

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

Name: Name suppressed (PC)

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Partially
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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.

The following submission has been prepared by the staff of _____ – classroom teachers and the Learning Support Team. _____ currently has an enrolment of 853 students. In 2016, 110 students were entered on the National Disability Data Collection (NCCD); 68 students were recorded for adjustments within quality teaching and 42 students were recorded for supplementary adjustments. Only six students receive individual integration funding, with annual amounts totalling \$68,000. This targeted funding means that only 5% of students identified as receiving adjustments on the NCCD receive targeted funding support; an additional low level support needs allocation of \$42,000 is from the Department of Education is provided to support other students. If this total is divided between the remaining 104 students listed on the NCCD, each student receives \$404. This is equivalent to approximately 2 days of Learning Support Officer time within a calendar year. Obviously these figures are taken from a simplified view of learning support. Usually Learning Support Officers work with more than one student at a time, so the resource is shared. In addition to Learning Support Officer time, the Department provides some Learning Support teacher time, but this is also very limited when compared to student need. At least \$70,000 of school and P&C funds has provided additional staff – Learning Support Teachers and Learning Support Officers – for some years to further support staff and student learning at _____

School staff appreciate the opportunity to provide information to the parliamentary inquiry about the high levels of student learning need in the school and the impact these have on students and staff. A. Equitable access to resources for students with a disability or special needs in regional and metropolitan areas For those students who need additional support, including adjustments to teaching, learning and assessment activities: In this school, teachers are well aware of the legal requirement to provide adjustments to teaching, learning and assessment activities through professional learning provided by the Learning Support Team, and procedures established in the school. Teachers are regularly reminded in staff meetings and through discussions how the learning

support referral process works to ensure students are supported through various levels of adjustments. There is expertise on staff to assist with supporting teacher understanding of student needs, but student need far outweighs what this expertise can address. Support is provided in a timely manner because the school prioritises supporting teachers and students – often additional school funds are used. Support is provided through SLSO time, withdrawal literacy groups and additional assistance in mathematics, and some individualised literacy support. SLSO support greatly assists teachers to manage student needs in the classroom and on the playground. Staff feel supported by school management to support students with additional learning needs, but feel that legal requirements are challenging in terms of workload, additional to long hours already being worked to manage class teaching and learning. DoE procedures inhibit access to support. These procedures are lengthy and time consuming, and often do not result in additional support. Examples include submissions for short term emergency support funds, which require a behaviour management plan, risk management plan and often consultations with/observations by local DoE staff e.g. Assistant Principal Learning Assistance are required occur before funding requests are considered. Parental support at home can assist teachers in delivering equitable access to education and improved learning outcomes but often parents may not be equipped or able to provide this support due to work constraints (for example helping a child with an individual home reading program or specific Maths home program). NAPLAN - Some schools (not are not familiar with how best to support students with additional needs in NAPLAN, for example providing information to parents on the adjustments that can be put in place so that students with disabilities can access the tests. Language around "disability" can inhibit access and inclusion as it can be confronting for parents to accept a child's diagnosis and therefore prevent a school from accessing integration funding or providing in school support for particular students. For those students who need access to in school specialist support (i.e. support from Learning and Support Teacher, School Counsellor, School Learning Support Officer, Learning and Support Team guidance/intervention):

- Access for students who need in school specialist support is not always available due to timetabling issues/ constraints caused by:
 - o inadequate levels of DoE learning support funding
 - o part time staff allocations
 - o extensive case load of school counsellor, whose allocation to the school is part time.

A backlog of learning support referrals means that counsellor assessments are delayed many weeks and often months after a referral meeting. School population of 850 students have a 3 day/week counsellor. Use of NAPLAN results as the basis for LAST allocation is a very narrow measure. Our students are fortunate to have additional support supplemented by school funds and P&C contributions, which provide additional time learning support teacher and SLSO time. For those students who need Integration Funding support: Access requests (ARs) for integration funding are a very time consuming and repetitive process. The Learning Support Team Co-ordinator and School Counsellor collaborate to consult with and complete the form on behalf of all staff members. Teaching staff do not have time or expertise to complete relevant sections. The Domain Support document provided by the Department to assist in completing ARs is outdated and describes a very limited view of the focus areas. In giving examples of types of student need/support it refers to supports no longer provided by the Department e.g. behaviour plans developed by Itinerant Teacher Behaviour etc. Changes to school submissions are almost always requested by local staff. This indicates support resources are inadequate as there is information known by local staff that is not available to school staff completing the applications. Examples include requests for Department staff to change levels submitted for areas (e.g. receptive language, expressive language, safety) in the summary profile section of the Access Request. School staff have been asked to change profiles to a lower level. Reasons given are that State Office will not accept the higher level entered by the school as the higher level requires a particular justification (not specified in support materials) that describes behaviours unlikely to be experienced at a mainstream school. Requests for resubmission are very common; this is a multi-step undo/re-do electronic process that involves a number of people. It is time-consuming and clunky. It takes months from initial submission until funds arrive in the school, assuming funding is approved. Fewer and fewer ARs are funded; often funding amounts are smaller than what has been given in the past. There are fewer areas that receive support than in previous years. Local staff refer to areas that are currently attracting funding e.g. safety needs attract funding for autistic students, but not

emotional/social/learning/language needs. At a school level it feels like there is a default position of no funding. It feels like schools have to fight (very hard) for support. For those students requiring a support placement: Since changes in Department staffing arrangements, applications for any pre-school student requiring a support placement must be completed by the local school. In the past these applications were managed by local department staff. Liaising with families, department staff, other professionals and pre-school staff is time consuming, and this before completing the application. There is no question that these children and families should be supported and provisions made available, but this is not the role of the local school when students are not attending the school. A related challenge for school staff is holding conversations with families of students enrolled at the school when staff believe a support placement would better meet the child's learning needs. The journey for families to realise and then accept that their child has additional needs, and then further that the additional needs are not best met in a mainstream setting is extremely challenging – and often fraught, marked by intense emotions. As there are no clear statements about what is appropriate and realistic for local schools to manage in terms of additional needs, and conversely what is the scope and work of support class placements (if these are available they are not known at a school level). It is very challenging to assist families to understand and accept that a support class placement will better suit the needs of their child. A lack of clear guidelines contributes to this challenge. The challenge is further exacerbated by the requirement that teachers differentiate and adjust to support learning needs, without clear supporting statements or guidelines. An unintended outcome of this is that families sometimes unrealistically expect teachers can (and should) work individually to support their child, without consideration for other students in the class and school, or the teacher's capacity to meet the child's needs. These difficulties have been encountered at Kindergarten to Year 6 with different families and students over a number of years. It is not uncommon. As with integration funding, the Access Request submission process for a support placement is lengthy and unclear and there are often extensive waiting times. The professional judgment of school staff is often ignored, with pressure from local Departmental office staff for schools to manage students in the local school rather than accessing support placements. Parent involvement in the process of selecting a support placement seems to be disallowed. There is extremely limited support and advice provided to schools in managing students waiting for support placement, and minimal and ineffective alternative support is provided to assist schools meet student needs at the current school if a support placement application is rejected. For those students who require specialist equipment and/or environmental adjustments: Access to specialist equipment /environmental adjustments is adequate and timely only if planned months in advance. Schools are reliant on external professionals e.g. Cerebral Palsy Alliance physiotherapist to make recommendations for required adjustments. For those students whose needs require support and intervention from the relevant personnel in the Educational Services team: Local Educational Services staff are placed in roles requiring extensive and broad specialist experience. This is unrealistic and unviable. In particular there is an increasing number of students with complex mental health and behaviour needs, and specialist behaviour teachers are no longer provided by the Department. This makes it challenging for schools and other Departmental staff to effectively support these students and their families. Educational Services staff are very hard to contact and seem consistently reluctant to assist at the local school level, e.g. attend parent meetings, provide support for planning and strategies to manage challenging students, advocate for school and teachers in challenging parent situations. In more recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of challenging students appearing in Kindergarten, often with undiagnosed disability or learning needs, such as autism, specific language disabilities etc. In the past Early Intervention support officers were employed by the Department to work with pre-schools to identify and support these needs before students started school. Now this burden and extensive workload falls on school staff, and means that students miss out on highly effective early intervention strategies. The professional judgement of teachers as experts at the school level is rarely acknowledged. School staff do not feel they are able to provide enough individual teaching program/time support to all students who need it. The children who sometimes aren't properly diagnosed or assessed fail to receive support. Those who stand out are recognised/ identified and do receive support but others miss out.

of education to students with a disability or special needs in New South Wales public schools.

1. Professional learning for skilled and knowledgeable teachers The initial training provided about Disability legislation requirements was informative and assisted with understanding of NCCDD and legal requirements to support these students to access curriculum. It has proved challenging to bring the parent community to the same understanding about disability, as the term 'disability' is very confronting. In order to effectively team teach, staff need effective planning / programming time to plan and discuss teaching programs. Currently it is very challenging for this to occur. 2. Support for students with disability in regular classrooms Staff receive a lot of professional development for managing adjustments for students and would benefit from practical modelling of these strategies within a whole class context. Teachers understand how to work with students individually or in a small group, but managing adjustments in a whole class context is the challenge. It is a challenge to balance in-class support with withdrawal support for students with additional needs. Staff feel they receive a lot of support but would benefit from further support due to the number of students in classes with high needs. Learning and Support Teachers (LASTs) came into their roles originally from specialist areas of expertise. This means they are not necessarily equipped or able to meet the wide range of needs in a school, e.g. hearing, behaviour, autism, language, reading etc. Complex behaviour needs are placing increasing demands on staff, and stretching capacity and limited available expertise. The lack of Departmental specialist expertise makes these issues more difficult. 3. Special schools as centres of expertise Staff at this school were unaware that special schools have been established as centres of expertise to assist regular schools, so support has not been accessed. 4. Understanding and assessing learning and support needs Almost all staff at this school were unaware that PLASST has been developed to track and monitor learning and support needs. Rather than a separate tool, teachers would like something that links to syllabus documents to assist with differentiation as they plan and program for all students in their classes. 5. Access to information and expert support Access to information and expert support is very limited and sporadic rather than ongoing and sustained. Whole day professional learning sessions are valuable, but systematic and regular support is absent.

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.

Recognition and understanding of the rights of students with disability and the obligations of teachers and schools toward students and their parents and carers has increased over time. There is too much pressure on classroom teachers to cater for the special needs students in class. Students will benefit from additional resources and teacher relief time for planning and consultation with colleagues and parents. This would significantly enable the development of individual education plans to effectively support student learning. Students requiring individual education plans may have previously accessed external support classes if support classes hadn't been closed; these students are now the responsibility of mainstream classroom teachers with little if any additional support. Not all promised professional learning modules have been released to assist teachers to understand student learning needs. Teachers believe there is inadequate time to plan personalised learning and support. This is particularly challenging for support staff such as RFF teachers who only teach students for 1 hour each week. Learning Support Teams (LSTs) are viewed and spoken of by local Department staff as a group that can respond to and manage any needs in a school. In reality LSTs do not have specific expertise or skills across the broad range of areas and needs that are required in a school. Additional local level specific skill support is essential. Teachers endorse the value of training for SLSOs to increase the effectiveness and recognise the professional nature of their work. This will also provide a higher level of support to students. More intensive and focused learning support through expert

teachers and trained SLSOs would enable more positive learning outcomes. Our school has access to student speech therapists through partnership with a university and this has been invaluable in identifying and providing additional support to students with language needs. A full time school counsellor is required for referrals and assessments/counselling to be done promptly. Currently the ratio which the department is aiming towards is 1:500 but our school's allocation is 3 days per week for 850+ students. Mental health needs of adults and children are significantly impacting school management of students with additional needs and support provisions. Often school staff are required to support/navigate/manage a family's journey in understanding and accepting their child's disability. Often the student's disability or learning needs are the result of challenging family circumstances so family needs are a priority in supporting the student. These needs are well beyond the traditional domain of teaching and learning that school staff are skilled to manage. If the promised full Federal Government Gonski funding with disability loading were delivered, it could be used in many ways to make a real and significant difference to the capacity of teachers to support students with additional learning and support needs.

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

E) Any other related matters.