



MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

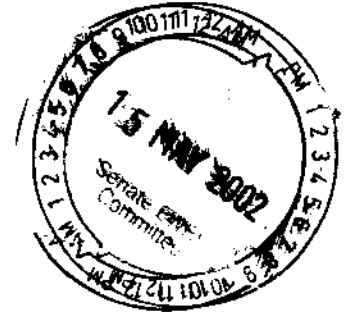
Covering letter to sub 11

Education Centre
31 Flinders Street
Adelaide 5000
South Australia
GPO Box 778
Adelaide SA 5001

Hon Trish White BE BA MP

Tel (08) 8226 1205
Fax (08) 8226 1556

MC 02/0666



Mr John Carter
The Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and
Education References Committee
Suite S1.61, Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Carter

I am writing in relation to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities.

Please find attached a submission from the South Australian Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities to the Senate inquiry.

The Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities is an advisory committee, which reports to the South Australian Minister for Education and Children's Services. As you may be aware, I have only been Minister for Education and Children's Services for a couple of months, following a change of Government in South Australia in March this year. Therefore, although I am endorsing this submission to be forwarded to the inquiry, it should be noted that the views of the advisory committee may not be the views of this Government.

An extract from the advisory committee's website is attached for your information, which lists the current members of the committee.

Without prejudice, I enclose the submission of the Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities to the inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Trish White
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

15/02

Encl.

Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities

Membership

Ms Diana Hill, Chairperson to the Ministerial Advisory Committee, is an Educational Consultant and Psychologist. She has worked extensively in schools as a teacher, psychologist and administrator.

Members of the Committee are appointed by the South Australian Minister for Education and Children's Services. They are chosen for their knowledge and experience in relation to children and students with disabilities.

- Ms Diana Hill
Chairperson
- Mr Richard Dalefield
Deputy Chairperson
- Ms Mary Bambacas
Parent
- Ms Elizabeth Barber
Australian Association of Special Education Inc (SA)
- Ms Francine Bickford
Catholic Education SA
- Ms Von Braybon
Non-government Special Education Committee
- Ms Libby Burns
Association of Independent Schools of South Australia
- Ms Helen Edwards
Department of Education, Training & Employment (VET sector)
- Dr Jerry Ford
Flinders University of South Australia, (Tertiary Education sector)
- Ms Stephanie Grant
Association of Non-Government Education Employees
- Mr Adrian Murray
Department of Education, Training and Employment (Schooling sector)
- Ms Eda Payne
Minister's Nominee
- Ms Kerry Presser
Department of Education, Training & Employment (Children's Services)
- Ms Tricia Spargo
Student
- Ms Ruth Summers
Disability Services Office, Department of Human Services
- Mr Nick Swan
Parent
- Ms Leah York
Australian Education Union (SA)



MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE:
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES SA



12th Floor, SGIC Building
211 Victoria Square
ADELAIDE SA 5000

GPO Box 2370
ADELAIDE SA 5001

Tel (08) 8226 3632
Fax (08) 8231 8961

Email: minaadv@saugov.sa.gov.au
Website: mocswd.sa.gov.au



sub.
11

19 April 2002

Mr John Carter
The Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and
Education References Committee
Suite S1.61, Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Carter

***Re: Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee—
Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities***

The principal roles of the Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities are to provide advice to the South Australian Minister for Education and Children's Services on the:

- Education of children and students with disabilities, from birth to twenty-one years of age, attending early intervention programs and government, independent or Catholic preschools and schools.
- Allocation of Commonwealth and State Special Education grants to organisations involved in providing support for these children and students in early intervention programs, preschools and schools.

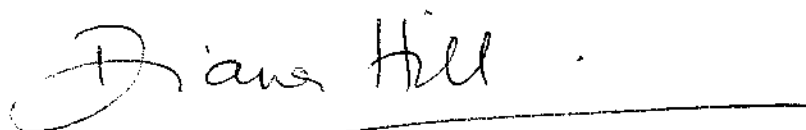
Please find attached the Committee's submission to the Senate Inquiry that includes comments on: Commonwealth/State Special Education funding; the increasing number of students with disabilities requiring support; the need for increased training and support for classroom teachers; and specific findings from several of the Committee's recent research projects.

Research undertaken by the Committee includes both national and state projects. A number of these projects may inform the Senate Inquiry and copies of the following reports are enclosed:

- *Technology for Learning: Students with Disabilities (2000)*
- *Early Learning—Linking Education, Health and Disability through Assessment, Access and Support Services (1999)*
- *Secondary Schooling for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (2000)*
- *Schooling Options for Students with Disabilities in South Australia—A Parent Survey (2001)*
- *Social Skills Development for Students with Disabilities (2001)*
- *Support for Children and Students with Disabilities—Information for Preschool Directors and School Principals (2002).*

These reports may be downloaded in PDF format from the Committee's Website at www.macs wd.sa.gov.au. Further information on the Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities is also available at this site. For future reference, however, please do not hesitate to contact Ms Margaret McColl, Executive Officer on (08) 8226 3632.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Diana Hill". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a solid horizontal line that serves as a separator between the signature and the typed name below.

Diana Hill
CHAIRPERSON
MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE: STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Attch

Sub 11

AUSTRALIAN SENATE
EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION
REFERENCES COMMITTEE



INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

**SUBMISSION FROM THE
MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE:
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES—
SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

CONTENTS

Role of the Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities	1
Disability—Definition	1
Adequacy of Commonwealth/State Funding for Students with Disabilities	2
Major Findings from the Committee's Research Projects	3
Disability-related Support for Classroom Teachers	3
Computer-based Technology for Students with Disabilities	3
Early Intervention Services for Students with Disabilities	4
Secondary Schooling for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders	4
Schooling Options for Students with Disabilities	5
Social Skills Development for Students with Disabilities	6
Support Services for Children and Students with Disabilities	6
Conclusion	6
Schedule 1: South Australian Organisations—Commonwealth/State Special Education Recurrent Grants in 2001	7
Schedule 2: South Australian Non-Government Organisations—Students Receiving Services versus Total Eligible Students in 2001	8



Role of the Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities

The Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities was established in 1989 to provide policy advice to the South Australian Minister for Education and Children's Services on the education of children and students with disabilities from birth to twenty-one years of age. These children and students may be attending early intervention programs and government, independent or Catholic preschools and schools in this State.

The Committee's primary role is to provide policy advice in the form of regular briefings as requested by the Minister. In addition, a number of policy-related projects are undertaken each year to provide a more comprehensive analysis of current issues that are initiated or approved by the Minister. The results of these projects are forwarded to the Minister with relevant policy recommendations. With the Minister's approval, project reports are then published on the Committee's Website.

The other major role of the Committee is to provide advice to the Minister on the allocation of Commonwealth/State Special Education Recurrent Grants and Commonwealth Capital Grants to non-government organisations involved in the education of children and students with disabilities, eg the Autism Association, Crippled Children's Association, Down Syndrome Society. Eligible non-government organisations may apply for both Capital and Recurrent Grants under the Commonwealth *Special Education – Non-Government Centre Support* programme (see *Commonwealth Programmes for Schools Quadrennial Administrative Guidelines 2001 to 2004*, Part 2.3, pp 77-79).

Disability—Definition

The Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities operates within the Commonwealth's definition of disability that is included in the guidelines for allocating Special Education Grants. The *Commonwealth Programmes for Schools Quadrennial Administrative Guidelines 2001 to 2004*, states:

A child with a disability means a child who has been assessed by a person with relevant qualifications as having an intellectual, sensory, physical, social or emotional impairment or more than one of those impairments to a degree that:

- if the child is of school age, satisfies the criteria for enrolment in special education programs or services provided by the government of the State in which the child resides
- if the child is below school age, would satisfy those criteria upon reaching that age.

Children whose only impairments are specific learning difficulties or for whom remedial education or remedial support is appropriate, are not eligible. (p 77)

Although for funding purposes the Ministerial Advisory Committee operates under the above definition, the Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act* includes a broad interpretation of disability. If this definition was applied to Commonwealth and State Special Education Grants, many more students with different types of disabilities and support needs would be eligible for funding (eg students with various psychiatric disorders, those with an infectious disease or total/partial loss of bodily or mental functions—see *Disability Discrimination Act (1992)*, Part 1, Section 4, pp 4-5).

However, the current levels of Commonwealth/State Special Education funding are inadequate to provide support for many of the students that are currently eligible under the Commonwealth Guidelines (see *Commonwealth Programmes for Schools Quadrennial Administrative Guidelines 2001 to 2004*, pp 77-79). In this State, those organisations receiving Special Education Grants operate within systems of prioritisation and students with low levels of need do not receive support. Some organisations are forced to operate a waiting list for newly diagnosed students.

Adequacy of Commonwealth/State Funding for Students with Disabilities

In recent years, members of the Ministerial Advisory Committee have noted the small increases to the total funding available from both the Commonwealth and State for Special Education Grants. Most organisations have received extremely modest increases in the past few years. (See Schedule 1 for a list of organisations that were allocated Commonwealth/State Special Education Grants for the school year 2002.) Members have noted that the annual percentage increases for Special Education funding have not kept pace with salary increases for the professionals providing support. They have expressed particular concern in view of the increasing demands on these organisations to provide additional support for students with disabilities.

Trends in population of students with disabilities

Trends in the student population registered with the major non-government organisations, receiving Commonwealth Special Education funding, show that total numbers of students requiring a service have increased in the past four years. However, a significant percentage (28%) of students do not receive any support (see Schedule 2). In many instances, this is due to inadequate levels of funding. The following data demonstrate the increasing demand on organisations providing support for children and students in early intervention programs, preschools and schools:

- In 1993, the South Australian Access Assistant Program was established for students with severe physical or multiple disabilities who were moving from segregated settings to local preschools and schools. The total number of students requiring this support rose from 203 in 1993 to 517 in 2001. Moreover, in 2001, the number of students identified with invasive health care needs was 126, as opposed to 20 in 1993. Currently, many students with a disability, who meet support criteria, do not have access assistant support because priority is given to those with invasive health care needs. In some cases, the education sectors have met this demand from existing resources, eg support is provided by School Services Officers.
- Total student numbers have also increased over the last four years for the Autism Association, the Crippled Children's Association, the Down Syndrome Society, the Cora Barclay Centre for Hearing Impaired and Townsend House (an organisation supporting people with vision and hearing impairments)—see Schedule 2. In addition, the Autism Association has made 208 new diagnoses in 2001; at least 180 additional children will be eligible for School Support funding in the next few years.
- Data provided by the Autism Association, Crippled Children's Association, Down Syndrome Society and Cora Barclay Centre also suggest that between 11 to 33 percent of clients registered are not receiving a service from these organisations. (See Schedule 2)

The Department of Education, Training and Employment's Preschool Support Program receives a State-based Special Education Grant. This program provides additional support to meet the learning needs of children with disabilities in South Australian preschools. Between 1999 and 2002, the number of children eligible for support increased from 698 to 1080. In 2001, children with learning difficulties/disabilities account for 18 percent of the total preschool population. With the current level of funding, however, only 5.9 percent receive support.

Major findings from the Committee's Research Projects

A number of important issues have been highlighted in the Committee's recent research into specific topics and these are outlined below. As previously mentioned, reports of these projects are downloadable in PDF format at <http://www.macswd.sa.gov.au/pub.html>:

- *Technology for Learning: Students with Disabilities*
- *Early Learning—Linking Education, Health and Disability through Assessment, Access and Support Services*
- *Secondary Schooling for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*
- *Schooling Options for Students with Disabilities in South Australia—A Parent Survey*
- *Social Skills Development for Students with Disabilities*
- *Support for Children and Students with Disabilities— Information for Preschool Directors and School Principals.*

■ Disability-related Support for Classroom Teachers

In recent years, a major finding of all projects undertaken by the Committee has been the need for improved levels of support for classroom teachers working with children or students with disabilities. In South Australia, although approximately eighty percent of all students with disabilities are now enrolled in year level classes (ie excluding those in specialist settings), the level of support required by teachers has not kept pace with this change in educational policy. In the Committee's reports, the two major areas of support requiring increased levels of funding include:

- Additional and ongoing disability-related staff development (for both teachers and teaching assistants) and increased access to appropriate professional expertise (from the education sectors and external consultants).
- Increased numbers of teaching assistants who have received adequate training in relation to students with disabilities.

■ Computer-based Technology for Students with Disabilities

In 1999, a national project conducted by the Committee, *Technology for Learning: Students with Disabilities*, investigated the use of computer-based technology in schools to assist students with disabilities to access, participate and achieve in education. The project focused on students with disabilities attending government and non-government schools across Australia, including those in rural and remote areas. Students were enrolled in the range of school settings, ie special schools, special units, special classes and regular classrooms.

The research data highlighted a number of factors that contribute to the successful implementation of computer-based learning programs for these students. These included the commitment and vision of school principals, high levels of teacher expertise in both disability and technology, relatively high levels of school-based resources (especially for computer equipment) and additional funding for teaching assistants and support staff.

The study results raised a number of implications that warrant consideration by Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and education sectors across Australia. In order to provide appropriate computer-based technology for students with disabilities, additional targeted funding is required for education sectors to:

- Develop Information Technology infrastructure to ensure standardisation of equipment for school-wide networking and access to the Internet.
- Develop mechanisms, including the linking of sector Websites, to allow schools to share expertise on a national level, particularly where students with low incidence disabilities are involved.
- Provide schools in rural and remote areas of Australia with on-site video-conferencing technology to facilitate access to city-based professional and technical support for the use of computer-based technology.
- Allow schools to purchase appropriate assistive and adaptive technology for students with disabilities.
- Allow schools to fund on-site training of teaching staff in the use of computer-based technology, including training in general computer competence, as well as skills in the use of technology specifically designed for students with disabilities.
- Provide on-site technical support in all schools, in the form of a separate Information Technology appointment, and not simply incorporate it into the role of existing classroom teachers.
- Allow schools to employ well trained and experienced teacher assistants for the successful implementation of computer-based learning for students with disabilities.

For a complete list of the policy implications drawn from this national project, see *Technology for Learning: Students with Disabilities*, pages v to vii.

■ Early Intervention Services for Students with Disabilities

In 1999, the Ministerial Advisory Committee agreed to an investigation of early intervention services for children and students between the ages of 0 to 8 years in South Australia. While members recognised the importance of early learning for all young children, they were particularly concerned with the growing numbers of those with developmental delay/disability who are not eligible for specialist disability services and who require additional planning, support and intervention to maximise learning. Included in this population are children for whom a specific diagnosis has not been made due to their current chronological age, lengthy diagnosis processes or lack of referral to an assessment service.

While many of the recommendations are couched in terms that are specific to South Australian services and organisations, several issues may have general relevance to all States and Territories. These include:

- The need for improved coordination and collaboration between the education, health and disability sectors in the delivery of early intervention services.
- The development of comprehensive databases on available early intervention services that can be accessed by both professionals and parents.
- Improvements in postgraduate medical education programs, for general practitioners in particular, to ensure early assessment for developmental delay/disability and early referral.
- The introduction of courses on interdisciplinary collaborative practice for education, health and disability professionals, as an essential component of undergraduate degrees.

■ Secondary Schooling for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

In 1999, the Committee investigated the current situation for secondary-aged students with Autism Spectrum Disorders in South Australian schools. Due to the complex needs associated with their disability, these students often have difficulty accessing and participating successfully in a planned learning program, particularly in their senior years of schooling.

The results of the study illustrated that many issues affecting students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder are directly related to their core disabilities in communication, socialisation, thinking and learning, and sensory processing. Specifically, limited organisational skills along with poor social and interpersonal skills were identified as major issues for these students.

At a school level, issues centred on the structure of secondary schools, the amount and format of academic requirements, a limited number of specifically trained and experienced professionals available to support classroom teachers, peer harassment, the need for specific social skills training, alternative placement/learning options and behaviour management strategies. Systemically, issues related to limited Commonwealth/State funding, resource availability and flexible resource management in secondary schools.

Data from the study, highlighted a number of successful school management and teaching practices. The most successful practices adopted a situation-specific and flexible approach. It was acknowledged that many students with Autism Spectrum Disorders have unique support needs that require attention during their school years. In addition, a small group of students with Asperger syndrome continue to present significant support and service challenges. Secondary schools are often faced with intractable problems due to limited placement options for these students outside of regular classroom settings.

■ **Schooling Options for Students with Disabilities**

During 2000, the Ministerial Advisory Committee conducted a random survey of parents of students with disabilities in South Australia. The survey sample was drawn from State, Catholic and Independent education sectors and included students enrolled in the range of school settings in both metropolitan and country regions (ie special schools, special classes, special units and regular classrooms).

The results of the survey clearly indicated that parents preferred a range of schooling options for students with disabilities. No one type of setting received unanimous support. Parents valued the opportunity to choose their child's school placement. A number of factors influenced parent choice, primarily the school's ethos, but also logistics, school facilities and curriculum considerations.

The majority of parents expressed satisfaction with their child's current placement. Of those parents expressing dissatisfaction, most would have preferred a different type of setting, while a number identified curriculum changes and improvements to facilities that could be made at school and sector level. These included:

- the provision of more special units in both primary and secondary schools
- the provision of junior and primary special classes on the same school campus (to facilitate transition)
- the provision of senior special units that provide a logical extension to primary settings
- flexible options for a split placement between a regular and special school
- increased use of local high school facilities by special school students
- speech and occupational therapies included in the curriculum.

While the results of this study were forwarded to the chief executives of the three education sectors in this State, many of these changes (particularly the provision of more special units) would require significant levels of additional funding.

■ **Social Skills Development for Students with Disabilities**

In 2000, the Committee investigated social skills development for students with a range of disabilities across all levels of schooling. A case study methodology was adopted and five schools participated in the research, three from the Department of Education, Training and Employment and one each from the Catholic and Independent sectors.

Results from the study indicated that a number of school-wide factors promoted social skills development for students with disabilities. Primarily, a 'whole of school' approach with formal reporting mechanisms provided the foundation for comprehensive social skills programs. Research data demonstrated the value of strong leadership where school managers understood the range of disability-related issues and were committed to supporting this group of students. They recognised the importance of structured social skills development for all students, especially those with disabilities, as well as the need to foster positive relationships within the school community, in particular with parents. Ongoing disability-related staff development with access to appropriate professional expertise was a key factor in this 'whole of school' approach.

Case study participants identified several teaching strategies that encouraged social skills development for these students, eg the use of mentors or coaches for individual students, role models, explicit teaching methodologies, appropriate reward systems, timely behavioural feedback and targeted skills development for individual students. A major factor highlighted in the data was the importance of well trained teaching assistants.

■ **Support Services for Children and Students with Disabilities**

Ready access to disability-related information at the school level has been identified as an ongoing problem by the Committee during research conducted over a number of years. In 2001, the Committee compiled a resource document aimed at providing preschool directors and school principals with an overview of support services for children and students with disabilities across the education, health and disability sectors in South Australia. Information is presented under four section headings: partnerships between preschools, schools and families; enrolment at the preschool or school; accessing services; and preschool/school management. All sections of the document include information specific to the three education sectors (State, Catholic and Independent schools). Contact details and descriptions of relevant support services and agencies/organisations that provide specialist aids and equipment are included in the Appendices.

Conclusion

In the past few years, the number of children and students with disabilities who are eligible for support under Commonwealth/State Special Education funding criteria has risen steadily. Total funding has not kept pace with the increased demands for services. As a consequence, there are growing numbers who do not receive support due to the limited funds available to service providers.

A number of reports prepared by the Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities have identified issues related to the provision of support for students with various types and levels of disability. The effectiveness of the Committee's recommendations included in these reports depends, in the first instance, on adequate funding being provided by both Commonwealth and State governments. This will require a recognition and response to the increasing number of children and students with special needs in our preschools and schools.

**SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ORGANISATIONS—
COMMONWEALTH/STATE SPECIAL EDUCATION RECURRENT GRANTS
IN 2002**

ORGANISATION	Total \$	State \$	Commonwealth \$
Autism Association Early Intervention	245,745	0	245,745
Autism Association School Support	511,189	0	511,189
Crippled Children's Early Intervention	239,836	0	239,836
Crippled Children's School Support	633,077	0	633,077
Down Syndrome Early Intervention	122,626	0	122,626
Down Syndrome Preschool Support	33,981	0	33,981
Down Syndrome School Support	237,127	0	237,127
Cora Barclay Early Intervention	34,473	0	34,473
Cora Barclay School Support	203,146	0	203,146
Townsend House Early Intervention	88,646	0	88,646
Townsend House School Support	51,710	0	51,710
Guide Dogs Association	44,323	0	44,323
Lower Eyre Peninsula Early Intervention Support Program	10,000	0	10,000
Mitcham Early Development Program	20,000	0	20,000
St Ann's Special School	326,373	326,373	0
St Patrick's Special School	254,461	254,461	0
Suneden Special School	232,334	232,334	0
Child and Youth Health Access Assistant Program	1,996,692	1,340,113	656,579
Department of Education, Training and Employment Preschool Support Program	867,094	867,094	0
Family and Youth Services (Children in Residential Care)	61,712	0	61,712
Aboriginal Family Support Services (Children in Residential Care)	5,278	0	5,278
Joint Sector Intensive & Crisis Support	45,000	45,000	0
Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities	209,000	0	209,000
TOTAL AMOUNT	\$6,473,823	\$3,065,375	\$3,408,448

**SOUTH AUSTRALIAN NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS—
STUDENTS RECEIVING SERVICES VERSUS TOTAL ELIGIBLE STUDENTS
IN 2001**

ORGANISATION	Total Eligible Students		Students Receiving Services		Students Not Receiving Services	
	1998	2001	2001		2001	
	n	n	n	%	n	%
Autism Association	515	870	546	63	324	37
Crippled Children's Association	919	1021	865	85	156	15
Down Syndrome Society	295	356	318	89	38	11
Cora Barclay Centre	104	190	128	67	62	33
Townsend House	109	156	155	99	1	1
Guide Dogs Association	23	30	30	100	0	0
TOTAL	1965	2623 (100%)	2042	(72%)	581	(28%)