

Senate Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities

Response from the Australian Association of Special Education - SA Chapter

The Australian Association of Special Education (AASE) is a research-based, non-categorical organisation that advocates for the provision of quality educational services for students with special education needs. Its membership consists of teachers, parents, educational administrators, therapists, and university researchers.

1 (a) *whether current policies and programs for students with disabilities are adequate to meet their education needs, including, but not limited to:*

i) criteria used to define disability and to differentiate between levels of handicap

The Commonwealth criteria for accessing funding should include mental health, acquired brain injury and other neurological conditions that significantly impact on children/students accessing, participating and achieving in educational programs.

Criteria for differentiating between needs should take into account the contextual issues of poverty, isolation, school setting (ie teacher expertise) etc.

Attention should be given to ensuring a common understanding that it is the impact of the disability not the disability alone that determines the level of resourcing/support a child/student requires to access, participate and achieve in educational programs.

Acknowledgement via eligibility for funding should be given to students re-entering education facilities after their eighteenth birthday.

Lack of continuity across State and Territory borders impact of some families.

ii) accuracy with which students' disabilities related needs are assessed

Lack of research into the development and trialing of culturally suitable assessment tools has resulted in inappropriate assessments, interventions and school placements.

Most norm based assessment tools are reliant on written or oral responses and do not support alternative communication systems.

Staff require additional knowledge and skills to identify, assess and develop programs for children in the early years ie 0-5 year olds.

iii) the particular needs of students with disabilities from low socio-economic, non- English speaking and Indigenous backgrounds and from rural and remote areas

Often these children present to a range of government departments (State and Commonwealth) for varying needs prior to reaching pre-school or school. The first point of referral may not be in relation to development delays. Personnel from other family supporting agencies should be alert to the indicators of development delay and be able to support families to access assessment and intervention services for their child.

An obvious impediment to this occurring is the lack of continuity of professional staff working with individual families in a range of agencies/services. This together with inadequate culturally appropriate supports for these families often results in families not connecting or persevering with support personnel.

iv) the effectiveness and availability of early intervention programs

Early intervention services need to extend beyond the school starting age to ensure those children identified as requiring early intervention services at the point of entry into school are not disadvantaged.

Acknowledgement of the specific needs of girls in respect to early intervention should be promoted given that they are often withdrawn and do not demand attention.

Increased understanding and sharing of what might be relevant information regarding individual children between agencies and Government Departments would assist with early intervention.

Acknowledgement that the numbers of children/students with significant and complex health care needs are impacting on the distribution of existing resources.

v) access and adequacy of funding and support in both the public and private sectors.

Commonwealth funding remains a small component of funding for students with disabilities in Government schools in this State. Children with disabilities access a greater component. The current funding levels are not supportive of the provision of high quality education programs.

Students with complex needs often move from the private to the public system because of reduced funding flexibility in the private sector. Government schools are able to access additional support/resources at the time the student enters school or shortly thereafter.

The Disability Discrimination Act has raised expectations within the community that families will be able to choose an educational placement for their child, in reality for many parents there is only one suitable placement.

vi) the nature, extent and funding of programs that provide for full or partial learning opportunities with mainstream students.

The long term support needs of some students should be acknowledged and funding allocated over a period of years to support the identification, development and implementation of complex intervention programs.

Support for students with health care support needs to access school is detracting from those who require support for curriculum access.

School aged students with disabilities experiencing post school options require additional supports to those provided in the school setting to ensure their success. Funding sources do not acknowledge this need by way of their criteria.

vii) teacher training and professional development

There is an urgent need for compulsory pre and inservice courses for registered and practising teachers focusing on diversity and in particular the needs of the groups of students as described in the Disability Discrimination Act. The courses should be on-site disability/behaviour training and should be available to all staff working on school sites including teacher assistants.

Staff appointed to specialist positions should be required to hold or undertake relevant training to a certificate or graduate level.

Opportunities need to exist for nationally supported research projects that bring together school personnel across the Nation and focus on needs identified in the previous point *ii)*

viii) the legal implications and resource demands of current Commonwealth and state legislation

Resource intensive in respect to policy development and implementation.

b) what proper role of the Commonwealth and states and territories should be in supporting the education of students with disabilities

Adequately resources to achieve stated policy and program outcomes.

Promote National standards in respect to identification and resourcing.

Support and promote practices that are inclusive of family needs eg wraparound model.

Encourage all education systems and sectors to work cohesively for the benefit of students with disabilities and their families.

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