

**Submission
No 344**

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

Organisation: Homebush Public School

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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.

Teachers are in the profession to teach and are not equipped with the knowledge or expertise to deal with every disorder being identified. The training offered is insufficient and often irrelevant to the individual student in the class. The Access Request process is tedious and cumbersome with one person being held up from writing their part by another person after them. We do not find out the results of the panel unless we are successful and never given feedback as to why the request was rejected. Parents and staff want this information so we can jump through the bureaucratic hoops to get assistance for the child. Timely access to in school specialists is not always possible because there are not enough personnel employed. Integration Support - my experience is that the amount of funding received could easily be used in one term for a student rather than one year. \$5000 is up to 1 hour a day of the 6 hours they are at school. To support genuine ongoing consultation with parents, LaSTs need Administration time allocated to their role. Using our RFF or cancelling intervention programs to be available for these is not best practise. As for the Assistant Principal Learning & Support - we were told they do not work with students any more, only teachers. We wouldn't call on them if we hadn't already tried everything in our box of tricks to improve educational outcomes for the students. We call for support, not extra irrelevant training.

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.

It is unreasonable to think that one person could possibly do the job of nine previous roles as efficiently or effectively as when they were separated. That one person (LaST) may have experience or expertise in one of the areas but not all nine. The same with the AP L&S role. Many of the people who were in the Behaviour teams are now APL&S. They may or maynot have the experience of

curriculum delivery, but their field of excellence is Behaviour Management. Also those who are experienced in curriculum are not always the best people to instruct us on behavioural issues. They would be best used working with the students and teachers together rather than telling us to complete online courses. The use of the Student Index based on NAPLAN is wrong! Basing everything on a one day test where the student may perform well or poorly depending on a variety of circumstances is not a realistic basis for assessment. Basing the flexible funding and LaS allocation on this appears as if we are being punished for using best practise and improving student results. For example, if we use our LaS allocation implementing best practise with classroom teaching and the students improve, we lose our LaS allocation so the next group of students can't benefit from input. ESES appears to be used as a way for the Government to decrease specialist classes and schools, stating that students with disabilities are best integrating in mainstream classes. If the people making these decisions either had a child with a disability or taught in a mainstream class with a number of gifted and talented students, many average students and a few with various disabilities, they would understand how difficult it is to cover the range of abilities in their classes effectively. The Government needs to stop thinking of ways to save money and support the schools in what they are expecting us to achieve, both financially and with personnel. Changing the way money is distributed to schools eg those attracting less than \$6400 in Integration Funding, is underhanded. It is making it sound as if a school is receiving an increase in funding, but in reality they are usually receiving less because that child's disability funds are being put into the 'school bucket'. The LaST often has to ensure that the child allocated the money is actually receiving the benefit of that money and 'fight' for that student. It causes more undue stress in the work-place. The online training course in which I have participated may be interesting at times, but they have not helped me with the students I am managing at school. They also take quite a bit of personal time to complete. Getting into them now with the changes in MyPL is another challenge we are having to cope with at the moment. Too much at the same time. Plus there is not enough Professional Learning (PL) money in the budget for each teacher to even attend ONE PL each year. How can we be expected to keep up with the latest research and best practise if we can't afford to attend PL? ESES has not been able to establish an adequate level of specialist teacher presence in our school to effectively support students with disabilities. We have 0.8 LaST allocation catering for over 450 students with 90% NESB. When the APLaS have been contacted they have not been able to suggest anything new for me to try with students failing because of their disability. Specialist schools are not sharing any expertise with us. I don't know of any schools in my area that are sharing expertise, except some are doing those walk throughs, but students with disabilities are not highlighted or used as a focus for the dem lessons. PLASST has been the big disappointment to me. Whenever I have used it for anticipated guidance on where to go for a specific student, the report has come back say I need an individualised plan for them. I knew that! I was hoping it would do what we were told it would – provide specific guidance for a student. Many of my reports have been identical, which has made me give up using it.

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.

I don't know what the increase in disability spending has been since 2010, but it is just as difficult to get funding to assist students in my primary school now as it was then. The 'transparent funding mechanism' to support students with disability is non-existent as far as I can see. If we are successful with an access request, we never know what level of funding we will receive or which aspects of the application got it for our student. If we are unsuccessful, we are not told why or sometimes even that it was unsuccessful! The fact that many disability confirmations can last longer than 12 months now is good. There are not enough autism places or autism/behaviour placements available in metropolitan Sydney. The fact that parents can refuse an offered place is frustrating when the specialists are available and we are left to cope with them in the mainstream class. Counsellors – we had our allocation cut last year, now only 1.5 days a week. The just this week were informed that we

are going to lose another half day a week, even though our school has increased by nearly 2 classes in the last 12 months. Preservice teachers appear to have one semester of one subject in Special Education. Do you really think that is sufficient when they will most likely have at least one student in their class with a disability of some kind. The need for SLSOs to have training is not necessary. Teachers are supposed to design programs for them to implement. No program designed for students with a specific disability should be beyond the SLSO.

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

Our school has good relations with most parent of students with disabilities. Consulting with parents on a regular basis is frequently difficult, mainly because the parents work and cannot afford the time off work for school meetings or because they do not understand the education system and are happy to let us make the decisions regarding curriculum adjustments for their child. We try to respond to parent concerns in a timely fashion and if we don't have an answer to their questions, we try to find out for them and contact them with it or guide them to a person or institution that would have the answers. Some parents need multiple meetings to understand their child's needs at school, but as a school we have tried to give that time to them – often out of school hours.

E) Any other related matters.

Most schools I know are understaffed in respect to students with disabilities. This in part is due to the lack of funding received to cater for the special needs of these individual students. They take extra teacher time to create PLaSPs, to inform any SLSO who will be assisting with the implementation of it just what is expected and the time to meet with the parents of each student concerned. Reviewing the programs, making adjustments and resources for that student or purchasing suitable resources to meet the needs of the student in order to succeed. More money needs to be specifically allocated to students identified through NCCD for example, in the school RAM allocation.

This email was sent from the NSW Teachers Federation website.