

**Submission
No 353**

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

Name: Karonga SSP

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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.

Equity can be defined as the 'quality of being fair and impartial.' Equity of access to resources for students with disability goes further to imply that students with special needs access education on the same basis as their peers. To achieve this end the natural extension would be that children with a disability begin with, in the very least, the same as their mainstream, non-disabled peers. The current state is that students in SSPs are not funded/ supported on the same basis as their mainstream peers. The funding policies/models used to fund SSPs continues to be grossly out of balance with our primary and secondary colleagues. Examples of this include; -notional primary staffing model applied to all SSPs regardless of the age of students. Use of primary staffing model negates all additional funding /resources applied to high schools. -SSPs are not afforded equity in QTSS. While funded as notionally primary, with staffing levels to reflect this, QTSS funding is strictly applied to primary students. Thus, teachers and students are disadvantaged. In addition to this a blanket factor of 3 is applied to those primary students without any recognition that each student in an SSP has a Factor of Need status that gives greater weighting based on student need. -Executive member in SSPs are not entitled to the FTE 0.042 allocation for EXR release. In high school and primary school support units, this is applied across the state. In all 113 SSPs no executive receives this entitlement. This continues regardless of the fact that students in SSPs are deemed of such higher need that mainstream support classes that specialist settings are required. -Class numbers in support classes and SSPs are reduced to ensure the students' needs are met. The additional planning and preparation required to support this cohort [even though smaller in number] is completely out of balance with that expected of a mainstream Primary or High School teacher. Teachers are expected to program for the class, meet their school obligations, and then prepare individual plans for all students, complex health care plans, intricate behaviour and risk management plans all with the standard allocation of RFF. In addition to this, all classes are cross stage and often cover both primary syllabus and high school life skills syllabus, thus the staff are required to be across content for an enormous range adding to the

challenge of the role. -SSPs by the very nature and need of students have smaller student populations. SSPs are staffed on notional primary basis, they attract no small school supplement -SSP students attract the RAM equity loadings for English as an Additional Language / Dialect. This is weighted according to progress and thus a student of regular intellect progresses through the phases an average annually. Students with disability often progress much slower, there is no allowance for this in the current RAM Equity EALD solution. The result is a rapid and substantial decline in funding applied for these students and a school wide disadvantage as 'school average' is applied to each student's funding base. The result will thus be students with from CALD will receive little/no equity loading over time regardless of ongoing need. Additionally, students arriving with no English are treated as equal within the schools allocation and thus the school average applied to them regardless of the length of time they have been at Beginning Language Learner phase. By default students from CALD background enrolling in an SSP are be severely disadvantaged from day 1. -SSP staffing, while notionally primary, do not attract the same levels of staffing that a mainstream primary school would. E.g. library and part-time allocations are not equal to our primary school colleagues, General Assistant allocations is based on actual student numbers rather than the notional number applied to teaching staff. -SSPs have additional staffing in the form of SLSOs. The addition to staffing numbers does not attract additional time for administrative staff or professional learning. The immediate requirements to replace SLSOs, are not considered in models of funding supplementation, putting SSPs again behind their mainstream counterparts. -casual staffing costs grossly outweigh the allocation made in global budget allocations from the DoE. Our school has students with compromised health and this leads to increased sickness which is easily transferred to staff. The double edge sword of this is that staff, when unwell, cannot be working with students who are vulnerable thus requiring greater amounts of sick leave to be taken to ensure students are safe. Students are sick more often causing staff to become ill more than in a mainstream school yet no allowance is made for this in funding As a consequence there is inadequate funds to target resources for improving student outcomes. The impact over the above stated issues is that students with disability are not afforded the same level of support as would naturally be provisioned in a mainstream school. The result is that they are not afforded equitable access to the curriculum on the same basis as their peers. Students at Karonga SSP benefit from the enormous experience and dedication of their teachers and support staff. This support is provided without prejudice despite daily struggles to fulfil each student needs within a system that does not address the very specific needs of each child. Students with special needs in our context receive adequate and timely support from staff, however, the provision of support from beyond the school requires dedication of time and a knowledge of who and what to ask before support can be granted. The supports often provided are limited in scope and fleeting. Supports required for long term needs are not forthcoming and we find that we are needing to regularly ask for the same thing term after term. At Karonga, teachers report a level of confidence in responding to student need. This support comes from within, from supervisors and colleagues and networks of schools well known to SSP staff. The experience of mainstream teachers and teachers in support units is very different. Within school support is limited and the communication of supports available hampered by lack of regional support personnel. This lack of external support severely impacts the ability of mainstream schools to adequately support people with disability. This lack of access is further impeded by workloads for student service staff that ensure they are unable to get into schools to aid. It is well understood that provision of access to support class placements is limited with many families forced to enrol into mainstream classes with limited funding support because there are simply not enough spaces in support classes. Many schools are completely ill-equipped to manage the access request process. Some schools rely solely on the school counsellor role to fulfil their obligations for making access requests [again, because of the limited available of external support staff guidance. An individual school's lack of knowledge and experience with the access request process can disadvantage students in that a staff member individual expertise may render one person's request papers more acceptable to the placement panel than another's. Consequently, students with higher levels of need miss out on appropriate placements. Schools are unfamiliar with the nature of support class settings, with some viewing support classes as a one size fits all – this can be highly frustrating when placements are denied

based on appropriateness of the setting where advice from external experts was needed – but no forthcoming because of inadequate support staffing. Lack of available spaces in SSP schools directly impacts current students with some students waiting indefinitely to move to another region/location. Regional placement panels are forced to insist on placement into inappropriate settings regardless of the impact on students or staff. Equity of access to educational outcomes includes equity of access physically. Karonga SSP is a site for students with moderate to severe disability with a significant portion of students with mobility impairments. The grounds are not accessible for all students. There is a great need for wheelchair access ramps and pathways and support from beyond the school has not been forthcoming. The school is forced to seek external grants and rely on charity to make such additions and modifications. The additional consequence is that rather than focus on developing access and participation in education the school leadership team is forced to use valuable time seeking trying to find resources to make the school accessible for all the students. Our school has access to the best special educators in our system. Unfortunately for our support class colleagues this support and experience is limited to the few teachers in the school with special education experience. For our mainstream colleagues the situation is even more challenging with few regional support staff able to engage and support. The increasing number of special needs students not afforded special placement increases this issue. Special education specific teacher professional learning is few and far between. Special education settings are forced to create their own PL with limited systems / resources to do so. Students attending SSPs make up some of the most complex and challenging individuals in our education system yet provision of resources to meet their needs is inadequate. Those offering external expertise such as WHS, often indicate that they are unable to provide the support required or even the advice necessary to make positive change in enabling a student to access teaching and learning. Safety of teaching and support staff is threatened by this lack of additional support. In order to access resources over and above the schools global allocation requires funding submissions that often supply short term solutions – and require ongoing submissions to access those required resources. This intermittent nature of additional resourcing continues in the attempt to establish processes to engage in effective transition planning for students. Funding must be applied for each year. Funding is fluent / fluctuates in levels and makes the development of effective transition plans reliant on ability to make savings with the global allocation of funds.

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.

Under ESES, the use of the Student Learning Needs Index based on NAPLAN results to allocate flexible funding and Learning and Support Teachers was applied. Students in SSPs do not participate in NAPLAN as the exam is not appropriate. By not participating they are thus not eligible to access additional funds. Thus, a student with a disability is disadvantaged because he or she cannot access the testing in the first place. Under ESES, students with low level needs attracting less than \$6400 in Integration Funding are now catered for by the Low Level Adjustment for Disability Resource Allocation Model Equity Loading. Students in SSPs with such additional needs are not considered. In the scenario of a mainstream class, if 30 students in the class had a moderate intellectual disability and funding support the all 30 students would be afforded Integration Funding Support funding for an SLSO – up to 6.25 hours a day.....the same student in an SSP would have a maximum Factor of Need applied of 1.666 – to fill a class would require 6 students with a FON of 1.666. They would be afforded 1 teacher and 1 SLSO with no means for additional support. There is no standard and easily accessible means to fund students with complex and emergent needs in SSPs. Under the first rollout of the ESES the Centres for Expertise projects developed by Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs) was the first time SSPs were recognised as having expertise that may be shared across the department to benefit all teachers and students with disability. This program has been ceased and there is no provision to support, extend, enhance, build on or connect the projects. There is no resourcing to allow mainstream colleagues to benefit from SSP expertise. While the ESES projects appeared to be a

strong and essential mechanism for developing and sharing the expertise within our states SSPs, the funding has ceased and thus resourcing to continue to build and share such expertise is quashed. More schools would have been able to benefit from these projects if there had been continued resourcing. The resources developed are thus often sitting underutilised because there is no support to continue to share these across schools. PLASST is very basic in nature. It provides a simple set of tools to give a broad picture of a student's needs and often serves to confirm what a teacher is already doing rather than to provide a basis from which to support and enhance learning. The PLASST is ineffective for student with high and complex needs. It has no scope for fine detail and no resource for program development. The existence of PLASST has made no difference to teachers in meeting the needs of student with disability.

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.

That the NSW Government substantially increase funding for students with disabilities and special needs in NSW Government schools to ensure all students have equitable access to education. Equity of access implies equitable funding allocations across primary, high school and SSPs. This is absolutely not achieved with SSPs needing to regularly remonstrate for equity. By applying the label of 'targeted' rather than 'base' for our school the provision of funding for students with disability may apparently be increased across the state. The levels of funding in our school are ostensibly no different over the past few years, even with the additional equity loadings. Additional grants for class resources, additional programs etc. are absorbed into the global allocation and when compared to previous years our school has not seen any increase in funding. SSP funding has not been enhanced in any way during this period. Teachers report an increased workload, increased pressure and lack of adequate time and resource to perform their role. Students are reliant on external sources of funding such as charities to receive the support they need to access education on the same basis as their 'non-disabled' peers. That the NSW Government, in its submission to the Commonwealth school funding review, advocate a transparent funding mechanism to meet the need of students with disabilities or additional learning needs. Transparency implies that schools have a clear understanding of how and why funding models are applied. Our school has had occasion to question such funding models and has been met with statements such as "we are not at liberty to discuss the model or how it has been applied." Funding for additional and emergent need and access for such varies from network to network. Funding and formula for staffing in SSPs is not clear. The allocation of FTE teaching and SASS staff varies from location to location. The staffing handbook does not explain all elements of SSP staffing such as Teacher Librarian, Part-Time, admin and ancillary staffing. That the NSW Government address the current anomaly in which Schools for Specific Purposes are staffed and funded on a primary school formula, even though they cater for a large number of high school aged students. This has not been rectified. In addition to this, SSPs are excluded from accessing cross school application of QTSS, executive release allocations etc. That the Department of Education and Training move rapidly towards the development and application of a functional assessment tool which has been independently monitored and assessed. This tool should be used to inform decisions about access to disability funding and to further enhance educational outcomes for students with disabilities and special needs. This has not been achieved. The Personalised Learning and Support Signposting Tool [PLASST] is broad and rudimentary in nature. It provides no information to assess complex need and cannot be applied to students with moderate – severe intellectual disability. Where other states have worked closely with academics to engage with such assessment tools, NSW has yet to support such works. That the Department of Education and Training: • acknowledge and accept that there is widespread concern about the unmet demand for special education places in NSW Government schools • undertake an immediate investigation into the level of unmet demand for special education places and classes and publish the results of this investigation • increase the number of special education places and classes to ensure that there are adequate places to cover demand for all

students with disabilities and special needs • abandon plans to dissolve existing language support classes. This has not been addressed. Hundreds of students each year are required to attend mainstream classes because of the lack of special education places. Placement panel convenors are forced to view students as numbers rather than consider their need and collective impact on schools and are thus placed inappropriately.

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

Parents and carers are stretched. The education system and the current supports for students with disability are inadequate and thus additional pressure must be placed onto families that are already stretched to their limits. The current staffing and funding models for SSPs ensures that resources in the form of time and staff are not able to adequately and efficiently respond to parent concerns. With such a concentration of complex need and a critical lack of staff, efficiently meeting the needs of parents is not possible.

E) Any other related matters.

Students requiring assisted school transport are not immediately provisioned. The result is that the wait period, often 2 weeks, deems that some students, because of their disability and need to access a special education setting are excluded by virtue of the fact that they have not been provided the necessary means to access this educational service. The Resource Allocation Model as explained by the DoE purports to allocated funding in 3 parts; "The RAM includes a base allocation, which is the largest component and reflects the core cost of educating each student and school operation. This supplemented by equity loadings to address student needs in schools, as well as targeted funding for students with more complex learning and support needs." Department of Education RAM Funding Model Explained The above quote indicates that the largest portion of RAM funding should be the school's base allocation – school type, school buildings, per capita funding and climate. The second most significant portion should be the school's equity loadings – English language proficiency, Aboriginal background and socio-economic status. The third – and smallest portion is targeted funding – individual student funding. At present SSPs receive small base allocations, small equity allocations and larger portions of targeted funding e.g. Karonga base is less than 10% of its targeted funding. If a school has such significant targeted need then it would stand to reason that the school needs an equally significant base allocation. Schools for Specific purpose appear to have been forgotten, left behind. The most complex and vulnerable students in the NSW education system are given the least priority. It's time to change. Time to consider what is best for students with disability. Time to support parents. Time to support teachers and School Learning Support Officers. Time to keep teachers and students safe by providing resources in an equitable and timely fashion. Time to stop shifting blame and invest in special schools. Time to realise that students with disability have more to contribute to our rich society than they are given credit. Time to allow students with disability to truly reach their potential. Time to once and for all truly include students with disability in the education system – to not just to let SSPs in the gate, but to open the classroom door and welcome them in and give them and their students the same opportunity that is afforded to everyone else. It's time.

I am a Principal

Organisation Karonga SSP

This email was sent from the NSW Teachers Federation website.