited and somewhat arbitrary. Some students have problems in a particular subject for which they may receive help in class, but it is not regular or consistent in approach. It is often subject to sudden change in response to acute needs elsewhere in the school. This happens regularly. As a consequence I feel it is not only ineffective but also counter-productive as those students who had been receiving support sometimes react badly to the support being withdrawn. A more permanent support mechanism would be more effective. But, again, there is no money. Some students who have been referred and

assessed are considered not to need any support. Where there is mild intellectual impairment but not sufficient to go into the specialised Support Unit there is no other form of support despite clear evidence that the child is unable to access the curriculum. The reasoning for these decisions often appears to me to be more based on funding than student needs. Extreme cases get help; the others have to get in line. There are support units in my school but they are limited and there appears to be no room for further placements. The Tutorial Centre, which takes students for ten weeks to assist with students needing intense support needs, has a waiting list and the limited time often results in students falling behind again and failing to access the curriculum when they return to the regular classroom. This often has impacts on behaviour, similar to the arbitrary withdrawal of SLSOs. The students become yo-yos in this system. It would be much more effective to give them permanent placements. But there is no money. Since the introduction of the support units, I have noticed that a number of students that were regularly put into the tutorial centre to remove them from the classroom because their behaviour had become extreme were given placements. They clearly had needs that had been assessed but prior to the support units there was nowhere to place them. They were often suspended despite the fact that they had extreme emotional and psychological needs. However, there is room for only 14 students with this classification. It is clear to me that there are many more with similar needs. But there is no money. Another area of underfunding is the allocation of buildings or rooms for the support unit has taken classrooms out of the timetable. This has resulted in stresses within the school as large classes are pushed into marginal teaching areas. With a number of these classes having students with needs this also compounds the issue. The calculation for rooming is narrow and does not take account of specialist areas such as Home Science, Industrial Arts or Science. Teaching students with emotional and behavioural needs in a room with hot water, industrial tools and utensils adds stress to the teacher. When there are students who cannot read and/or write it is impossible to deliver the curriculum in the regular classroom but there is no support for them or the teacher under the current funding system. Reading programs funding is irregular and there is little other support. When this process is queried by me, I am informed that there is no money to do it any other way. With so many students with needs in my classes, I try to make adjustments as best I can at an individual level but this is impossible. My load is predominantly middle school. This is where emotional needs are greatest and the results of learning deficits have the greatest impact. I do not have enough time in the day to do all that is required to meet all of the needs of all of my students. Some students have needs that are beyond my ken despite the fact that I am highly experienced. There is no mechanism for meetings of teachers of the same classes and/or students to meet on a regular basis to discuss and exchange ideas to deal with the issues. In schools time is money and there is no money. Teachers are continually re-inventing the wheel, or in some cases not because they do not have the time or knowledge to do so. The result of the underfunded integration of a large number of students with needs in state comprehensive schools, in my view, results in poor outcomes for those students but it also impacts students who do not have needs as the classroom becomes a place where learning is difficult. Teachers find it impossible to meet the demands of every student. Some faculties have in the past 'streamed' classes. This goes against the concept of integration but it does assist in delivering good quality education to some of the students in the cohort. However, the lumping of a large number of students with needs into one class, even with an SLSO, can be highly counterproductive for those students with needs as the needs are compounded and the issues intensify. The lack of equity is palpable. Students who need help do not get it or do so only after an extremely lengthy and tedious process. Two terms is equivalent to ten percent of the school life of many of these students. It is also at an important stage of their schooling. Without timely interventions, assistance delivered later has less effect and is, therefore, less cost effective.

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.

adjustments for students of need. I have in the past been involved in various types of training and I have found regular meetings with colleagues working towards the same goal and those with expertise to assist to be the most effective. I have found one off events and online training to be the least effective. The learning support teacher can help but that person is so overwhelmed that many teachers find it difficult to access any expertise. Moreover time is not made available for regular meetings or workshops to work towards developing adjustments. In schools time is money and there appears to be a lack both. The learning support teacher assists teachers with the most urgent needs and there is little time left over for those students with what are perceived to be lower levels of need. The majority of the students, therefore, do not benefit from this expertise. When this person is given a teaching load there is less time available. I am not aware of the learning and support signposting tool that has been brought to my notice as a result of making this submission. If this information is available to the support unit, it has not been shared with most of the staff in the school.

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 clear that there are many students in need of support than can be placed in the support units at this school. This is of concern to teachers who have to try and create a productive learning environment in the classroom and some parents who have been contacted. It is lengthy and time consuming process from initial referral to the final assessment of a student's needs and even then there is no certainty of support. This part of the state appears to lack any units to deal with students who are intellectually impaired. It has emotional and behavioural units as well as those that cater for students with levels of autism and physical disabilities. Some students appear not to be getting assessed because it is regarded as pointless if there are no places available for them after the exercise. There needs to be an audit of the needs in each school so every child can have his or her needs catered for. With one over utilised learning support teacher it is clear that this teacher needs support also. A group of teachers could support the role and assist with the development of strategies to assist students with needs. This would require funding as those teachers would need relief time to work on them. There also needs to be time for classroom teachers to work with these people to develop teaching and assessment strategies to cater for all of their students.

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

E) Any other related matters.

This email was sent from the NSW Teachers Federation website.