

ANALYSIS OF AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION ACT 2012 from an neurological disability (Autism Spectrum Disorder) perspective SUBMISSION 8/2/2013

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N.B: all black text is direct copy from the Australian Education Bill 2012;

All blue text is personal perspective and comment:

All pink text is direct copy from Victorian auditor-general report august 2012 "Programs for Students with Special Learning Needs"

## Australian Education Bill 2012

"...SUMMARY: The bill: establishes three goals for Australian schooling, namely: for Australian schooling to provide an excellent education for **all students**; for Australian schooling to be highly equitable;

**ALL students?? How ALL students??**

Need to assess barriers to effective learning and teaching for those with ASD.

Need to research and identify effective practice for learners with neurological disability,

Need to recognize that Semantic Language Disorder is a legitimate communication disorder which requires adequate integration aid, classroom support and curricula modification

Need for utilization of up-to-date IT for students with communication disorders to enhance learning in the classroom and need to support this enhanced learning in home through provision of IT in the home e.g. iPad.

Need for more frequently written and reevaluated IEPs (6 - 8 weekly) written in detail collaboratively by classroom teacher, integration aid, speech therapist, parent, special education coordinator and external consultants if applicable to focus on achievable goals, (this system is very effective in New Zealand)

Need for focus on life skills and post school options and opportunities for students at special and specialist schools with focus on secondary subject choices which are prerequisites for post secondary options based on individual interests and passions e.g. Science for a post-secondary interest in animal-related jobs,

Need for acknowledgement of splintered skills in many ASD individuals. Skills and talents of ASD individuals need to be enhanced in the school environment instead of a generalized curriculum which is geared in special and specialist schools to the oft-inaccurately measured intellectual disability score of ASD students who have communication disorder.

Need for school staff to have adequate professional development related to neurological disabilities such as ASD. This could dispel the myth that ASD students are “too disabled” to achieve much academically.

Considering ASD rates in Australia average 1:100 there is a need for teacher training courses to have compulsory

## neurological disability training

Data gathering on educational outcomes should not be just generalist as this generalist data does not identify information relevant to neurological and/or communication disabilities although the education system involves constant receptive, expressive and adaptive language and communication .90% of language is non-verbal and a deficit in understanding such negatively impacts learning outcomes.

Need to address inappropriate use of funding (money put into general school fund in some schools and not disability - student targeted, therefore no accountability).

Need to run specific programs with the disability funding for the enhancement of the learnings of students with disability

Need to address lack of consultation with disability organisations at the forefront of key disabilities such as ASD in designing effective education policies as educational issues and disability nuances are dealt with by organisations like AV continually. Just consulting educationalists as the Education Act mentions is not gaining the full picture to determine deficits in the current system for ASD individuals.

Need to adequately support in the classroom those students who do not meet the current State Government funded eligibility criteria and will not do so under the proposed NDIS scheme as education is excluded from such scheme as State government responsibility.

Currently the Australian Education Act 2012 does not have a financial loading determined for educating students with

disability as the Gonski Education Review fails to determine a loading in their recommendation to Government There is a need for the Government to be expedient in determining such loading

**“...Loading for disability “The Panel has included a loading for students with disability in the resource standard, but it is not possible to provide an indicative estimate □ of loadings at this time.” (p167)**

□ For each level of adjustment, an agreed amount for the loading must be calculated. Work is underway to develop average costs of meeting the needs of students within each adjustment level in the agreed definition.

□

□ After three failed attempts by previous governments, the Australian Government has recently achieved agreement from the States and Territories to a nationally consistent definition of disability.

This definition must now be used in a national data collection, with schools reporting how many students with distinct categories of disability they serve, and the level of adjustment that needs to be made for each of those students. Guidance for schools in how to complete the reporting template is currently being developed and a trial data collection will occur this year....”(Gonski Report on Education in Australia and recommendations for change)

Need to carefully consider the comments and adopt the following recommendations in the Victorian Auditor-General Report August 2012 “ Program for Students with Special Learning Needs”:

Although the exact number of students with special learning needs in Victoria is not known, having systems in place to identify and support these students in a timely and equitable manner is critical to maximizing their educational and life outcomes.

Long-term individual measures of performance are required.

DEECD has developed policies and guidance to help schools support students with special learning needs. It also provides funding to support students with the highest levels of need through the PSD. However, it does not monitor how schools use the funds nor does it adequately oversee the educational outcomes of students with special learning needs. Schools are not implementing DEECD’s policies consistently or effectively. As a result, the quality and type of support provided to students with special

learning needs is not equitable.

Since 2006, DEECD has distributed more than \$2.6 billion to schools through the PSD. However, DEECD does not have the information it needs to determine whether PSD funding is being used efficiently and effectively

DEECD does not know how many students in Victoria have unfunded special learning needs. It cannot identify these students, nor can it determine if they are being adequately supported by schools.

Students with similar needs are receiving very different levels and types of support across different schools. DEECD's new Abilities Based Learning and Education Support program will help to bring more uniformity to the approaches of schools by enabling teachers to identify students' needs and develop effective learning programs that address these needs. Abilities Based Learning and Education Support has been used with over 6 500 students to date, but it is unclear how DEECD will assess the program and how wide reaching its impact will be.

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In 2011, 92 per cent of applications for PSD funding were

successful. However, success rates vary considerably between categories of disabilities suggesting that DEECD could do more to clarify and/or simplify the eligibility criteria around some of the more complex conditions such as severe language disorders and autism spectrum disorders.

While the intent and purpose of having SSGs is sound, not all audited schools used them in a manner that maximised their value. Similarly, few of the ILPs reviewed clearly detailed student needs or their educational goals and strategies. DEECD does not monitor the practices of SSGs or the quality of ILPs, even though these practices are potentially compromising the quality of support provided to PSD students.

Resource intensive application process and limited availability of SSSOs are discouraging schools from applying on behalf of borderline students.

DEECD does not monitor the support provided to students who have been refused PSD funding, nor does it monitor their long-term educational outcomes. It also does not know how many students with special learning needs are being supported in schools or how effective the support is. Support for students that are not eligible for additional funding

There is only a limited uptake in the small but growing number of teacher training opportunities to support students with special learning needs. DEECD has limited records of who or how many staff have undertaken training. Neither aides nor education support workers receive specific training to support students with special learning needs.

As a consequence, the quality of support can vary considerably from school to school.

DEECD does not identify and monitor the achievement of educational and broader outcomes of students with special learning needs and therefore does not know how effectively its policy and resource commitment is working. DEECD has not adequately addressed VAGO's 2007 audit report *Program for Students with Disabilities* which recommended that it establish performance indicators to monitor and evaluate the program's outcomes.

Complaints information should be able to be used to identify areas of concern. However, DEECD's complaints system is inadequate for this purpose.

Recommendations:

Accountability and oversight

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development should:

Develop processes to monitor and report on the learning and progress of students with special learning needs, including both funded and non-funded students

Monitor the effectiveness and impact of programs to support students with special learning needs including which schools are using them

Provide clearer guidance and training for teachers on how to get the most from Student Support Groups and how to develop and implement meaningful and effective Individual Learning Plans.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development should:

Seek feedback from schools about the clarity and usefulness of critical policy and guidance material and act to address identified deficiencies. In particular it should focus on:

- restraint and seclusion practices
- parents paying for external support delivered in school
- the circumstances in which full time access to school

can be restricted

set and implement measurable performance indicators for  
the Program for Students with Disabilities