

Community Affairs, Committee (SEN)

Role of developmental & educational psychologists in schools

Dear Members of Senate Enquiry into the Funding of Mental Health,

I am writing on behalf of my colleagues working in schools, having formerly worked in schools myself. Educational and developmental psychologists are an invaluable yet undervalued resource. They are highly trained professionals in a profession with high standards. Like all psychologists, they maintain ongoing professional development to ensure they remain at the cutting-edge of developments in their field.

Educational and developmental psychologists excel at working with children and adolescents in schools who are experiencing any of a diverse number of mental health problems. Some students can be seriously emotionally disturbed and it is essential that they receive help from a qualified professional.

Educational and developmental psychologists are a pre-existing, cost-effective resource. They are embedded within their school communities and have extensive networks throughout the education and healthcare sectors. They have the knowledge and skills to work with all stakeholders, not only students but parents, siblings, teachers and other healthcare professionals as well.

With so much being invested into training psychologists with world-class standing here in Australia, it is imperative, I believe, that funding is increased so that educational and developmental psychologists can not only maintain current services but also expand their offerings. For instance, they could undertake triage, diagnosis and case management in conjunction with local GPs. As well, some existing services need additional funding, autism and conduct disorder being cases-in-point.

Some people think that *any* caring adult can provide support to troubled children and adolescents. You just need to listen and be there for them, right? Actually, nothing could be more wrong. Much, much more is required and educational and developmental psychologists are *the* most qualified to deliver. We have to question what message we will be giving our young people, our very future, if we do not fund and provide the fullest range of specialist psychological services in schools.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Regards,  
Dr Helen Harrison  
Developmental & Educational Psychologist