

Submission
No 368

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

Name: Name suppressed (PC)

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Partially
Confidential



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 increasing demands on classroom teachers and school executive to meet the need of all students without adequate resources and support is placing the system under extreme stress. Classroom teachers work tirelessly to cater for the diverse range of students within their classroom and deliver high quality teaching and learning to support all students to succeed. Teachers and leaders in our school experience the following obstacles in being able to support all students, particularly students with a disability or special needs:

- onerous and inefficient processes of the Department of Education (DoE) in order to access additional funding or support to cater for students with special needs.
- delays in delivery of support placements and/or funding owing to DoE's timeframes for review panel meetings that do not occur with enough frequency, leaving teachers and students often weeks without any assistance.
- a lack of targeted, relevant and ongoing professional learning for teachers.
- access to resources or support largely reliant on formal medical/mental health diagnosis, appearing to be restricted to Autism Spectrum Disorder as receiving most support however still insufficient.
- the administrative demands on classroom teachers, executive and school learning support teams in the process of making application for support.
- the current funding levels through RAM allocation are not adequate to address the full range of needs of students.
- the lack of access to diverse specialist support to target student needs, with current reliance on 'generalists' that often have neither the direct experience or knowledge to address the increasingly complex behaviours and needs of students.
- a failure on DoE to communicate correct information relating to availability of places in support class/es.
- lack of a variety of support classes within our local network area (The Hills) to cater for the needs of our students and support families in our school community. The closest support units to our school, for any type of SSP or support unit, are at least 25 minutes away, without traffic. Given our students would be commuting to school in peak hour periods, and often not against the flow of traffic, this puts significant pressure on our school and families in the decision around how to best support their child. As an example of a recent case in trying to access an

appropriate support class for a student, we have a young student, at 6 years of age, commuting from to access the closest support class for their specific need.

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 reallocation of LaS Teachers, as a result of the implementation of the 'Every Student, Every School' (ESES) policy, to our school context has been insufficient to meet the full range of needs of students, particularly for students with a disability. Whilst we were the beneficiary of an LaS Teacher with high levels of expertise in literacy interventions, our LaS Teacher does not have adequate training or expertise to confidently support teachers with relevant accommodations, adjustments or interventions for students with a disability or special need. The result of this has placed increasing demands on classroom teachers to make learning adjustments along with individualised plans and strategies without sufficient professional learning, resources from specialist settings or direct and regular access to experts, as was the case for schools before the implementation of ESES. In addition, our LaS Teacher allocation is inadequate to address the increasingly complex needs of students with a disability or special need, and we require more specialist intervention and assistance in this area to relieve teachers of the additional workload demands. ESES has not enhanced our access to specialist support, nor has it provided teachers with sufficient training to be able to confidently cater for the full-range of student need in a mainstream classroom.

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.

With regards to the recommendations of the 2010 inquiry, our workplace has not observed • increases in funding for students with disabilities and special needs to ensure all students have equitable access to education. The funding allocated to schools through the RAM does not provide sufficient support for teachers and students to be able to provide the attention and support required to help these students succeed. • the funding mechanism to meet the need of students with disabilities or additional learning needs is not transparent – teachers and schools must provide exhaustive levels of documentation, data and observations to receive any level of funding to support students with additional needs, and the level of funding made available appears random without any 'base' level of funding as a reference • increases to 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 – our experience in this area has been the opposite. An example of this experience has been recently, where after submitting the lengthy and time consuming application for a student through the Access Request process, we learnt only following the meeting of the placement panel some weeks later that 3 out of the 4 classes that were applied for had closed and those options were no longer available for our student. Our school was not notified of the closures, nor informed at the time of application, nor at the time of the meeting of the placement panel, that the preferred options of both the school and the child's family would not be available, which added further delays to the process of finding a suitable setting for that student as well as significant risk to teachers and students as the school attempted to manage the violent and aggressive behaviours exhibited by the child. • the DoE has not supported teachers with the promotion of increased resources that are available on an ongoing basis to assist with adjustments and accommodations to help students with a disability or additional needs in the mainstream classroom. The availability of such resources has been ad hoc, at best.

D) Complaint and review mechanisms within the school systems in New South Wales

for parents and carers.

The partnerships our school has parents/carers of all students, particularly in the case for those caring for students with a disability, are extremely important. Classroom teachers foster these relationships through regular meetings, often held outside working hours and adding considerably to their workload demands. The consultation required with parents in the development, assessment and ongoing monitoring of individual education plans, interventions and strategies with these additional meetings is not supported to a sufficient level through current funding to allow teachers the time to carry out these tasks. Our LaS Teacher meets with many parents over the course of a week in her own time, so as not to impact or reduce the face-to-face hours she has to work intensively with students. However, this adds significantly to her workload and often delays in the implementation of support because of the inadequate provision for support in this area.

E) Any other related matters.

To deliver equity and excellence to every student our workplace needs additional resources made available sooner when classroom teachers are working often under pressure to support students in the mainstream setting that have challenging and complex behaviours without a formal medical diagnosis, and/or significant additional learning needs owing to developmental delay. Resources in the form of additional support teachers and face-to-face hours with these students, professional learning around accommodations and adjustments for students with a disability and/or additional learning needs, access and connections with more specialised experts not generalists as is the current experience with Learning and Support Teachers and Learning and Wellbeing Officers, and increased places in support classes to help schools and students engage in high quality learning experiences and ongoing support transition will begin to address the significant unmet need of these students in our schools.

This email was sent from the NSW Teachers Federation website.