

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date received:** 26 February 2017

---

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.**

Students' access to specialised support varies depending on a number of factors, including parental support and paediatric or medical diagnoses of a disability. The level of support for students with a disability is also poorly understood by both staff and parents and often the label of a disability has directed the level of support given as opposed to functional support needs of a student. One poorly understood level of support is the provision of adjustments to teaching, learning and/or assessments. Along with this, is the inadequate time available to teaching staff to meet with specialist personnel, including the LaST or LST coordinator, to discuss, modify and/or create vibrant programs that best support a student with disabilities in the classroom. For students receiving Funding Support (Integration), the support is generally limited to School Learning Support Officer assistance in the classroom and with assessment tasks. Occasionally, funding support is used to release classroom teacher/s to work with specialised personnel in developing appropriate support or for the development of individual learning programs, including behavioural support plans, however the opportunity for this is limited. Again, it is generally poorly understood by classroom teachers as to the support and adjustments available to teachers in planning and delivering appropriate learning experiences for students with disabilities. Our school has a Support Unit with five classes delivering educational programs to students with autism; mild, moderate and severe intellectual disabilities; and emotional disturbances. Some students across these classes also display significant or serious behavioural disorders including violence, self-harm, and severe aggressive behaviours. Some students choose to access mainstream classes for either mandatory subjects or for elective subjects in accordance with a number of Federal and State Governments Anti-Discrimination Acts, Disability Standards for Education and People with Disability Statements of Commitment. Accessing additional supports for these students is difficult and relies on the submission of either annual or termly applications for targeted funding. They are time consuming, and the receipt of funding is erratic which makes planning and providing timely, additional support for staff and students difficult. There

is also the difficulty of students in support classes accessing practical subjects when they are not counted in the number of students in the school which affects the number of teaching staff and therefore the number of classes available. If a mainstream class has already reached the maximum number of students allowed, especially for practical subjects, then students from support classes may be unable to attend that class even if doing so is requested within their Individual Education Plan. Often it is the goodwill of the mainstream teacher that allows for a student from a support class to attend a mainstream class. Our school has recently (over the past three years) attempted to increase the number of support classes at our school. Due to the increasing number of students in the mainstream diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, and researching the probable enrolment of students with ASD over the next 6 years from feeder schools, an Autism class had been sought. This has yet to be established. While waiting for this class to be established, not only is an enormous strain placed on existing supports but current students with ASD miss out on specialised support. Students within both the mainstream and support classes who display significant or serious behaviours that put at risk themselves, staff and other students, and who require either specialised support or placement in an alternative setting, do not receive adequate support from regional educational support teams. These students take up an inordinate amount of time for staff, with some students requiring daily 1:1 support that is not adequately funded through any source. Due to our semi-regional setting, access to alternative placements is not an option and therefore a better system needs to be implemented that provides support for these students without the need for ongoing applications for targeted funding. A better system would provide appropriate levels of support to both staff and students which would increase student retention, allow for greater transitional supports, and provide a more positive post-school outlook.

**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.**

There is still a wide range in the expertise and willingness of teachers to make adjustments to support the individual learning needs of students with disability within their classes. Although many teachers understand that some students that they teach require additional support, they are less likely to understand their role in the provision of teaching and learning activities that support the full range of students in their classrooms. Often teachers seek out specialist personnel to 'fix' a student or choose to send a student to the 'expert' rather than seek advice to program effectively for all students, including responses to inappropriate student behaviour. The implementation of ESES has had little overall impact on the level of access to information and expert support to classroom teachers in identifying and supporting the educational needs of students with disability. Information on the expertise or resources developed in specialist settings (SSPs) is rarely extended to classroom teachers in mainstream settings. The ability to disseminate information is limited to the little time available and often adds to the information overload many teachers feel. The RAM Equity funding for students requiring low level adjustment for disability is inadequate to meet the full range of support needs for students with disability within regular classes. There is also inadequate time made available for relevant personnel (usually executive teachers) and Learning Support Teams to discuss and plan the equitable distribution of funding to ensure that resources are funded that improve student outcomes, strengthen partnerships between teachers and parents/carers, and develop a positive learning culture across the school for all students.

**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 the development and roll-out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the existence of multi-disciplinary teams to deliver professional and allied health support services to students with

disabilities in schools is non-existent (Recommendation 21). Additional supports for students with disability, including speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical management, and behavioural therapy, is vital for some students. Access to these services should not be determined by the quality of a student's NDIS package. In-school supports are necessary to ensure a holistic approach to educational support for students with complex support needs. Recommendation 25, "that the Department of Education and Training provide additional resources, including relief time for teachers to develop Individual Education Plans", is non-existent. IEP meetings occur during teacher release time or, in the majority of cases, after school. At times, period "swaps" can occur between teachers. Funding made available for release time is necessary to ensure IEPs occur in a timely fashion while ensuring learning programs are not interrupted for other students. Recommendation 28, "that the NSW Government promote through the national reform agenda that special education be embedded throughout pre-service teacher training", has been inadequate in ensuring all classroom teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills required to program and support the full range of student abilities in their classrooms. This also includes the ability to support the behavioural needs of some students. It should also include a better understanding of Life Skills Outcomes and their relationship to regular curriculum learning outcomes.

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

Concerns from parents and carers of students with a disability are dealt with as quickly as possible. However, time constraints, including teaching a class, impact on when meetings can occur or the dissemination of pertinent information to staff. Inadequate release time for executive teachers to fulfil the requirements of their position leads to greater stress and impacts on the timely response to parents, the review of existing supports, the design of updated plans and the provision of professional learning to staff.

**E) Any other related matters.**

This email was sent from the NSW Teachers Federation website.