

Senate Inquiry into Students with Disabilities – Bendigo Deaf Facility

The Bendigo Deaf Facility is a Victorian Department of Education and Training facility, which offers specialist education for Deaf students in mainstream schools. The Facility operates from Prep to VCE across three campuses. The campuses involved are Kennington Primary School, Golden Square Secondary College and Bendigo Senior Secondary College. The students are enrolled in the respective schools and then the staff of the Deaf Facility support the students in those settings. There are 24 students supported by Teachers of the Deaf, Sign Language Interpreters and Deaf Instructors in the Facility.

We believe the major issues the Senate Inquiry should address, related to the Terms of Reference, include the following:

Terms of Reference (1), (a), vii) – teacher training and professional development

- Insufficient numbers of qualified teachers of the Deaf and sign language interpreters are available to support the students. This should be addressed immediately as the population of teachers and interpreters continues to age and reach retirement over the next few years. This could be addressed, for example, by providing study leave to complete appropriate qualifications, allowing HECS exemptions for suitable courses, implanting apprenticeship/traineeship schemes in the fields of Deaf teaching and sign language interpreting.

Terms of Reference (1), (a), ii) – the accuracy with which student’s disability related needs are being assessed

- Assessment of needs of students should include classroom /educational setting assessments as well as audiological and speech assessments. This provides a more accurate indication of the support required by the student in their actual setting. Some students present as having few difficulties with hearing and expressive and receptive language ability in a test or one to one or small group setting. However, these students have much greater difficulty in, in our case, a class situation and require sign language support to effectively operate in the classroom situation.

Terms of Reference (1), (a), vi) – the nature, extent and funding of programs that provide for full or partial learning opportunities with mainstream students

- Consideration needs to be given to providing flexibility in staffing formulas, particularly at the upper secondary levels, in determining interpreter and Teacher of the Deaf to student staffing ratios. This is required to allow equity with the hearing students in being able to select the full range of elective subjects offered. At Golden Square Secondary College all students at Year 9 and 10 do five full year core subjects and eight semester length subjects. The semester subjects are elected from a broad range of choices. This means that in a particular year level the students may all do different subjects, which requires a greater number of staff to support them than the current staffing ratio provides. This situation needs to be addressed in providing allowances in staffing formulas at levels where elective subjects are part of the curriculum.

This situation is worse in VCE Year 11 and 12 levels all subjects are electives apart from English.

Other factors apart from elective subjects, which should be factors in determining staffing levels, are the spread of students across classrooms at different Grade or

Year levels and the different communication styles of students requiring different interpreting skills.

I would be happy to discuss these issues in greater depth as they impact greatly on the quality of support we provide and hence the quality of education the Deaf students receive. We would also welcome any visits that your committee or parliamentary representatives make wish to make.

We look forward to a positive response to these issues in the Inquiry's outcomes.

Yours sincerely

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