

Submission
No 79

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 8 April 2024

Partially
Confidential

To the member of the committee.

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

My name is _____ and I have 3 sons with Autism that have been recently or are in public educational setting in NSW. I have only just found out about this inquiry and I believe you all need to hear my story.

Two of my sons mainstreamed with some assistance and while there have been multiple unacceptable instances where concerns were pushed aside and schools involved have swept concerns under the rug, however my son that is in a SSP (school for specific purpose) has had incidents where the understaffing has led to neglect resulting in injury & it has recently been brought to my attention my son is not an isolated case. I haven been able to identify in the at least 10% of the schools cohort that have has critical incidents & multiple staff members that have been injured due to under funding.

Before I get into details of my concerns I just want you to know it has not always been the case, When My son was first granted a spot at _____ special school I was so grateful and relieved as I had no doubt they would keep him safe. In the 12 years he has attended the school I have been an active P&C member, Held many executive positions on the P&C over the years and sat on many panels for hiring the staff as the parent representative. The school has had my full support over the years.

The changes stated becoming apparent during covid lock down. Good experienced staff were lost. Our children regressed in critical skills that had been built up over the years and parents were locked out. When students started returning to school and parents were still locked out I started noticing and hearing stories of children coming home with unexplained injuries like drag marks & abrasions up backs, pinch marks resulting in bruising , bite marks etc. Parents were usually told the school was unaware of how it happened.

In the last twelve month there ave been so many injuries on students and staff it can no longer go unaddressed.

Please bear with me while I go through my sons case. For two years I reported bullying where my son was scratched, punched, spat on choked etc that was never dealt with. My son(_____ was repeatedly put in the same area as a child that was bullying him resulting in sever anxiety and trauma.

_____ is non verbal and uses a iPad for communication. Over the years the school has refused to use it , claim they are unable to due to time or understanding of multiple devices or really uses it. I have had _____ speech therapy attend over the years to train multiple staff on his device as this is his voice. When A Childs voice is taken away the only form of communication they are left with as behaviour, unfortunately behaviour is often then labeled as attention seeking and ignored, until reaches a level where there is risk of injury or actual injury.

_____ main issues began in 2023 term 1. Where _____ was put in the class of a beginning teacher who was over whelmed with a larger than normal class due to the school not having enough staff. The entire term _____ self isolated in a small room about 2-3 meters. While in there he was not interacted with, not given any work or his communication device. I repeatedly asked for _____ to be moved from the class to be told it was not possible due to staffing. I shared my concerns about him not engaging _____ multiple times with the principal of

the time ([redacted] and deputy principal ([redacted]) I explained that Leaving [redacted] at school was akin to dropping a dog off at a pound to sit in a cage for 6 hours a day. My concerns were not taken seriously and I was told there was nothing they could do due to staffing. I asked for the teacher to be given more support as he is clearly overwhelmed and [redacted] deserved an education. Toward the end of the term [redacted] has a few meltdowns resulting in property damage , mainly broken windows) It turned out to be he was in pain from a short term medical condition and it was treated and he recovered.

Term two The school obtained enough staff to open another classroom and [redacted] changed classes. I was told this teacher was very academic and it was implied that she would make up on the lack of education from the previous term. [redacted] continued to isolate in the back room of the new class as this was now routine, accepted behaviour and his was of making himself feel safe. While I don't know exactly what happened behind closed doors [redacted] suddenly started having Meltdowns resulting in property damage, mainly windows. Became afraid of the word sit and I was being called multiple times a week to come calm [redacted] down or take him home. The SLSO assigned to [redacted] class seemed to be the only person that [redacted] felt safe with and he appeared to trauma bond to her. This put a great deal of pressure and stress the SLSO and I continually advocated for her wellbeing in addition to [redacted] . During week 7 term two I was called to collect [redacted] due to meltdown where My husband I I had a conversation with the principal [redacted] where I explained the current behaviour was only occurring at school, not home or in the community At this time I requested a new behaviour plan be done as the current one was no longer effective for the current situation (the behaviour. Plan was not updated until 2014 after [redacted] was injured and needed to attend the emergency department). Every day I try to trouble shoot with the staff the cause but I can only do so much . I requested to see the data /ABC sheets taken to see if I could identify a pattern since this had been happening for more than 7 weeks on a daily basis. I was then told they had not been taking data and the also had not been trained on taking data.This pattern continued for the rest of term 2 and all of term 3. By the end of term 3 The school requested I bring in a behaviour specialist despite the department having access to these specialists, I do not believe the learning and wellbeing team was consulted during 2023.

At the start of term 4 2023 the problem consisted of [redacted] being put in the same area as his bully, having meltdowns as it was his only form of communication many times. It was considered a successful day of 3 or less windows were smashed. I still had not seen any paperwork on the behaviours, any department specialists. I spent thousands in NDIS funding brining in behavioural specialist, Occupational therapist and speech therapist , I engaged the school psychologist and community liaison officer. Stake holder meetings were held and recommendations were made only to be ignored by the school. One of the recommendations was that [redacted] to stay with the teacher he had for term 4 as he has trust in her and staff that would be working with [redacted] in 2024 work to build a relationship with him before the year ends. At the end of term 4 I learned that [redacted] was assigned to a different teacher, One I previously witnessed lie to a parent about the standard of care a child received in her care and when I reported this to the principal it went unaddressed - I was told everyone has different teaching styles. I reminded the principal of the recommended outcomes of the stake holder meetings and [redacted] was reallocated to the teacher he was had in term 4 2023. The school also requested I start to medicate my son even though the behaviour is location specific. - this is a chemical restrictive practise requested for a behaviour they created.

2024 term 1 [redacted] had a new principal start. Day 1 I emailed [redacted] :he new principal asking for a meeting after yet another meltdown from [redacted] so I could bring him up to speed on the situation and get his input.

Day 3 term 1 2024 I receive a call from the school [redacted] has been injured and to get to the school asap. On arrival I was escorted to the playground where [redacted] was receiving aid as he had cut his leg trying to escape the school. This is where I learnt that the student that had been bullying [redacted] for he previous 3 years was allocated to the same class as [redacted] now lived in a constant state of flight or flight and on this day he busted his shoulder trying to open the class door, smashed the glass panel on the door climber through the broken glass, made his way to he next door tried kicking it open only to cut himself, then heed to the next set of doors and tried to kick them open. This was evident by the blood splatters up all the glass when I arrived. I took [redacted] to emergency room for medical attention.

The principal ([redacted]) and myself had a meeting before [redacted] returned to school this is where he comforted there was very little data on [redacted] despite the staff verbally knowing what was going on. By the end of week two term 1 The school had asked me to do reduced hours with [redacted] as they fear him being critically injured and can not keep him safe. I agreed as I fear for my sons safety but this has been done with out any formal paperwork. Since then the Deputy ([redacted]) has been working tirelessly with [redacted] to make him feel safe at school but we were attending for roughly an hour a day. Starting with hydrotherapy to help regulate [redacted] During this term I have been unable to work or leave the school grounds while [redacted] is there due to risk of injury. The department has a responsibility to keep children safe, they are failing and putting it back in to families. The departments response not try to force my son to transition to an adult program, the transition officer even contacted NDIS telling them I need a review . She was unauthorised to do so and caused more problems for me to deal with. It is also not appropriate for a child to be in an adult program as they are entitled to an education and the expectations is they are at school. There are no day programs form under 18's for this reason.

On Friday 5/4/24 I took [redacted] to the school I was there at 9:01 and could not gain access through the pedestrian gates as they had been padlocked already , I had to gain access via a secondary gate on the side of the school that the staff access for smoke breaks. I had not been in the school for 10 minutes when deputy principal

([redacted]) can to tell me [redacted] was distressed and refusing to swim, due to the P&C meeting I was trying to set up (as I as president was responsible for) would I go and get him in the pool for the staff. I agreed to assist as always. I was just grabbing my keys & finishing an instruction to other parents when [redacted] hears and repeats " [redacted] is on the driveway" Since when I arrived that morning the pedestrian gate was already padlocked I had no reason to believe that the other gates would not be locked. We quickly made our way to the area where [redacted] was through a locked door and locked gate to see [redacted] tanding on the driveway with the gates wide open. [redacted] ([redacted] deputy principal) was telling [redacted] "Mums coming, come to mum" she did not chase him as she heard her chasing him would make him run. . As I rounded the corner before [redacted] saw me he ran out of the open gates to the road. There was what I know as an 8 tonne open bed truck approaching. I called to [redacted] and told him "DANGER". Thankfully [redacted] stopped on the footpath as the truck went by. I honestly believe had I not been there my son would have been killed at school this morning. I am now too afraid to send my son to school because they can not keep him safe. Funding cuts are

meaning that incidents similar to this are happening every day. Does a child have to die before the school's get the support they need?

This is just my sons story. Just at this school I know of another child getting to the road unattended this term.

A child getting stuck up a tree and needing be cut out by emergency services and taken to hospital for suspected crush injuries. Children and sibling of children being attacked at school drop off by other students ,

I have also been made aware of a teacher abusing students in 2023 (police were involved and that staff member no longer works at the school) and while this is truly every parents worst nightmare a verbal student made allegations perviously about this staff member and the school accused the child of making up stories.

A staff member lying about poor treatment (neglect) of a student to parents. It was reported to principal at the time and ignored.

The school caused repeated injury to a student during changing then falsely reported the family for sexual abuse , based on the injuries sustained at the school.

While I thank you for taking the time to read my story I am but one mother, this is the story of just one school. How many other have similar stories? My son had gone from a child who loved school and learning to being highly traumatised and afraid. The only education he has had in the past 6 months is work sheets that we printt at home and his 8 year old sister plays schools with him. Why is my child not entitled to an education? How can the department cut funding to a level where staff are so overwhelmed that children are not only being put at risk injury but are having lives put in danger. School is not meant to be a traumatic place.

While I acknowledge my story makes the staff look bad a majority of the staff are highly passionate and doing their best. And really are trying. I see many turning up day after day injured, abused covered in bruises. They are pushed to braking point. The system has become so broken it can not be sustained. And they can no speak out as they fear loosing their jobs. They need help, they deserve help. It is the only way to make sure our children who are the most vulnerable members of society are safe.

Please take my story into consideration with your inquiry there are hundreds more just like mine. Sometimes families are too afraid t speak out in fear their child will receive worse treatment.