

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

Name: Name suppressed
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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.

As a teacher in Special Education for the past 20 years, I have not ever seen equitable access to resources for students with a disability or special needs. I have taught in the public education system in primary and high schools and still hold a position as a Head Teacher of a Unit for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in a High School. Not only have there not been academic resources readily available for students requiring differentiation, in the classroom and the playground but there has not been the accommodations made physically in the school environment. In 2004, I was asked to set up a new Autism Unit in Blacktown. We were the first of its kind in NSW. This was a result of parents campaigning that there was nowhere for their children to go to once they finished primary school if they still needed support in High School and the number of students with the diagnosis was rising. As Head Teacher of this new unit, I was given three current classrooms at Evans High School with an establishment grant that barely bought the furniture and stationary that all three classrooms needed. Twelve years later we have been asked to take on a fourth class which we have. This means we have 28 students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, and half of those students with a dual diagnosis of Mental Health 1, 2 or 3. Twelve years later our resources remain - 4 classrooms with primitive resources. We do not have a separate toilet for those students who suffer from severe anxiety with loud noises, crowd, being prone to being bullied and very commonly in Autism, suffer from obsessive compulsive disorder. If our students don't cope with being on the playground at recess and lunch, we have a small part of a balcony outside our staff room where they can sit at recess and lunch. If any of our students tend to run away we do not have any areas where they are safe and myself and our staff shadow in order to ensure this. In regard to curriculum, some of our students follow a mainstream pattern of study, yet we do not have the staff to support them fully in the mainstream yet for them to do life skills outcomes would not be fair on their abilities and potential. Our students in the homeroom who follow a lifeskills pattern of study have teachers that regularly make their own resources to suit the Life Skills syllabus because there are not enough. I have seen new schools built

in surrounding suburbs with 'purpose built' support units that provide time out areas that are fenced, access from special transport straight to their classrooms so they don't have to walk through the playground if they're particularly anxious, the classrooms are purpose built and have their own kitchen and toilets for supporting students in work and community education programs along with Life Skills. Why is this not provided for all schools who have support units? Why do the new schools that are built have access to this type of funding and not the current schools? As Head Teacher of the unit, I am still expected to teach a regular Head Teacher load. Our students have regular melt downs despite excellent behaviour management strategies and visuals that all my staff use. When these meltdowns occur, a teacher is expected to manage this and support the student in helping them to calm down and be ready to re-enter the learning environment / classroom. These meltdowns can take anywhere from 5 mins to two or more hours for them to calm down depending on the situation. This means I have to leave my class to support the student, hence leaving the SLSO with the class which is not allowed. We have to open classroom doors so another teacher can supervise and teach my class, as well as their own class so that I can prevent a serious escalation of behaviours from a student who is on time out and needing support. This results in not one class having their learning interrupted, but two or more classes. Once we have a student that has escalated to violent behaviours such as throwing objects, kicking bins over, swearing at teachers, self harm, I have no choice but to lead staff in managing that student and overseeing lockdown procedures. Once again, all four classes disrupted due to me having to leave my class and manage a student having a serious meltdown. The domino effect of these meltdowns is calling parents to sometimes pick up the student, reporting on SENTRAL, reporting to principal and deputy to clarify actions taken. Ensuring students restore furniture or equipment that they have thrown, as well as building the rapport with that student afterwards to ensure the day or the next day can be a fresh and positive start. Throughout this entire time from supporting the student to escalation of behaviours to positive rapport when they have calmed down, it could be two or more hours before I can return to class so that all classes can return to their learning and timetable. The position of a Head Teacher, Special Education entails such a variety of roles including leading staff, supporting students, managing IEP's, writing programs, differentiation of curriculum, making visuals on a daily basis depending on needs, behaviour management, risk management, IEP meetings, review meetings, OoHC meetings, managing Assisted Special Transport, regular contact with parents who themselves, regularly suffer from high anxiety and mental health issues.

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 funding we receive is minimal. This is for a unit of four classes where we teach every subject - English, Maths, Science, HSIE, PDHPE, Electives. How do we buy text books for each student in Maths? We find some good resources but have to wait until we can get a submission in which can be knocked back if there are other priorities for the school. As stated above, resources environmentally and academically are poor, one due to funding but also two, due to limited availability of suitable life skills programs. Our support unit needs resources and buildings that the school is never going to be able to provide with the Government's 'Every Student Every School' policy.

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.

We have spent 12 years at our High School with limited School Counsellor access. As a support unit for students with extreme mental health issues, regular self-harm, depression, bullying, accepting they have a disability, understanding and recognising their differences and coming to terms with that - we should have a full time counsellor. Referrals go in but they are unable to continue to see them regularly. They are able to see them once or twice, however, this is not enough for students like ours. It takes at least three or four meetings with that counsellor for the student to start to feel comfortable and even this may not be enough time. Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder need to feel that they know the person, trust the person and feel that the person actually understands how they think in order for them to listen or seek support from them. I understand this is similar to all adolescents but this is again, more pronounced in Autism. They have a language and communication disorder which requires longer time to process information and has a significant impact on how they learn and how they learn to manage their emotions, responses to anxiety - fight or flight. All of these strategies take significant time, years, for our students to transfer across a variety of environments.