

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

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My time as a LaST is used to staff school sport for 2 periods each Monday afternoon. I am not used to support students experiencing disabilities and special needs, but to teach a "class" for school sport. The other LaST is used to staff Sport Detention. This is, similarly, teaching a "class" for sport. The DoE's "Role of the LaST" document states that the LaST cannot be used to create an additional class (see attached). This could be made more clear by including a statement that "this includes creating extra sport groups or teaching classes for school sport."

The issue of specialist qualifications being under-utilised is, in my opinion, a significant one. In the area of ASD, there are a number of practices which occur daily which are just not supported by the evidence base. Roberts and Pryor have reviewed the Helping Children With Autism early intervention practices. They found that many "autism specific" early intervention services are not utilising evidence-based practices, and are relying on anecdotal evidence and past practices. As a parent, I have experienced this with the only early intervention service available in my area using the same "brushing program" as was used by a health service to "de-sensitise" my daughter in an effort to ameliorate her "extreme sensory sensitivity to touch". There is no evidence base for this particular intervention, and as such it should never be used in cases where it results in distress to the individual child. If non-evidence based practices can infiltrate autism-specific intervention services using the HCWA funded packages, how much more likely are they to be found in educational settings which do not employ autism specialists? The study I undertook with the Autism Centre of Excellence at Griffith University focused on Evidence Based Practices (EBPs) and included modules in Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA). In the USA, there is external credentialing of ABA therapists, and many educational districts employ ABA therapists. In NSW, very few people have any qualifications in analysing behaviour and learning needs in a systemic, evidence-based manner, designing interventions to address the needs of individuals, and assessing and reviewing the selected interventions to determine their effectiveness. This is a specialist role which the DoE does not currently support, and a role which I could fill. If the DoE utilised specialist teachers and supported re-training in this area, it would very likely result in improved interventions and practices, and ultimately in improved outcomes for students with ASD in NSW. Utilising my skills across schools in this way would surely be a more effective use of a scarce resource than having me teach mainstream classes and mainstream sport as is currently the case. I have also authored, distributed and delivered a number of newsletters, professional learning presentations and articles in other's newsletters, some in quite specialised areas. Please find attached an example of this, concerning hyperlexia and ASD, and how teachers can develop literacy skills with these unique students.

The ESES re-structure included re-training of LaSTs via Online Training Australia (OTA). One of these courses was "Dyslexia and Severe Reading Difficulties" which I found to be very informative and full of practical strategies as well as some research base. I think it's still available as PL for teachers. This could be a starting point for any parents wanting to know if their Public School LaSTs have knowledge and skills in providing interventions for their children. I would recommend that course as a good starting point for LaSTs working on developing reading and writing skills. The OTA courses allow teachers who've done them to go back into the course to get more resources. That is definitely something the DoE has done for students experiencing disabilities and special needs, as it allows teachers on-going access to some high-quality resources.

There was some disagreement over the transferability of information across state borders. I was referring to guidance or counsellor files. I have confirmed this with a number of DoE School

Counsellors. These files are definitely not transferable, as they contain reports on psychological testing. The DoE in NSW does not allow the files to leave this state, and all state education departments follow a similar policy. Information on student files is much more readily transferable. In a mainstream educational environment, this means that school reports and other information can be transferred interstate, however any psychological testing which could be used to support application for Funding Support is not transferable. This leads to students waiting for Funding Support applications to be processed. If we could use testing undertaken interstate, the application process would be more streamlined and efficient. This exacerbates our issues here on the far north coast. We have too many students who would be eligible for Funding Support, but who cannot access these funds because they have no diagnostic results within or available to the NSW DoE through the School Counsellor service. This is an issue only for students in mainstream educational settings, as more specialised settings such as support units and SSPs require diagnostic information for students to access class placement.

Most states in Australia pay special educators an extra allowance in addition to their salary. This is, generally, termed a "special education allowance." This allowance is paid in recognition of the difficult work that we undertake, and is some small measure of compensation for the additional study undertaken, as well as acknowledgement that it is very difficult to recruit special education teachers. In NSW, this allowance is paid to teachers in all support classes, SSPs, Behaviour Schools and Education and Training Units within Juvenile Justice Centres, as well as some LaSTs (the former ISTBs). In NSW, this allowance is officially termed the "Teachers of Handicap Allowance." This term is not only archaic and anachronistic, it is extremely offensive to parents/carers and persons experiencing disability. If this Parliamentary Inquiry achieves nothing else, it could address this offense by resulting in this allowance re-named as a "Special Education Allowance" or similar. I am not a lawyer, but I would question whether the naming of this allowance breaches disability or anti-vilification legislation. It simply must be re-named.