

INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Referred : 13 March 2002
Submissions due : 29^t April 2002
Tabling date :24 October 2002

DEAF AND HEARING IMPAIRED STUDENTS WITHIN GIPPSLAND

Submitted by :
Mrs Suzanne Harrison
Co-ordinator
Traralgon Deaf Facility
Liddiard Road Primary School
PO Box 264
Traralgon VIC 3844

Phone : (03) 5174 1795

REASON FOR SUBMISSION

This submission is being presented in the anticipation that the Inquiry into Education of Students with Disabilities can assist the Traralgon Deaf Facility achieve its goals to continue to provide the Deaf and hearing impaired children of Gippsland with an education that best meets their needs.

BACKGROUND

The Traralgon Deaf Facility was established at Liddiard Road Primary School in December 1995 with a student enrolment of five. Numbers have fluctuated over the years, reaching ten at one stage, with a current enrolment of three. Some of the original students have graduated to the Traralgon Secondary College, who have a current enrolment of nine Deaf children.

CONCERNS

The Traralgon Deaf Facility has four major concerns:

- We are aware of young children who will access the facility in three to four years time. However, when the students who are currently enrolled move to Traralgon Secondary College the facility will drop in numbers. This reduction in numbers may enforce a closure, thus giving these future students no access to a much-required resource.
- At present the Traralgon Secondary College has a signing support aide and a teacher training to be a Teacher of the Deaf. Not being part of a facility the children lose out on audiology and speech support, as well as the knowledge and skills of trained Teachers of the Deaf. As part of a facility it is possible to support student's full time, however, the secondary college students' funding only provides for part time support. This is unacceptable for profoundly Deaf signing students who require full time language support.
- We are aware of approximately eight students within the Latrobe Valley, two of which are at secondary colleges and another fifteen students in the Wellington District. While these students are receiving some support, a facility that is designed and resourced appropriately is only a short journey (bus/taxi) away. Both Liddiard Road Primary School and Traralgon Secondary College promote a positive image of deafness and as such, the children's needs would be better met.
- Finally, it is apparent that if the primary and secondary population are not combined, thereby increasing the student numbers, then the facility will no longer be viable. Gippsland will lose the specialist trained teachers and support personnel to other areas that can better utilise their skills. This may result in relocation to the metropolitan area, or interstate.

It was with these concerns present that both the Traralgon Facility and the Traralgon Secondary College prepared and submitted a submission in June 2000 for the Facility to be accredited as a Prep to Year 12 Deaf Facility. We are still awaiting a response

to this submission. Meanwhile the students, not only in the two schools, but also in the neighbouring areas are being disadvantaged. The hearing peers continue to achieve while those with a hearing deficit are being hindered in their ability to succeed because of this situation.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education undertaken by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HR&EOC) has concluded that school retention rates are lower in the country due to:

- the travelling time and distance and lack of public transport,
- the lack of curriculum choice, and
- the lack of income support for families.

In addition, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states:

- Education must install respect in all children for human rights and their cultural identity, language and values (article 29).
- Children with disabilities must have access to education that ensures dignity, promotes self-reliance and facilitates their active participation in the community (article 23).
- Indigenous and minority children must have access to education that ensures their right to enjoy their culture, profess and practice their religions and use their own languages (article 30).

SOLUTION

A Prep to Year 12 facility will cater for these concerns, as it will provide the education choice parents are seeking in their region. Parents will not be required to find the additional finances to either board their children or move the family to the metropolitan area. More importantly, the Deaf children will continue to live with their own family.

Most of the children within the facility are profoundly Deaf and use AUSLAN as their first language. AUSLAN is provided as the LOTE subject and the secondary college has mirrored this. Liddiard Road Primary School currently conforms to the above rights, however there is no secondary educational facility in the Gippsland region that does.

What has been achieved with the primary school is unique, special for the region and has taken many years to accomplish. The attitude of the school's population towards signing, Deafness and hearing impairment has contributed to the success of the Deaf and hearing impaired children.

When comparing Deaf facilities throughout Victoria, transport is a major discrepancy that can be noted. The Traralgon Deaf Facility is provided with all the same resources, such as audiology and speech pathology; however, it is lacking the vital service of funded transport. Families in the metropolitan area have access to funded transport and efficient public transport. Rural families are not afforded with either option. This makes it extremely difficult for parents to access the best educational setting for their children.

It is highlighted that a lack of funding for transport contravenes article 23 of the Convention of Rights of the Child.

The two schools already work closely together and are more than happy for this amalgamation to occur. The decision for this to happen would allay the following concerns:

- It would enable the signing Teachers of the Deaf to easily access the students located at Traralgon Secondary College and allow for continuity and necessary support (Middle Years).
- Student numbers would not be such a concern, as the Facility would be maintaining contact with the students throughout their education.
- Students would no longer have to relocate to the metropolitan area, as full time support would be available.
- Access to the facility would be more widely available, through the provision of funded transport.
- The Gippsland area would not lose its specialist teaching staff, who would not have to relocate to metropolitan or other schools that can utilise their skills.

SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATION

The above information highlights a serious level of concern within the education of our children and could be considered of a discriminatory nature. Our children should not be disadvantaged by their disabilities or the location they reside.

Therefore, your assistance is required to support an appropriately resourced and funded Prep to Year 12 Deaf and hearing impaired Facility to cater for the needs of the Gippsland student population.

Mrs Suzanne Harrison
Co-ordinator
Traralgon Deaf Facility
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