

This submission is from a parent who has spent the last six years fighting for the recognition and continuation of a specialized school for children with motor dysfunction and multiple disabilities.

Some time ago I was making inquiries about enrollment at a state school that had a great reputation for catering for students with special needs. I was quite surprised to find out that we lived in the wrong area for my son to attend that school. The very next day I phoned the same school with a different scenario, I was inquiring about my gifted and talented daughter, as this school also specialized in meeting the needs of such children. I was astonished to hear how simple it would be to have my daughter placed there. Is this not discrimination?

Mainstream schools are encouraged to attract students by specializing in different areas. There are schools of excellence for different sports, arts or music and there are enrollment agreements for children who attend the high performance center. When it comes to special education it is not applicable because special education is apparently a privilege in itself

The school deemed by Education Queensland as the nearest coded school is the only option given to parents of students with disabilities. It is extremely difficult to accept that a child's education is determined by the transport department, based on where the child lives.

The ascertainment process is one that causes grief for many families, children with motor dysfunction often present as having an intellectual impairment and need the associated support and resources however it is unfair to label these children as having an intellectual impairment just to make them fit into formula.

Schools are coded according to the types of students it can cater for. Using the ascertainment data the child is matched with the nearest coded school. Unfortunately this does not take into account the different programs, pedagogies or methodologies developed and practiced by different special settings. More importantly the individuality of the child and family are completely disregarded as the Education Department promotes generic Special Education.

Xavier Special School at Coorparoo is an Education Queensland State School for children with motor disorders such as cerebral palsy and developmental delay; it is the only school in Queensland where all programs are based on the principles of Conductive Education. At present our children range in age from fourteen months to thirteen years.

The quality of Xavier's programs means it enjoys a reputation for excellence, not only within this state, but nationally and internationally. At present 30 children attend from many areas including the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast and many suburbs of Brisbane and surrounding areas Several families have moved from

interstate and country areas and some from overseas, to place their children at Xavier Special School.

Conductive Education “CE” originated in Hungary and is facilitated by a Conductor. “CE” is a holistic approach to providing a system of education designed to meet the varying needs of children with physical and multiple impairments. The disciplines of physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy and teaching are integrated into a meaningful whole. “CE” fosters a belief in every child’s ability to learn, it teaches children to be responsible for their own movements rather than being a passive recipient of therapy, it promotes personality development and empowers parents to be able to support their child’s development.

Most children who come to Xavier have very little control over their bodies, they soon make the progress that had eluded them and families find the hope they had searched for. Xavier’s “CE” programs have been a necessary stepping-stone towards effective integration into mainstream schools for some students while others have achieved a level of independence beyond expectations.

“CE” is a way of life - the families who have taken on the challenge to understand and practice it have found they soon become enthusiasts; the staff at Xavier shares the same enthusiasm. From humble beginnings in a hospital ward in 1970, Xavier Special School has become a crucial part of the education system and has touched the lives of hundreds of grateful families.

Despite policy endorsement of programs based on the principles of Conductive Education the Xavier community has fought tirelessly to remain viable and now in an attempt to ensure a future, the school will become Xavier Special Education Unit, an off site campus of Whites Hill State College.

It has been frustrating trying to keep up with the education departments ever changing rules and regulations, many of which make little sense and are so rigid. It appears that departmental changes are self-serving, with little or no focus on what really matters; quality education for students with disabilities.

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