

**Submission
No 348**

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

Organisation: Woy Woy-Ettalong Teachers Federation

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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.

Our school has a significant number of students with special needs including intellectual, social/emotional and physical. When the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data was completed in 2016, one hundred and fifty three students were listed as having an identified need. This was approximately one-third of our total school enrolment. Sixty five of these students were in a support class and had individual education plans. The remaining eighty eight students were in mainstream classes and had differentiated programs or significant school counsellor involvement. Meeting the additional needs of students with a disability requires knowledge, time and money. Teachers need to learn about the student through interaction with them and their parents/carers. They also need to receive training and consult with other professionals about the best ways to meet specific student needs. Time is also required to prepare and/or modify educational programs and resources. Many students with a disability require individual assistance to complete tasks or to support their social/emotional needs to allow them to participate appropriately as a member of their class. Some students receive integration funding which can be used to employ a Student Learning Support Officer. However, this usually only equates to approximately 1-2 hours a day. There are also many students who don't receive funding but require program modification or specialist support. The Learning Assistance Support Teachers have limited time due to the large number of students requiring support. The result for these students is a cumulative gap in their learning. Extra funding would provide extra time and support that is desperately needed to ensure an equitable education for these students. We also have a Preschool within our school. When students with a disability are identified in a private preschool, staff can apply for extra funding to employ a 1:1 support worker. However, DEC preschools do not have this option. There is a ratio of one teacher and one SLSO for twenty students and any extra support must be paid for out of school funds. When there are multiple students requiring support, this can place great strain on a limited school budget. The benefits of early intervention have been well researched and documented so it seems logical to provide funding

in this early stage to try and improve long-term outcomes for the students, whilst also decreasing future costs. Once students are diagnosed with a disability, the process to place them in a support class can be very slow. This places unnecessary pressure on already vulnerable families, particularly those transitioning to kindergarten, high school or a new school. Additional funding could enable a more streamlined process which, in turn, would facilitate the implementation of an appropriate transition program. The role of the School Counsellor is very important in supporting students and their families to navigate the educational system. They also play an essential role in the Learning Support Team, liaising with parents and agencies and providing advice to staff. We therefore need to ensure that funding is available to provide adequate and consistent School Counsellor support in all schools. As educators, we have a duty of care to meet the learning needs, as well as the safety and wellbeing needs of all students in our care. Without extra support, it is very difficult to fulfil these obligations. The provision of the remaining Gonski funding, particularly the Students With Disability loading, would greatly assist our efforts to provide an equitable education for all students.

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.

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.

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.