

Andrea Gard
40 Andrews Street
Newell Beach
Mossman 4873
tangles@austarnet.com.au
Ph : (07) 40981556

25/4/2002

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

Inquiry for Students with Disabilities.

Dear Senate Committee,

I would firstly like to commend this initiative by Senator Lyn Allison as I believe action is overdue in a number of areas relating to the education of students with disabilities. In my role as both secondary teacher in a rural town in Far North Queensland and mother of a six year old daughter with cerebral palsy, I have observed both positive and negative influences on education for students with special needs. Thus I would like to address two of the points identified in the terms of reference supplied. These include (VI) the nature, extent and funding of programs that provide for full or partial learning opportunities with mainstream students ; (VII) teacher training and professional development.

A positive focus is that many schools both primary and secondary, are embracing aspects of inclusivity within mainstream education. I am a strong advocate of inclusion within mainstream settings as it promotes positive role modelling for the student with special needs, allows these students to remain with their peers developing socially acceptable patterns of behaviour as well as realistic involvement in life and learning opportunities.

However the negative influence is that of attitude. Many fellow teachers still consider that students with disabilities do not have a place in regular classrooms and are struggling to implement suitable and meaningful learning tasks for these students. **Mainstream education for students with special needs is to be strongly encouraged and to better promote this philosophy, more specific teacher training is paramount.** This will require increased resourcing and funding for specialised training.

Teachers, particularly secondary teachers, become too focused on academia. However all teachers would be aware that schools offer so much more than

just the opportunity to engage in cognitive learning. Schools are dynamic places with a myriad of opportunities to become involved in social, cultural, sporting and life skill development activities ; to name only some. Students with special needs will and do gain much from these various opportunities.

The way mainstream students view and embrace students with special needs is largely determined by the way teaching and support staff interact with them. If the special needs teacher walks several paces ahead of a physically and intellectually impaired child, turning periodically to demand he walks faster, students will fail to see respect being role modelled and are then also likely to display little respect, tolerance and understanding themselves. All people who work with special needs students should treat them with the greatest of respect and dignity demonstrating this through both words and actions. **My message would overwhelming be that teachers and support staff who work with special needs students have both substantial training and experience.**

I sincerely thank you for this opportunity to express my views. I trust they will be listened to and acted upon.

Yours sincerely,
Andrea Maree Gard.