

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

**Name:** Name suppressed  
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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.**

- In our school, we only have access to one school counsellor, one day per fortnight. Currently, our normal access is 8 days per term.
- Access to professional external agencies are extremely limited due to our distance from a nearby metropolitan area. In addition, the extensive range of services that children are likely to require (for example; speech pathologist, psychologist, hearing specialist and paediatricians) are often not easily accessible unless they travel approximately 150km to the nearest major town. Children and their families need these services in order to gain specialist support. Often these expert agencies are sourced from over our border in Victoria.
- There are limited Professional Development opportunities for teachers to participate in, that specifically relate to helping students with disabilities and special needs.
- Our Learning and Support Team is strong but often struggles to provide enough timely assistance to every student, one to one, as the ratio of the LaST (Learning and Support Teacher) to students is considerably underweighted to the high number of students that require additional support to meet their learning needs.
- There is not enough time to develop Individual Learning Plans (ILP) for all students and most notably, update them regularly.
- Our Learning and Support allocation and timetabling limitations is not sufficient to enable the LaST to efficiently upskill other teachers in providing modifications to work and strategies to engage students that require special learning needs.

#### **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 Every Student Every School Policy clearly states "that we must find better ways of ensuring that we meet the additional learning and support needs of every student in every school" (Page 4). Much support was meant to be outlaid in 2012 and 2013, we are now in 2017 yet cannot say that we were

delivered the extra resources, training and support in our school. The Department clearly states that “we will do” an array of things to assist with the implementation of learning and support in schools, yet we do not believe we have seen these implemented. The following are some of the many promises that have not been delivered from this policy to date. No scholarships for special education and retraining opportunities. No local professional learning opportunities for teachers as promised. The development of a new functional assessment tool (page 11), has not been made available to our school, nor have we had any correspondence about the development of such a tool. Classroom teachers have not had additional access to support as outlined on page 11. Instead we have seen the regional consultant positions become non-existent with nothing to replace them. This has left a gap, especially in rural and remote schools. The launch of the new Physical as Anything website in 2011 (page 17), went unnoticed by us and upon googling this, the website is no longer a valid domain. These are just a few examples that we have noted.

**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.**

Out of the 31 recommendations made by the General Purpose Committee No. 2 in 2010, many have not been met and others are not relevant in our school context. The following are recommendations that have not been met at our school; 20 – Mainstream classes at our school have not benefited from additional resources as stated in this recommendation. This applies to both physical resources and human resources. Our school would benefit from additional learning and support teacher aides and officers as well as technological aides for students. 22 – In a rural and remote setting we have limited access to a school counsellor that is not commensurate with the statistics of teen mental health in the wider community. The ratio of a counsellor to student time is significantly impacted by the amount of time our counsellor has to travel between regions with distances up to 400km between schools. 23 – In rural and remote areas, it would be difficult to source trained psychologists which is the proposed alternative to school counsellors. It would be better to offer re-training to teaching staff to fulfil this short fall. In a school context it is imperative to have a trained teacher in this role to meet the mental and educational needs of students. 24 – The Department of Education has failed to offer guidelines and support on Individual Education Plans in rural and remote areas. Staff do their best to develop these plans with the resources available and have undergone independent online training to further enhance their knowledge of implementing IEPs in their own time outside school hours. 25 – In 2016, our Learning and Support teacher spent over 50 hours of her own time after hours to develop Individual Education Plans. The Department did not offer our school relief time or resources in preparation of these plans. In 2014, our Learning and Support teacher was given some time to plot our students on the Literacy Continuum. However, this continuum action plan was never followed up in subsequent years so we can update Individual Learning Plans. 27 – Pre-training in Special Education at Universities needs to be improved and reflect the current needs of students in the classroom. Our Learning and Support Team is regularly engaged in upskilling new scheme teachers in modifications and practical strategies in the classroom. 28 – Special Education needs to be a priority in all levels and across all key learning areas in pre-service teacher training to reflect the needs of students and schools in a range contexts. 31 – Access to training and development for Learning Support Officers is non-existent in rural and remote areas. Formal training has not been offered to our learning support officers.

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

Being a small school, we are able to create meaningful and ongoing relationships with parents, caregivers and families within our community. We do respond to concerns from parents and promptly address these issues. However, sometimes outside agencies and support services are not readily

available to target student need. This is a real equity issue for students in rural and remote schools. As educators, we do our best with the resources we have, but sometimes students require a more specialised support service that is just not accessible.

**E) Any other related matters.**

Our school has difficulty providing support without the Gonksi money as promised. The biggest issue is that we do not have enough allocation to extensively support the higher number of students who have a learning difficulty. The 3-year cycle of funding that comes from the NAPLAN test does not always continue to match the cohort group that requires support in that specific time frame. The Department have mandated in all their inquiries and policies that students with a disability should be entitled to equal access to resources and opportunities that other students in mainstream schooling are given. Sadly, this is not the case for so many of our students. We wish our school had access to all the promises that the Department and the Government so regularly dish out so that we know we have done all we can to make schooling for our students accessible, enjoyable and achievable.