

**Submission  
No 354**

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

**Name:** Fairfield 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.**

\*Additional support, including adjustments to teaching, learning and assessment activities: -Students do NOT receive adequate and timely access to this support. The processes and administration required to access funded support prohibits timely access and sometimes access is denied. - Classroom teachers do not feel equipped, confident and supported to provide the level of support that is required to meet the needs of every student. - The lack of allocated funds for all levels of student need, along with the additional staff and resources required to meet that need, inhibits access to the level of support we feel should be provided. \*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): - Students do NOT receive adequate and timely access to this support. Although teachers know how to access this support and feel that their professional judgement is acknowledged, we find there is not enough specialist support available within the school to match student need. The specialist support teachers we do have are too few in number to effectively support need. This results in allocation of support not matching the level of need and therefore being far from equitable. \*Integration Funding support: - Students often do NOT receive adequate and timely access to this support. - Some teachers in the school know how to access this support but many do not. The process of applying for the funding is onerous and time consuming. With limited funding available, we find the process to be competitive and not based on actual need. Instead, it appears to be unfair in distribution - with many applications denied or the level of need unmatched by the amount of funding granted, which means either the school has to find a way to utilise its own resources to match the need or the students go without the support they actually need. \*Students requiring a support placement: - Students do NOT receive adequate and timely access to this support. Placements are very limited and highly competitive. The application and administrative processes are onerous and time consuming, with input from teachers, counsellors, support staff, medical staff and parents required. Panels then determine if placement is granted

based upon the very limited numbers of vacancies, NOT on actual need. Parents who do not understand the process sometimes cause delays in placements or refuse them once granted. Schools are left to try and cater for need when placements are denied, with no extra funding or teacher training, apart from what the school can source and pay for from its own budget. This is far from equitable, unfair and is denying students the quality education they deserve to match their level of need. \*Students who require specialist equipment and/or environmental adjustments: -We find that students sometimes receive adequate and timely access to this support. -Teachers know how to access equipment and have their professional judgement acknowledged, however, lack of school funds may prohibit the purchase of items required to meet need. While waiting for funds to purchase equipment, students with unmet need are left in mainstream classrooms with the school and/or teachers doing their best to provide what they can. If environmental adjustments have to be made, the administrative processes required can cause lengthy delays – with the result being student need remaining unmet and schools/class teachers having to cope without the equipment or environment that best suits the student need. \*Students whose needs require support and intervention from the relevant personnel in the Educational Services team: -Students do NOT receive adequate and timely access to this support. Many services simply do not exist any more or if there are relevant personnel, the student need far outweighs the support services available. -We find that schools are left to fend for themselves or find avenues of support to access through networking with other teachers and schools. Limited funds at the school level and limited specialist support teachers being available within the school means that access to support is inhibited or lengthy delays are experienced. This is inequitable and unfair, as some student need can be met and others are not. \*Workplace resources: -We believe it is essential to have genuine, ongoing consultation with parents and carers. The time constraints required to meet with parents, the administrative and financial burdens of purchasing time to do so and the cost of hiring interpreters to ensure that consultation is meaningful, is all borne by the school. With no allocated funds for this, or if interpreters can not be purchased, the process relies on the good will of the school and staff. Many meetings occur in personal time and many interpreters are teachers who volunteer their time. This is unfair and inequitable. It is also not a sustainable system that ensures consultation is ongoing. -Teachers and the Learning Support Team feel that we can identify the needs of and necessary adjustments for students, however, the adjustments are subject to the availability of funds and staff. We endeavour to provide the required reasonable adjustments to students but this is often left to individual teachers, their good will and hard work. Although our teachers do the very best they can, funding levels and specialist teacher resources are far too low for the required reasonable adjustments to be provided consistently and equitably. -Implementing and maintaining assessment of need and efficacy of adjustments is also difficult to maintain due to the lack of resources and funding. -The school does the best it can to run an effective Learning and Support Team but again, this is dependant on funding. The level of student need far outweighs the number of specialist support teachers and support resources we can purchase. -Teachers are provided with limited time to develop personalised learning and support plans. It is common to find teachers completing these processes in their own time once the allocated time with funding has run out. -The school tries to provide teachers with access to specialist support and special education expertise but the availability is limited. If students are undiagnosed or unfunded, there are very few experts to utilise, unless school networks assist or unfunded support is accessed through teacher and school good will. -Although the school endeavours to provide teachers access to relevant professional learning, we find that this is inadequate in regards to need. Every class has students with unmet support required for need. We simply do not have the funds, nor access to enough professional learning, to up skill every teacher to be a special needs teacher. -The school attempts to provide teachers access to in-class support and the process is done as fairly as possible, however, the high level of need far outweighs the level of support available. This means that student need is identified but the specialist teachers are not enough in number to meet the need. We have too few and they are spread thinly across the school, or the needs are ranked and only the highest needs can be supported with others going without anything other than class teacher support. -All teachers and the school try to provide every student with equitable access to teaching and learning, via adjustments and differentiation of the curriculum. This, however, is often

unsupported by funds or specialist expertise, making the onerous task fall upon individual teachers heads. Personal time, personal resources and huge workloads result, making this unfair and inequitable – if one class has higher needs than others, that teacher has higher workloads and administrative burdens to cope with. -Processes to engage in effective transition planning for students vary from year to year. It is an unfunded process, so is dependant upon teacher good will or school budgets allocating time.

**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 implementation of ESES in NSW resulted in: The reallocation of 9 categories of support teachers to the single role of Learning and Support (LaS) Teachers, the reallocation of Assistant Principals Learning Assistance and Assistance Principals Behaviour to the single role of Assistant Principal Learning and Support, the use of the Student Learning Needs Index based on NAPLAN results to allocate flexible funding and LaS Teachers in schools, students with low level needs attracting less than \$6400 in Integration Funding now being catered for by the Low Level Adjustment for Disability Resource Allocation Model Equity Loading and the Centres for Expertise projects developed by Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs). These changes directly impacted our school by: -increasing teacher workload through the expansion and implementation of online training modules for teachers, in order to meet the high need of students not being met by specialist support. -making the school responsible for accessing specialist courses for teachers when funding allocation did not provide the specialists required. We feel that this has resulted in: -teachers being left to make adjustments to support the individual learning needs of students with disability or learning difficulties without the support they require or the professional learning they need. -the school being forced to create and maintain effective collaborative partnerships with parents and other professionals, in lieu of special education personnel being responsible for this. -many teachers struggling to feel equipped to understand and meet the learning and support needs of the full range of students in their classrooms. -an adequate level of specialist teacher presence in our workplace to effectively support the high level and varying degrees of student need. -only some Learning and Support teachers at the school being a specialist i.e. they have adequate qualifications and/or experience to "provide direct and timely specialist assistance to students in regular classes with additional learning and support needs and their teachers" -access to additional support within the school to meet the educational needs of students with disability or difficulty not being met -our school receives limited benefit from a network established across schools to share the knowledge, expertise and specialist resources available in special schools. So many schools require so much assistance, support and expertise that the resources on offer can not possibly be equitably shared across schools. -less schools/teachers being informed by the expertise and resources developed in specialist settings. -less students benefitting from teachers' access to expertise available in our specialist schools. -teachers and the school being responsible for the timely and proper use of the Department's Personalised Learning and Support Signposting Tool (PLASST). -dedicated time and planning having to be directed to ensuring PLASST is actively used to profile the learning and support needs of individual students in collaboration with students and their parents. Financial and administrative burdens of purchasing time and interpreters to successfully do this is borne by the school, yet not by all schools, so is inequitable and unfair. -teachers requiring training and time to feel better equipped with the PLASST to identify the strengths, abilities, skills and learning needs of students with disability. This training and time requires teacher good will or school funds to be used – again another inequitable and unfair burden on schools with high numbers of new teachers and LBOTE parents/students. -specialist support for students with disability not always being accessed due to lack of funds or lack of specialist teachers/resources/placements. - a reduction of staff placed in schools as specialist support or the collapsing of specialist classes, placing students with special needs back into mainstream classes without specialist support –a competitive outcome system being implemented across schools.

Many students miss out on placement/resources and schools are left with limited funding to spread across multiple need. Therefore the class teacher is left as the only one attempting to address need, as the current processes deem students to be "not considered bad enough" to gain placement, as students are ranked in severity of need and allocated places or support until the options are exhausted. All others miss out and are left to the teacher and his/her ability to meet their needs. - reduced resourcing from the department for students with more severe disabilities. -reduced capacity by the department to meet obligations to students under the Commonwealth Disability Standards for Education 2005, however, the burden of responsibility being placed on individual schools. -the devaluing of students with a disability or learning difficulty, which does not promote the system-wide recognition and understanding of the rights of students 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.**

We do NOT believe that the NSW Government substantially increased funding for students with disabilities and special needs in NSW Government schools to ensure all students have equitable access to education. Reduced specialist teacher numbers, the collapsing of specialist classes and the withholding of GONSKI funding allocations for students with disability prove that this has not occurred. We feel the NSW Government, in its submission to the Commonwealth school funding review, did advocate for a transparent funding mechanism to meet the need of students with disabilities or additional learning needs. 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 is both unfair and inequitable has NOT been addressed. The Department of Education has NOT reduced the requirement for those students whose disability and level of need is unlikely to change dramatically in the space of a year to reconfirm their disability status on an annual basis in order to receive disability funding. The need is not matched by funding and the funding is reviewed annually. The Department of Education does not communicate the outcome of the disability funding assessment process to families, carers and schools in a manner that is clear, timely and sensitive. Schools are left to do this and find that the information is often NOT timely, nor easily understood without the assistance and support of counsellors, interpreters and teachers. Although the Department implemented PLASST as a tool to be used to inform decisions about access to disability funding, we do NOT feel it has further enhanced educational outcomes for students with disabilities and special needs. The lack of funding to match the identified need precludes the enhancement of student learning outcomes. The Department of Education has NOT acknowledged and accepted that there is widespread concern about the unmet demand for special education places in NSW Government schools. It has NOT increased 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 and it HAS dissolved language support classes. This goes directly against the recommendations. Although the Department of Education worked towards ensuring that all school learning support teams include at least one member who holds a special education qualification, many more staff are required to meet the needs of our students. The recommendation that the Department of Education provide additional resources, including relief time for teachers to develop Individual Education Plans has NOT been followed. Time allocation comes from school good will (where existing funds are allocated by the school for this purpose). Extra funding is NOT provided for this and many teachers end up spending their own time working on these plans. The Department of Education has NOT worked towards assisting all School Learning Support Teachers to obtain a special education qualification. PL to up skill teachers comes from school allocation of other funds, not from disability allocations. No other support teachers in our school have obtained Special Ed qualifications.

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

disabilities or learning difficulties. We commit ourselves to working with and consulting parents/carers of students and responding to concerns and complaints raised by parents/carers of students in a timely manner. However, we do all of this off our own backs, without the direct support of resources or allocated funding from the department. We utilise school budget funding for other purposes or we rely on teacher good will and use personal time and resources to implement the review and complaints mechanism.

**E) Any other related matters.**

To deliver equity and excellence to every student, our school needs the full GONSKI allocation of funding for students with disability. We need dedicated funding for Teacher training – every single teacher has students with specialist/high needs in social, academic and behaviour domains, however, we can NOT access training. We also need programs with targeted support and the funds to match the needs of every student – so it must be an allocation per student need, not a pot of money. Our school requires more Counsellor time and qualified counsellor personnel – student need requires this to be fully qualified teachers who are counsellor trained, so that they have the understanding and expertise required to make recommendations and implement programs that will target student needs and support teachers with an understanding of educational settings. 41% of our students have refugee status, 98% identify as LBOTE and the community has been identified as low SES every year since this practice has been used by the department. These unique circumstances mean we consistently require resources, specialist support and funds to meet the level of high need. We currently receive allocation for EALD and low SES but we need dedicated funding for specialist support teachers and resources for students with disabilities and learning difficulties in order to deliver equity in education.

