Submission No 390

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

Name: Ms Sarah Willett

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New South Wales
Teachers Federation

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.

Many students don't qualify for support and are expected to be catered for as part of mainstream differentiation, which is not always possible. I hear of many teachers laying awake at night, trying to think of ways to support these students, with extremely limited resources. Often, these students' needs are only met when there's a rare 'spare moment' in the day, something I have strived as a teacher to achieve, which is not easy in a class of 30 students.

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.

It feels as though we, as teachers, have more and more diverse needs in our classrooms and it is a struggle to meet every individual's needs, especially when they are at polar ends. For me to be able to teach students with additional learning needs, as well as those who require extension and enrichment, while also ensuring everything in between, feels like a mountain each day.

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.

The amount of funding that students with additional needs receive is unclear and could be more transparent. While I am satisfied that my school directs money towards teachers aids that support students with additional needs, I feel that this practice should be mandatory. It should not be optional to direct funds to students with special needs. In addition, while I integrate students with

additional needs, I have not been offered any additional training in how to maximise learning opportunities for additional need students by the Department of Education, which is surely necessary to high quality education. Again, while I actively seek additional training, I believe this should be made readily available to teachers.

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

The school in which I work actively seeks to involve parents and carers' feedback, however, I don't believe that parents are necessarily always empowered to ensure that their child is being adequately resourced. Teachers are time poor with their extreme workloads to be able to support parents of children with additional needs, given there are multiple students with additional needs in each class and no additional release time.

E) Any other related matters.

Our school needs stable funding for all students with additional needs. The system currently relies too heavily upon parents' and teachers' ability to integrate these children into a mainstream classroom without support. While this integration is a positive development, it still needs to be reinforced with additional teachers aids and other resources to support these students who are otherwise often unsupported.

Name Sarah Willett

I am a Teacher

This email was sent from the NSW Teachers Federation website.