

Furlong Park School & Pre School for Deaf Children No 5214

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Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities

The students supported by our school service are Deaf students, Hearing Impaired students, and students with a diagnosed language disorder such as dyspraxia. Our students have access to a minimum of two communities, languages and cultures; the mainstream, English using community, the Deaf, Auslan using Community as well as other minority groups such as Vietnamese, Turkish and Singapore communities.

The dilemma we frequently meet is that our students are funded through the Disabilities and Impairments program which focus mainly on the medical state of deafness rather than giving equal status to the cultural and linguistic status.

Current allocation of funding

This is clearly evident through the tool with which the department allocate funding; the Educational Needs Questionnaire (ENQ). Funding is allocated according to a ranking system for a set of categories outlined as follows:

- Mobility
- Fine-motor skills
- Receptive Communication
- Expressive Communication
- Challenging (Excess) Behaviour
- Safety
- Hearing
- Vision
- Self-care (toileting, eating, dressing)
- Medical
- Cognitive skills

The ranking system ranges from 01 – no impairment or low degree of severity through to 08 – minimal or no participation according the above categories.

The receptive and expressive categories deal only in receptive and expressive English / Speech. It does not cater for the skills requiring support in the area of linguistic development of sign. Signing is mentioned throughout the ENQ but only to the point of being a tool to assist English such as Makaton, or signing ‘Stop’ or ‘Come’. There is no emphasis on nor recognition of developing linguistic competence in Auslan

A number of our students are developing receptive and expressive skills in Auslan in conjunction with skills in expressive and receptive English. For signing students to have equal opportunity and access to the full range of opportunities afforded through the curriculum it is vital that they have a solid language base in Auslan. The current model of ENQ does not take this need into any

consideration. Subsequently our students are regularly given comparatively lower levels of funding which results in their specific needs not being met.

Special Schools for the Deaf are currently funded using an Indexed model of funding. Due to the low levels of funding our student attract and the relatively small numbers of our school population we are constantly battling to provide the appropriate staff and number of staff to provide a quality, equitable education.

A *possible* solution to address this situation may be to include a linguistic needs area on the ENQ such as:

Linguistic Development – for students using sign only

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 01 | Uses sign-supported-speech to clarify understanding and expression |
| 02 | Comprehends and expresses concepts presented visually using gesture and formally recognised structures |
| 03 | Comprehends and expresses ideas and opinions with unfamiliar Deaf person using Auslan-based structures |
| 04 | Is able to discuss elements of languages (Auslan and English) with the purpose of developing better understanding of these languages and how they are used embedded in their cultural contexts. |

A section such as this allows Auslan using students to receive funding to further their ability rather than focus on their *dis*-ability.

In this way Deaf, Auslan-using students need to be viewed in much the same way as indigenous students with the same provision made for Multicultural Education Aides (MEA) from the Deaf Community. Auslan is recognised as a Language Other Than English (LOTE) by our Curriculum Standards Framework document however those Auslan-using students are not granted the status of a minority, cultural group. This is a vital area requiring a more equitable approach.

Deaf students with particular requirements

Currently the Special School environment is not able to recognise the ESL status of any of its students. The definition of a student who is an English as a Second Language user is defined as:

- comes from a language background other than English, that is, either the student or one or both parents was born in a non-English speaking country
- speaks a language other than English at home as their main language
- has been enrolled in an Australian school for less than seven years.

<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lem/esl/esch.htm#who>

Families who are **Deaf and use Auslan at home (not English)** meet all of the above criteria. However this funding appears to be denied on the grounds that our students do not come from another country and cannot be classed as “new arrivals”.

Families who are hearing, using English as the language at home, may also qualify. In this case **English is not the primary language used by the child**. Therefore English, while being the “mother tongue” of the parents, does not necessarily hold the same “native” language status for a Deaf child.

Another major dilemma for families is the deceptive nature of deafness. A child may have clear speech skills at a social level but in a learning environment require academic or subject specific language in Auslan or specific teaching for conceptual development. Student who do not sign often fall into this category as they appear to be “fine” however the repeated claims that hearing aids and cochlear implants do not “solve” or “cure” deafness and strong teaching support with appropriate knowledge and training is required to ensure that these students do not go through their schooling years without appropriate support.

Teacher Training Courses

Teacher training needs to reflect the ongoing development in this ever-evolving field of education.

Post-Graduate courses are currently under funded and graduate teachers are given no incentive through either scholarships or ongoing employment unless they are already employees with ongoing employment. Fixed term teachers are not eligible for current scholarships so those who train go into mainstream education with a career structure and security. Newcomers to the profession are dissuaded before they begin.

Professional Development is offered however is not always accessible due to the remote areas in which teachers work or due to lack of appropriate funding for professional development activities.

We are faced with the urgent problem of having no teachers of the deaf now and in the immediate future as the aging cohort of our current teaching field face retirement or are given more secure opportunities in other fields.

We hope the Senate inquiry seeks to address these issues.

Yours sincerely,

Sue Izard (**Principal**) and the **Staff at Furlong Park School & Pre School for Deaf Children**