

Submission
No 39

**INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITY IN NEW SOUTH WALES EDUCATIONAL
SETTINGS**

Organisation: Cerebral Palsy Alliance

Date Received: 29 February 2024



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Children and young people with disability in New South Wales educational settings

Prepared by Cerebral Palsy Alliance and CPActive

**For the NSW Legislative Council
Portfolio Committee No.3 – Education**

Submitted Thursday 29 February, 2024

Contact

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The Secretariat

Portfolio Committee 3, Legislative Council,

NSW Parliament House, 6 Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000

To the Committee,

RE: Submission – NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into children and young people with disability in New South Wales educational settings.

Dear Secretariat,

On behalf of the Cerebral Palsy Alliance and the CPActive Champion Steering Committee, we present a submission to the inquiry.

Cerebral Palsy Alliance

An estimated 34,000 Australians have cerebral palsy. It affects 1 in every 700 births and is caused by a brain injury during pregnancy or shortly after birth. Cerebral Palsy Alliance is committed to positively changing the lives of people with cerebral palsy (CP) and other similar disabilities. The organisation has more than 75 years of expertise and experience in pioneering treatments, harnessing and accelerating technology and leading global research efforts to support the lives of these individuals – a global community of over 17 million people with cerebral palsy and an associated community of 350 million.

Cerebral Palsy Alliance is part of local, national and global networks working together to improve the lives of people with CP through treatment, research, technology and advocacy. CPActive is Cerebral Palsy Alliance's grassroots advocacy campaign, bringing together more than 10,000 people with CP, their families, carers, the disability workforce and allies who are passionate about creating a more inclusive and accessible

Australia. CPActive’s accessible online town halls, focus groups, lived experience labs and training opportunities are considered sector ‘best in class’, offering an unprecedented model for immersive, virtual and accessible advocacy. CPActive nurtures Champions who are the lived experience voice of the campaign ecosystem.

Cerebral Palsy Alliance fully supports moves towards inclusive education and our response is that the way we make schools work better for young people is by listening to the voices of these young people who have been through the education system. There are a number of barriers to attaining equal opportunities in education which have a carry-on effect when young people with disabilities try to find meaningful employment and community participation opportunities after school.

CPActive Youth Labs and ‘Blaze the Trail’

CPActive Champions are highly engaged individuals with lived experience of CP and other disabilities. The Champions have driven CPActive campaign discussions through events called ‘Youth Labs’ since 2021. Strong themes around education to employment pathways resulted, with a range of common experiences emerging, such as:

“My teachers didn’t include me because they thought it would be too difficult. If teachers have this attitude, how can we expect students to be any different?”

A common trend in the Youth Labs was young people reporting they don’t feel heard – at school, in education settings, workplaces and generally in their day-to-day lives. This is similar to other extensive [consultations](#) with young people with disabilities, such as the NSW Office of the Advocate for Children & Young People.

These CPActive Champion discussions, led to the development of the **Blaze the Trail** campaign in the lead up to the NSW Election in March 2023. The CPActive Champions told all the major parties that the time is now to improve our schooling and employment systems in NSW to make these systems more inclusive for young people with CP and all other students with disabilities. We know that students with disability do not receive adequate support to prepare, think about and plan for pathways after school, and they report that when support is received, it is often limited and poor.

The CPActive Blaze the Trail campaign called for all candidates and representatives at the next election to commit to an **Inclusive School to Work Pathways Strategy for NSW**. It is intended that this strategy is to:

- Be designed by students with disability in partnership with educators, employers, and the community.

- Be consistent with Human Rights Obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and;
- Include measurable targets that would be reported annually.

The Inclusive School to Work Pathways Strategy for NSW developed by the CPActive Champions is to make the pathways from school to work better through three key **asks**:

1. Clear, consistent, and enforceable guidelines for support around assessments at school and university for students living with disability.
2. Pathways for people living with disability to enter the teaching workforce.
3. A state-wide initiative supporting the development of pathways for students living with disability into large business, government departments and community organisations.

The incoming Labor Government accepted and celebrated these three commitments in March 2023, and is currently working with the CPActive Champions to develop these strategies into an implementation plan.

1. Clear, consistent, and enforceable guidelines for support around assessments at school and university for students living with disability

While an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is mandated under the [Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#) and the [Disability Standards for Education](#) exists to provide students with disability reasonable adjustments, in practice, there is no standard experience amongst the CPActive community to the implementation of those reasonable adjustments. There are no standard experiences between universities or in different school settings, or even within the same setting but with different standardised assessments such as between school based and the New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA). Having to re-litigate their reasonable adjustments each time an assessment, exam or change of school occurred is an unnecessarily onerous process for these young people to go through, when their disability remains unchanged. It would make more sense for their IEP to be accepted by all the different institutions to make assessments equitable for children and young people with disabilities in NSW.

“You get to year 12 and with the stress of the HSC already placed upon you, you go through vigorous standardised assessments to once again prove the level of impact your disability has on your education and these assessments are highlighting that you are not at the same level physically as your peers.”

- **Sophie**, CPActive Champion

CPActive calls for responsive policies around assessments will involve a centralised platform and greater transparency on the processes that assessment bodies go through to assess a young person's needs during this time.

Encouraging full access to all areas of the curriculum is significant in encouraging a sense of belonging for students with CP and similar disabilities. Recognising the differing rates of development amongst students with CP and valuing students' strengths and interests to inform educational goals is essential in an inclusive school.

"I've studied two Bachelor degrees at two universities and I was astounded that all the reasonable adjustments within my EIP could not just be transferred from one institution to another. For example, at the first university I studied at I was given the provision of an extra hour per hour for written tests taking into account such things as my slow typing skills. However, when I enrolled in the second degree and met with disability services, they were not even slightly interested in sighting my current EIP meaning that I had to advocate and fight for additional 30 minutes per hour for exams after they wanted to give me only 15 minutes"

- **Nicole**, CPActive Champion

2. Pathways for people living with disability to enter the teaching workforce

Teaching is an essential and highly regarded profession in Australia, and the first mainstream structure that young people with disabilities are exposed to. The difference that the profession has on these young minds has been documented multiple times and cannot be underestimated. For instance, [Kurt Fearnley](#) (Paralympian and Chair of the National Disability Insurance Agency) reflected on leadership shown to him early in life by the teaching staff at his local school fighting to include him rather than send him to board at a segregated school a long way from his home and community.

Having more teachers with a disability not only creates aspirations for students with disability, but it also assists changing mindsets of able-bodied students and teachers towards the opportunities people with disabilities have. It also means the accessibility and inclusion practices of the schools is better equipped to include students with disabilities, in particular, physical access requirements for those with mobility aids.

We often hear "we cannot be what we cannot see" and we need a clearer pathway for young people to enter the teaching profession to change:

“Representation matters. I didn’t have it when I was at school, and I know the impact it would’ve had on me had that representation existed. I knew of very few people with disabilities with professional careers when I was growing up. And I don’t recall having met anyone in any kind of leadership or high-profile role until I was much older. Had I met those people earlier, I would have felt less alone, I would have felt I had someone who understood me and more than anything, I would have seen that a professional career WAS possible for me. That I could aim high. It would have given me the confidence to be comfortable with being myself.”

- **Declan**, CPActive Champion

The rate of teachers with disabilities mirrors that of the general population –NESA barriers need to be removed for people with disabilities to enter the teaching profession. This will include making university courses more accessible, growing awareness, and schools making reasonable adjustments for teachers with disabilities as other workplaces do.

NESA has prioritised half of teachers' professional development training to be in four priority areas including disability, a significant improvement, and teaching students are also required now to complete core units on inclusive education and students with disability.

3. Pathways for students living with disability into large business, government departments and community organisations

Young people with disabilities face many barriers to entering the workforce, with internships, mentorships, and graduate programs being invaluable entry pathways. They also provide opportunities for employers to introduce more diversity into their workforce and bring awareness around disability to employees. These programs need to be identified, funded, ongoing and include structures in large businesses, government departments and community organisations:

“Pathways to professional careers for people with disability come with many hurdles. There are low expectations of us from teachers, an educational curriculum that often excludes people with complex disabilities, and a systemic mindset that people with disability, like myself, are only worthy of low paying jobs. Only 48% of working age people with disability in Australia are currently in paid work. This is something we all can agree needs to change. Creating inclusive and flexible pathways for emerging teachers with disability will not only boost the disability employment rate but also address the national shortage of teachers.”

- **Aaryan**, CPActive Champion

Networks are very powerful for people to get a foot in the door, and this is no different for young people with disabilities. CPActive will continue its networking opportunities, but we need structured pathways in place to support the professional development of young people with disabilities. Targets with diversity and inclusion plans will also contribute to growing this area. The public service currently has around 2.5% of its workforce identifying as having a disability, this is woefully inadequate – and well below the [Premier Priority target of 5.6% by 2025](#).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Systemic barriers to inclusive education continue to exist for students with disabilities, as outlined in the [Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability](#) (DRC). This is not a small number – the Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing’s 2022 paper, [“People with disability in Australia”](#), reported that there are approximately 380,000 children aged 5–18 with disability in primary or secondary school (10% of all students). There are a further 187,000 people (aged 15–64) studying for a non-school qualification.

For all students across NSW, CPActive Champions ask that their three policy asks to be implemented by the NSW Government:

1. Clear, consistent, and enforceable guidelines for support around assessments at school and university for students living with disability.
2. Pathways for people living with disability to enter the teaching workforce.
3. A state-wide initiative supporting the development of pathways for students living with disability into large business, government departments and community organisations.

The CPActive Champions **recommend:**

- Flexible curriculum and assessment approaches that are responsive to the needs of young people with disabilities in all educational settings (in line with Australian Coalition of Inclusive Education’s 10-year [roadmap](#) for achieving inclusive education in Australia (2021).
- Increase efforts and commitment to reduce the lack of awareness about disability across the communities that would pave a practical path to solve pressing issues that young people with disabilities face especially in navigating the education system and job market.
- Establish a taskforce to implement the second and third asks with CPActive Champion representation and trial innovative solutions in these areas.

Adding these recommendations will contribute to building the foundational supports as outlined under the NDIS Review that the NSW Government is currently considering.

We thank the committee for providing us the opportunity to share these policy asks from CProActive. CProActive Champions welcome the opportunity to speak to the Committee and share their thoughts in person.

Regards,

Rob White
CEO,
Cerebral Palsy Alliance

**Steering Committee of CProActive
Champions**
Cerebral Palsy Alliance

29th February 2024

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