



S . E . A . S

**Special Education all Schools**

Supporting Parents of children who have disabilities in Government and non Government schools

**To: THE SENATE EMPLOYMENT,WORK PLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION REFERENCE COMMITTEE.**

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## **S.E.A.S**

### Mission Statement

To support and empower children with disabilities in mainstream school.,

To create and access opportunities for them to lead valued lives as equal members of society within their family and theCommunity.

About our group.

We are are self funded autonomous group of fifty families in South Australia. Our members have children in the government and non government sector of education. The leadership of this group is provided by two voluntary members of this group who serve the group, rather than govern .It is a democratic group who vote on issues to direct their leaders. The group meet regularly for support and for exchanges of information. We are currently constructing a web site , so we can include country and interstate members.

### **INQUIREY INTO EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

After consultation these are the recommendations by our parents who currently use the education system.

#### **1] Recommendation 1 .**

*The commencement of a Education Information Service Australia wide for parents who have children with disabilities in main stream schools , explaining how systems work at the local level and your options as a parent.*

#### **Recomendation,2.**

*Implement support services as early as possible in the school setting with parent participation at the assessment time and as an ongoing partnership.*

**Recommendation 3.**

*A special review with all participants and rural parent representation on the working party*

**No Recommendation 4.**

**Recommendation 5.**

*As fundamental structure is in place the greatest need is classroom support. An increase in targeted Special Education Funding by Government is needed. This is a matter of some urgency.*

**Recommendation 6.**

*Urgent funding is required to assure the highest possible standard of care and teaching can be received by children with disabilities.*

**Recommendation 7** *.A review of university courses in teaching Special Education and Inclusion ,and a date set for ongoing reviews to bring standards up to 2002 and beyond.*

**Recommendation** *Child Protection, Duty of Care ,policy and implementation needs reviewing*

**Recommendation** *That real citizenship be available to children with disabilities by having a choice the same as any other child to attend the school of their choice. That proper resources be provided by government to all schools so schools are not disadvantaged. This will lead the way for a fully inclusive society.*

**Comments**

*In the education system at local level there are no resources or support base for a parent with a child with a disability, commencing mainstream school. The isolation, and grieving process for a different type of future for the child, is travelled unsupported ,and alone. This anomaly does not create, potential, for an optimistic future, acceptance, inclusion or any sense of partnership in education. The following pages give further information about, and why these recommendations.*

**1} Information Disadvantage.**

Comments regarding the process of schools definition and differentiating between levels of handicap, parents have said they need accurate information.

Parents are "Information Disadvantaged" ,they are excluded, by all education systems who keep commonwealth guidelines for funding eligibility , unaccessible, regardless which sector the child attends. There is **not** a government booklet explaining to parents the criteria for a child's level of funding [disability] and who is the definer.?

All states should have the same definition and level of funding.

We need an honest open process that is transparent , and supported by comprehensive information for parents, provided by government ,regardless of the sector or system. This lack of information by government , frustrates and compels parents to feel isolated ,in their battle to provide the most effective education for their child with a disability

**Recommendation 1** *The commencement of a Education Information Service, Australia wide for parents who have children with disabilities in main stream schools , explaining how systems work at the local level and your options as a parent.*

**2} Assessment**

Students with disabilities when commencing primary school are often disadvantaged by "**a wait and see approach**" ,rather than an adequate assessment which indicates appropriate intervention and services be put in place to justly support the child's evident needs. There is often a delay for a year or so while they choose to observe the child. This creates unnecessary hardship for families.

The end comparison of children who had the better approach is markedly more optimistic.

As Primary carers of their child with a disability .parents, need strong involvement with these assessments.

**Reccomendation,2.**

*Implement support services as early as possible in the school setting with parent participation at the assessment time and as an ongoing partnership.*

### 3) **Fresh Investment urgently required.**

As there is little funding targeted to rural and remote areas for children with disabilities ,a review with all experts and including parents as participants [only current parents of children with a disability in schools, and representation from each sector .Not currently employed by any education sector either, so there is a clear parent perspective.] There can be no conflict of interest.

**Recommendation 3.** *A special review with all participants and rural parent representation on the working party..*

4) No comment from our parents.

### 5) **Targeted Funding**

There is an urgent requirement for New Funding in Special Education in all education sectors. This money needs to be targeted as an Investment ,in “**Teacher aide Support time.**” We will fail our young people with disabilities ,and relegate them to a future of isolation ,dependence and limited opportunities without adequate support..[this money needs to be targeted for this purpose only ,and traceable.]

**Recommendation 5.** *As fundamental structure is in place the greatest need is classroom support. An increase in targeted Special Education Funding by Government is needed. This is a matter of some urgency.*

### 6.) **Shortfalls in funding**

In all schools sectors students with disabilities need support staff. In many sectors this is being provided by volunteers, who may not be suitable. Volunteers in most cases are great for lap programmes ,in supporting mainstream students and do an amazing job. However, for students with disabilities untrained volunteers, with no understanding of duty of care, ,health issues, and no specific training ,can cause grave concerns for parents and frustration for their children. with disabilities. These volunteers should not be used because of a shortfall of government funding.

### **Recommendation 6.**

*Urgent funding is required to assure the highest possible standard of care and teaching can be received by children with disabilities.*

### 7. **Teacher Training**

The current courses of Teacher Training offered at Universities in each state are out of date and often does not successfully equip some teachers to meet the challenges of the inclusive classrooms in 2002 and beyond .So a well meaning teacher may be disadvantaged from the beginning, even the Special Education electives are out of date ..Where are the practicum’s to work with real students with disabilities.?

Many teachers are uncomfortable with technology which is a very important part in supporting students with disabilities, they need technical familiarity, or they limit the child’s independence. Technology has the benefit to enable our young people to transcend the confining nature of their disability and identify with and participate in the community.

Addressing these issues will save valuable resources in future years and raise outcomes for all concerned.

**Recommendation 7** *A review of university courses in teaching Special Education and Inclusion ,and a date set for ongoing reviews to bring standards up to 2002 and beyond.*

**Note** Child protection needs to have a particular emphasis, as the duty of care of children with disabilities seems to have been sidelined, as some risk that will never happen. All systems need to be more accountable so our schools can be safe places for our children with disabilities. Life has already dealt these children a hard blow, so we could at least offer the highest level of care and safety. This needs immediate close examination. We would suggest a review of all education sectors regarding these issues.

**Recommendation** *Child Protection, Duty of Care ,policy and implementation needs reviewing .*

### 8.) **Equity**

The non government sector although they have many children with disabilities enrolled in their schools are disadvantaged due to the inequity of funding to provide adequate specialist help and the resources to properly support their students.

This may lead the education sector to apply for unjustifiable hardship thus disadvantaging the student by not having the school of their choice.

Parents are disempowered by lack of choice .

**Recommendation 8.** *That real citizenship be available to children with disabilities by having a choice the same as any other child to attend the school of their choice. That proper resources be provided by government to all schools so schools are not disadvantaged. This will lead the way for a fully inclusive society.*

Comments

In the education system at local level there are no resources or support base for a *parent* with a child with a disability, commencing mainstream school. The isolation, and grieving process for a different type of future for the child, is travelled unsupported ,and alone. This anomaly does not create, potential, for an optimistic future, acceptance, inclusion or any sense of partnership in education.

S.E.A.S. thanks the Senate Committee for the opportunity to comment and make recommendations. We will make our selves available for further comment if required.

We do not believe our submission reflect adversely on any individual or organization. Our comments are more about moving forward ,as it is the time.

Marie Murphy and Christine Flynn Leaders of S.E.A.S.

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