

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

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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.**

In my 2017 year 1 classroom, I have a student with autism who absconds, has violent meltdowns and has no awareness of her own safety. I also have a student with a suspected mild intellectual disability, a student with severe receptive and expressive language disorder, a newly arrived EAL/D student, a student who displays severe oppositional defiance disorder behaviours, a student with an undiagnosable genetic disorder that affects her gross motor and fine motor skills. And this is all in a mainstream classroom, but nor does it encompass all the student needs in my classroom. The variety of student need is incredibly difficult to cater for. Any and all resources are made by me out of school hours as there is not enough time in my 2 hours a week of RFF to cater to ALL the specific needs of my students. Currently, my school is funding an SLSO to support me in the classroom and on the playground for my student with Autism. As the student is classified as high functioning, she does not attract any funding, nor does it allow for the SLSO to be full-time. The student absconds from the classroom at least upwards of 3 times a day. The student has spent the majority of her school life outside the classroom, sometimes for her own safety, the safety of the staff and other students, and thus her learning has been severely affected. The majority of my class have their own Personalised Learning and Support Plans - and no two students have the same needs. I have at least eight students that are unable to read or write due to their individual learning needs. Students are receiving some specialised individualised support, but this isn't consistent, nor is it delivered by specialised teachers. There is not enough funding to support the individual student needs across the school and so support staff are only available for 2-4 hours a week. When applying for Integration Funding Support, our Learning and Support Team is directed to ensure that our description of the student in need of funding is detailed and to remember that the school is 'competing' for the funding needed. The funding is also limited - a school is required to continue applying for funding for the same student as the funding amount is not enough to cater to the needs of the student or enough to be used in order to support the student full-time until the major concerns/needs can be catered for.

In cases of applying for support unit placements, or placements in schools for specific purposes, there are waiting lists and students can often wait a year before a space becomes available. Students who have autism and a secondary disability (or even just one disability) but are not violent, are often forced to attend mainstream school until a vacancy in a unit or SSP opens up. There are not enough units or SSPs to place all the students that are in need of specialised targeted support. It is also public knowledge that about 50% of teachers in Special Education are not Special Education trained, which leads to the possibility that students are not always receiving the targeted support they require.

**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.**

As the only teacher with Special Education qualifications and/or Special Ed experience, our school lacks the skills to cater to all the needs of our students. We are a mainstream school and we have high needs in every single classroom. I was the Learning and Support Team Coordinator, but as I was classified as a classroom teacher, I have been moved onto mainstream class and now have a class with at least 50% of students with additional learning needs. It was felt that my expertise was better suited to teaching the high needs student with autism. Executive staff don't have a lot, if any, experience working with students with special education needs and this makes the job of the classroom teacher that much more difficult. For example, rules and consequences that are enforced in the classroom, are not followed when the student absconds. Students can be pandered to, and this undoes any of the behaviour expectations the classroom teacher has managed to teach the students. It is not the fault of the executive, they just don't have the right experience to understand why their actions can actually effect the student's learning and behaviour and thus effect the whole class and add to teacher stress. As previously mentioned, I am required to write at least 8 PLSPs for students in my classroom. Due to the instruction of the executive, classroom teachers are not expected to have more than 5 or 6, and so I am not able to write PLSPs for some students who are borderline in their additional learning needs. This is the same problem staff are facing across the school. Every classroom in my mainstream school has at least one "top tier" student. These students have severe ADHD, severe ODD, speech and language disorders, EAL/D students, conduct disorder, autism, down syndrome, and these are just the diagnosable disabilities within our classrooms. This list does not include the students that have additional learning needs due to their home life, domestic violence, out of home care, absent parents, refugees, etc. The teachers at my school are incredibly dedicated to student improvement and work tirelessly before and after school, on weekends and during holidays to ensure they are creating resources and differentiating lessons to ensure student success for each student in their class. There are not enough hours in a day, nor enough resources or access to expertise to assist with supporting teachers with programming and catering to the individual student needs. Schools are forced to use some of their funding to employ outside consultants to upskill staff in areas of literacy and numeracy. The Government's 'Every Student, Every School' has only added to teacher stress and workload (including executive staff) and has severely affected student learning and outcomes.

**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.**

There is not enough funding in schools to support students with special educational needs. For example, a student with down syndrome in a mainstream classroom that has been diagnosed with a moderate intellectual disability does attract funding, but does not attract enough funding for a full-time SLSO to aide the student in the classroom and on the playground. My school has a high number of students with mild intellectual disabilities and none of these students attract any funding.

Unfortunately, many of these students with intellectual disabilities, become behaviour concerns as they become increasingly aware of how far behind their learning is compared to their peers. With funding for these students, teachers could use SLSOs or additional teaching staff within their classrooms to ensure that the number students with an IM diagnosis in their classroom receive increased 1:1 teacher time for most learning tasks. Targeting these students and providing them with the academic skills they require to fully participate in school, decreases the risk of students developing violent behaviours. Every teacher or support staff should have experience or training in working with students with special needs. Too many staff are untrained and are not all ready to meet the individual needs of students and this compounds the issue for the staff and the students.

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

There is never enough time to deal with concerns and complaints for ANY student in a school. Primary school teachers are only afforded 2 hours of RFF time a week. This means that teachers use the hours after work and their weekends and holidays to ensure that they are handling the concerns or complaints.

#### **E) Any other related matters.**

The NSW Government needs to ensure more funding for NSW Public Schools to ensure they can properly cater to the growing needs of their students and classrooms. If the Government invests more in education, provides funding and resources that allows teachers to properly teach and cater to their students and the student needs, then the futures for these students are likely to be a lot more positive and students have an opportunity to become productive members of society. In the long term, supporting early intervention, supporting NSW public schools, investing in the students of today, will produce positive effects in the future. A decrease of offenders and repeat offenders would be a result of investing in NSW Public Schools. The NSW Government will see a decrease of dependency on social funding such as Centrelink. Students with disabilities and additional learning needs, if provided with support and opportunities to practice skills and enter the workforce, will have a positive effect on society and reduce the financial burden the NSW Government is currently experiencing. Bottom line - Investing in Public Education is investing in Australia's future.

This email was sent from the NSW Teachers Federation website.