

I am a parent of a 10 year old boy in Year 5 diagnosed with ADHD (Yr 3), anxiety (Yr 2) and dyslexia (Yr 4) who has been enrolled at the same primary school since the beginning of his schooling who has presented with these developmental difficulties since birth with formal assistance provided by the public Child Development Centre since the age of 3.

- a. current levels of access and attainment for students with disability in the school system, and the impact on students and families associated with inadequate levels of support;

In my experience the school needs to believe a disability exists for assistance to be considered. I have spent group meetings with the school, my child's OT, psychologist and psychiatrist where the specialists have detailed their view of my child's difficulties and what accommodations could be put in place to assist. The response by the school is simply that they don't see those behaviors at school so see no need for assistance. They can only provide assistance in extreme situations where the child or other student's safety is put at risk by explosive behaviours.

My child would internalise his anxiety and difficulties during the school day. In the younger years he would explode on exiting the classroom, throwing his bag at me, kicking and screaming on the ground blocking the classroom exit. This would continue at home with self harm by biting himself and banging his head against the wall, kicking doors, taking chunks out of walls and the like. He would exhaust himself, promptly fall asleep and wake up an hour later a normal but exhausted child. As he grew older the tantrums tended to be contained in the school grounds and the explosion would happen upon getting home.

As he has been under assessment by the Child Development Centre since a young age many specialist reports were provided to the school. It is my experience that the class teacher reads the report, adopts whatever they can into their teaching strategies and the report is filed into the never-never for the process to start again with the next year's class teacher. I was not aware at any stage of any additional support for my child being provided to the class teacher.

Eventually with multiple formal diagnosis in hand, my husband and father both diagnosed with cancer and an extremely stressful environment at home with my son's continual meltdowns I again sought assistance from the school to receive the same responses. With no other options I read the legislation with what the school should be providing and burst into tears. Not once had the school done anything they were required by law to do and all meetings, discussions and the like were at my insistence not theirs. I lodged formal complaints regarding non-compliance with the law to the school. The response from the school was that they did not consider my child to have a disability or be in need of any accommodations. Given his many diagnosis by qualified specialist providers thought otherwise apparently meant nothing to the school.

I insisted a schools plus funding application be made. My son qualified from a medical perspective but as the school did not consider him to have any difficulties he did not meet the school checklist criteria. I then escalated my complaints through to regional office with full intention to continual the escalation process until my child was appropriately supported. Fortunately the regional office listened to what I had to say and asked what assistance it was that I wanted for my child as they didn't believe a class aide was necessary. I had previously identified the areas that I considered needing support were in relation to transitions and literacy. The school believed there were no literacy issues but his spelling could do with improvement. This did not feel right to me given my son had failed to pick up literacy skills, despite extensive work at home and private speech therapy, that my other son two years younger had learnt without trying. I arranged privately at a financial cost of around \$500 for my sons literacy to be assessed by an independent assessor with the end result being a diagnosis of dyslexia.

With the dyslexia diagnosis and the support of regional office the school provided significant assistance in the transition from year 4 to year 5 and provides one 30 min session a week on literacy support. While I would not consider this to be very much support the difference it has made to my son has been significant.

He is mainly happy and willing to go to school whereas last year I would have to drag him into the deputy's office kicking and screaming as he was too anxious to enter the classroom. We still have trouble with anxiety on special dress days and the like where anything out of the normal routine takes place but nowhere near the extent it was. I am happy that my son now appears to be making some progress on the literacy side and is slowly learning the phonics that he appears to have completely missed during his earlier years when his anxiety coupled with his adhd and dyslexia made him unable to concentrate enough in the classroom to learn the foundations which he appears to have missed completely.

So while I am now comfortable with the support provided to my son the extent that I had to go to receive it was completely unacceptable. This was at a time when I was spending most days in the hospital at either my husband or fathers side as they obtained chemotherapy, radiation and other associated cancer treatment while trying to hold down a part time job to financial sustain my family. Both my husband and father have since died and I do not believe it fair I needed to spend the last 6 to 12 months of their lives fighting with a school for my son to receive the education he is legally entitled to receive.

- b. the social, economic and personal benefits of improving outcomes for students with disability at school and in further education and employment;

My sons IQ testing shows him to have high intelligence. Anxiety and ADHD are able to be well managed with adequate support and sound literacy is able to be achieved by people with dyslexia if they are taught in a manner conducive to their learning needs. With this support there is no reason why my son should not be able to go on to fully participate in society and achieve employment in whatever area he desires. Unfortunately to graduate from high school you are required to have minimal literacy levels. Support is not provided to achieve these literacy levels until you have failed the designated NAPLAN and OLNA testing many times. This support comes much too late and should be redirected when indicated as necessary from the initial Year 3 Naplan testing not at the end of your schooling.

- f. the progress of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability and the findings, recommendations and outcomes from this process, and how this data will, or should, be used to develop a needs-based funding system for students with disability;

I do not believe this system of data collection to be of assistance when developing a needs-based funding system as students such as my child do not make it onto the list as the school does not believe a disability to exist.

- h. what should be done to better support students with disability in our schools;

Reports from specialists detailing recommendations should be reviewed by the school and responded to in writing detailing how the recommendation will be adopted by the school and where it is not to be adopted a statement as to the reason why. This should then be reviewed by an administrator with experience in the disabilities acts and standards for education to ensure that any non-adopted recommendations are supported within the law.

Teachers and administrators should receive better training on disabilities and managing children with disabilities. I continue to be astounded by the number of teachers I meet who have since gone on to have children with disabilities who say they had absolutely no idea just how hard the life of a disabled child is and no idea of the sort of modifications they could have been putting in place to support the children they taught.

- i. the early education of children with disability;

It generally takes a number of years for children to be diagnosed with a disability. While behaviours may be outside the norm it is only with growing age that the extent of those behaviours can be identified certainly enough to diagnose. For example my son who was eventually diagnosed with ADHD and anxiety was initially assessed as having severe sensory difficulties. The checklist approach to funding for younger children means many children miss out on adequate support in their younger years.