

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 10 April 2017

Partially
Confidential

I am writing in relation to your inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in government and non-government schools in New South Wales.

Our 13 year old son has a moderate degree of autism and has attended 2 special schools in Sydney since he was 6 up until the start of this year when we started home schooling him. To give a brief report about our experience with him in the school system he has a very pronounced sensitivity to sound and attended classes with children who were prone to loud tantrums/ emotional outbursts. I believe this had a detrimental effect on his nervous system. We gave him antipsychotic medication to help him cope with this situation at school, which helped in the beginning and then became less and less effective over time. My son became anxious and aggressive in response to the upset sounds of his class mates and the school staff struggled to manage his aggression. They also did not manage to implement any successful strategies to help reduce/relieve his anxiety.

At home our son was learning to communicate with a letter board. Through this means he has revealed to us (his parents) and his speech therapist that he is intelligent and capable of sophisticated thought processes for his age. In the class room, by contrast, he was given work which was pitched at kindy level. This was appropriate in some respects because he didn't have the motor skills to work/perform at higher levels for certain activities but the problem was that the staff seemed to believe that his intellect was also at kindy level, which we as his parents knew from his spelled communication to be far from an accurate assumption about him. I believe this attitude from the staff and the random sounds of upset children made school a stressful and unpleasant environment for our son. After trying two schools I didn't expect to see an improvement anywhere else and so we opted to home school. I believe that teachers generally need to understand that just because a child may not demonstrate intelligence in ways that are usually expected does not automatically mean that intelligence is not present. In some cases the way to uncovering a child's intelligence may be obscure and take persistence. I also think that many teachers tend to think a parent is deluded when they say their child shows more skill at home. I think they need to be more receptive to parents' insights about their children especially when they are dealing with children who have difficulties with communicating.

Since home schooling started for our son we have ceased giving him anti psychotic medication, with the rare exception of the occasional day, as he no longer needs it and he is working at an academic level that is 6 years above what it was during his time in special schools. Our paediatrician wrote a letter of support for our initial application to home school, which has thankfully been approved. His letter corroborates the significant reduction in our son's stress since home schooling began.

Thank you for your interest,