

COVER PAGE

SUBMISSION
TO
SENATE INQUIRY INTO
THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES.

NAME OF ORGANISATION	Australian Federation of Special Education Administrators
AUTHORS OF THIS SUBMISSION	<p style="text-align: center;">(1) Mr Peter Davis, Secretary Principal, Ipswich Special School PO Box 464 Ipswich Queensland 4305 Phone (07) 32811455 Email: peter.davis@ipswichspecs.qld.edu.au</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(2) Dr John Enchelmaier, Vice President Principal, Aspley Special School 751 Zillmere Road Aspley Queensland 4034 Phone (07) 3263 2288 Email: john.enchelmaier@aspleyspecs.qld.edu.au</p>
AUTHORISATION	Authority was given to the above authors by a minute of the Management Committee Meeting held by teleconference on Wednesday, May 15, 2002.
PRESIDENT OF ORGANISATION	<p style="text-align: center;">Ms Margot Radford PO Box 700 Walkerville South Australia 5081 Phone (08) 8161 7262 Email: radfordm@hospitalad.sa.edu.au</p>
NOTES	<p>The President and members of the AFSEA Management Committee wish to express thanks to the Senate Committee for accepting this submission.</p> <p>It is an additional wish of the Committee that AFSEA be considered as a source of further detailed information during the course of this inquiry, should an opportunity for “face to face” representation or other dialogue be possible.</p>

THE
AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION
OF SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS LTD

BACKGROUND TO AFSEA

The formation of AFSEA was achieved as an outcome of the inaugural national conference of school based special education leaders held in Adelaide, South Australia in November, 1997. It was conceived to parallel similar national bodies such as the peak bodies of secondary and primary principals associations. It has formally been incorporated at this national level with the attendant legal structures and responsibilities.

This peak body brings together school based special education leaders from across all sectors of schooling including early intervention, primary, secondary and special settings. The structure is one of a federation of state and territory based organizations of such leaders.

Currently the Federation represents a national membership comprising 420 members across all states and territories. Because of the unique emerging patterns of service delivery of special education services, this body is unlike the national primary and secondary organizations, in as much as the leadership includes, but is not restricted to school principals. Critical leadership is also represented in the leaders of services within and across schools and school systems.

PURPOSE OF THE AFSEA ORGANISATION

The purposes of AFSEA as described in our constitution include but are not limited to the following:-

- To promote the role and status of special education principals and other leaders in special education
- To advocate for the full range of education services for students with disabilities from inclusion through to special school placement
- To promote the professional development of special education principals and other leaders in special education
- To promote research and excellence in special education
- To liaise with other organizations whose views and activities affect the development and standing of special education services and facilities
- To provide a forum for the development of policies that relate to students and teachers in special education
- To provide a forum for the exchange and discussion of ideas with a particular focus on school administration and leadership in special education
- To facilitate the development of national and international networks of special education principals and other leaders in special education.

AFSEA RESPONSES TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE SENATE INQUIRY

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

- AFSEA Executive Council has analysed state and territory approaches to this issue and found considerable variation in criteria used, interpretations and extent of categories leading to a complete lack of uniformity across the nation.
- This has resulted in
 - difficulties encountered by families in accessing services when moving throughout Australia
 - variation in identification of target populations by different states/territories to receive specific additional services and resources
 - inconsistent and therefore inequitable service provision from state to state leading to the disenfranchisement of some students as a result of their location and exclusion from a particular state set of criteria
 - difficulties in identifying and then comparing student outcomes for transparency and accountability purposes
 - the ever increasing pressure to include additional categories where such an approach is used as criteria for service eligibility
- AFSEA submits that these difficulties will be perpetuated unless a more consistent national approach is adopted based upon a closely monitored student need as opposed to an aetiology or medical based model
- If a categorical model is to be used, a national uniform approach using, for example, the World Health Organization definition of disability would be proposed
- The maintenance of such a model will continue to be pressured unless it has the capacity for constant upgrading and monitoring.
- A preferred approach would be based upon student needs and incorporate a rigorous monitoring of resourcing and outcomes

(a)(ii) the accuracy with which students' disability related needs are being assessed

- The focus of assessment remains largely directed to overcoming the disability as opposed to being directed towards the achievement of appropriate outcomes. As such the link between resource allocation based upon a medical model of deficit often masks the true student needs
- Often education authorities are preoccupied with assessments for the purposes of resource allocation rather than student outcomes.
- Professional preparation of teachers in universities neglects this area and the need for a re-skilling of existing personnel remains largely unaddressed
- Assessment of curriculum outcomes for students with disabilities remains neglected by education authorities and the curriculum reform documents and instruments being adopted are struggling to be truly inclusive

- The level of support to teachers of students with special needs through school psychologists (or equivalent personnel) has failed to keep pace with demand from students as it has to teachers of non-disabled students. This has occurred at a time when greater team processes and partnerships are required to underwrite student outcomes
- AFSEA's position to redress this situation would involve
 - the better utilisation of assessment instruments and processes,
 - the dedication to improve knowledge bases in teachers and other support professionals,
 - the integration of assessment with the full set of curriculum responses to achieve increasing standards of outcomes
 - a commitment to ensure that systems move beyond the rhetoric of inclusion and ensure that student assessment is given appropriate priority
 - the provision of Commonwealth incentives and resources to research and development in this area
 - a commitment to greater clarity of future post school needs as well as the present education needs

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

- The acceptance of the rights of all children to an education is no longer contested. It has meant however, that often the fact of enrolment alone has been assumed to be meeting educational need. The interaction of disabling conditions and the additional ecological factors as defined above, has not been fully understood or addressed
- Where there have been targeted programs, as in previous Commonwealth Equity and Social Justice programs, there has been cultural insensitivities and poorly targeted resources although intent has been admirable.

(a)(iv) the effectiveness and availability of early intervention programs

- International research has firmly established the efficacy and economic advantage of these programs for students with disabilities. The trend to reduce the level of teacher specialisation in the area of disability is putting this at risk. A combination of knowledge from the traditional fields of early childhood programs and disability in a team approach remains essential.
- The debate about which community service or government department has responsibility for these programs puts at risk the proven outcomes for early intervention if such programs are not universally available and quality assured from a professional knowledge base.
- AFSEA would advocate the immediate establishment of "full service/ wrap around" type of integrated programs based in the community, with education services adopting a lead agency role. This would set up structure to maximise access and reduce barriers for any students with a disability from the age of diagnosis. It would also create a seamlessness to underwrite smooth transitions at all points across the students' school pathways. Commonwealth

leadership and incentive in a framework of standards that all states and territories could develop would be necessary for this to routinely occur.

(a)(v) access to and adequacy of funding and support in both the public and private sectors

- The growing trend for service provision close the point of service delivery and the inherent discretionary decision making that often accompanies this has removed the guarantee of programs for students with a disability. This has been evolving as a response under the general rubric of the reconceptualisation of teaching and learning conditions in the twenty-first century. A concomitant growth in a trend towards “technical managerialism” by persons with no expectation to have precise knowledge or experience of the precise needs of this population of students with disabilities is emerging.
- Funding efficiency and capacity is being reduced by unnecessary layers of bureaucratic processes designed to limit or control access to services thus reducing the level of direct service to students
- Presently, government education services provide for the majority of students with disabilities. There is concern for the potential to produce unintended consequences should there be differential responsibilities and accountabilities between private and government provision. Anti discrimination laws by themselves are not a guarantee of appropriate access and support. Commonwealth led financial incentives and accountabilities are also required
- AFSEA would advocate that, as a premise, the education of students with disabilities has to be a “whole of society” responsibility in a social justice sense. It is therefore the role of the Commonwealth Government to either provide directly for this through resource allocation or take measures to guarantee that this occurs through a combination of incentives and sanctions.
- Adequate transparency does not presently exist to track the flow of resources in both the government and private sectors. AFSEA would advocate for the strengthening of accountabilities and for a framework of guidelines that is clear and unequivocal
- In a climate of school based management devolving to the local level, there must exist a guarantee of deployment of resources and the expectation of achievement of associated outcomes for students with disabilities in both private and government sectors.
- Notwithstanding the above point, any process, which does not add value to the delivery of services, should not continue.
- AFSEA would contend that, in view of a range of unmet needs across Australia states and territories, the level of government funding remains inadequate. AFSEA is mindful of the public and political perception of the relative high cost of services to the disabled population. The failure to adequately educate and train this population and prepare them for responsible participatory citizenship, however, is infinitely more expensive in the long term for our society. The need for statesmanship in political leadership transcending short term political advantage is overwhelming at this point in

history for education in general and education of this group of young people in particular.

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

- There has been a rapid reconsideration and reconceptualisation of the nature of learning and the environments and conditions under which learning for the future will occur. This has meant that such notions as “Integration, Mainstreaming, and Inclusion” may now be the wrong points of focus for the present and the future ideological debates. A flexible range of responsive options and variable pathways, which include ALL students, must be the feature of future teaching and learning.
- The management of the highly emotive issues surrounding education of students with disabilities require leadership to achieve a refocus on outcomes instead of obsession with the “place’ of learning, given these new understandings. AFSEA would advocate strongly for inclusion to the maximum extent possible of all students into society. To have this as an outcome, those students with disabilities will continue to require a particular set of interventions at all levels to facilitate this participation through authentic educational provision.
- It is clear that the establishment of national goals of schooling has not yet resulted in a curriculum focus that has met the needs of all students. The accommodation of the tensions of the twin demands for the recognition of the individual needs of all students and the need for levels of “outcomes in common” has not yet been made in a curriculum context. There is considerable variation in the curriculum expectations for students with disabilities across the nation although AFSEA recognises the intent and work in progress. Greater urgency is nonetheless required.
- AFSEA would advocate for Commonwealth led incentives through such actions as seeding grants for research and development in this critical area of inclusion for students with disabilities. State government systems have been withdrawing from a full commitment to research in this area and universities have not been encouraged in a market type economy to invest in research in an area with little or no obvious economic payoff potential. It is noted that the most recent legislation in the USA (‘No *Child Left Behind*’ Bill 2002) has restated the need for their system of public education to be “evidence led”.

(a)(vii) teacher training and professional development

- The demographics of the present teacher force with respect to those holding specific training in the area of disability is such that Australia faces a critical shortage in this area in the immediate and near future.
- This has been exacerbated by the perpetuation of the myth that specialisation of knowledge is no longer required in the face of inclusion movements and other similar philosophical influences.

- In the face of this perception of reduced need for such specialised knowledge, then, a generalist approach has been adopted in university training programs in which, although all teachers have to have some awareness of students with disabilities and special needs, the intense study and understanding of students with disabilities has been generally neglected. Additionally, the re-skilling and professional upgrading for the existing workforce in the disability area have also been neglected. Special education is a complicated field and generalities in this area are not meaningful without an appreciation of these complexities.
- Specific training for the facilitation of inclusive practices wherever they are manifest has also been neglected. There has been an array of simplistic tenets held about the assumptions of social inclusion and learning outcomes.
- The presence of students from newly emerging aetiologies, such as abused children or children suffering from the direct and indirect effects of substance abuse, has meant that there are increasingly complex patterns of learning and social behaviours to be addressed. These “new populations” also have students who are surviving previously fatal conditions due to advances in medical knowledge and practice.

(a)(viii) the legal implications and resource demands of current Commonwealth and states and territory legislation

- Whilst ASFEA would endorse the passage of much Commonwealth and state legislation in such areas as anti discrimination provision, the downside has seen a concern at the systemic level for compliance only as opposed to a commitment to ever increasing quality. Systems then are driven by what will keep them away from litigation and a belief that because there is a level of compliance that outcomes will automatically follow. AFSEA would argue that the necessary and sufficient conditions for successful student outcomes will not be achieved with this legal approach alone. The issues are much more complicated
- “Undue Hardship” provisions in a number of Acts have tended to weaken the spirit of the legislation.
- Despite the increasing predisposition to litigation in the community generally, legal challenges on behalf of persons with disabilities present severe barriers for all but the most empowered in the community. Many disabling conditions are often associated with the least empowered members of the community. Hence the capacity of the system to be monitored and influenced consistently by the development of case law is reduced.
- The recent New Zealand experience of a class action suit against the New Zealand government is, however, an action that requires the implications to be closely monitored.
- AFSEA would be concerned at the unintended, negative consequences of promoting parental choice yet at the same time promoting the ideologically driven option of local “neighbourhood school” as the only provision. This may have legal implications as well as an unsettling impact upon parents at times of great vulnerability.

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

The Commonwealth Government has an involvement with the following:-

- Facilitating uniformity of legislation and service delivery standards in a generic context
- Provision of philosophical leadership, involving adequate consultation to ensure that the area is as apolitical and bipartisan as possible
- Provision of resources to rejuvenate an ethos of research and development
- Provision of dedicated funds to ensure that there is an adequate data base concerning future provision of the workforce
- Professional preparation of teachers at two levels – a general level of understanding of the educational needs of students with disabilities and a second tier of expertise to underwrite the achievement of outcomes for students with disabilities that match their individual needs
- The facilitation of an integrated provision across all levels of Commonwealth government to enhance effectiveness and efficiency of service provision both at school and in the transition from school
- Ensuring that such programs as the quality teacher programs specifically include teachers of students with special needs
- Provision of leadership and resources to ensure the successful transition from school to post school in all its forms, but particularly in the vocational preparation area and the preparation for students to be life-long learners.
- Leadership with business and commerce to encourage a “vocational social conscience” so that meaningful work can be re-structured with more than an economic “bottom line”. This involves assistance to operationalise the “triple bottom line” concept.
- Research to identify successful school based models of leadership, which produces outcomes for students with disabilities as well as the non-disabled population. This leadership will involve models of interdependent leadership and shared leadership responsibility in ways yet to be determined by future research and development
- Parent education support programs including education and respite care provision.
- Application of sanctions to those states not meeting required levels of service provision.

Note: AFSEA would be of the view that, because of the relatively high costs of educational provision for students with disabilities, only through the combination of fiscal incentives and sanctions would states and territories be encouraged and empowered to go further than a minimalist provision.
- The provision of a national Clearinghouse for professionals and community members generally with an interest in the area of students with disabilities particularly in the areas of curriculum development, “leadership capital” technology and applied technology, and research. This must incorporate the advantages of developments in Information technology.

State and Territory governments have involvement with the following:-

- The constitutional responsibility to provide educational opportunities for all students with no exceptions through education services.

- The responsibility to deliver programs within a single general framework of national expectations and obligations
- Ensuring the adequate professional preparation of teachers for students with disabilities at a level that is designed to meet present and emerging educational need
- Co-ordination of all other relevant government services to achieve “full service sites” and thus to increase effectiveness and efficiencies for clients i.e. parents/carers as well as students with disabilities
- A contribution to a national level reference group to monitor the outcomes and research efforts into the provision of education students with disabilities.
- Provision of community based support mechanisms to ensure lifelong participation in employment, community life and further education and training

SUMMARY STATEMENT

Australia has a tradition of giving all a “fair go”. We are expecting renewed commitment from society generally, and from government services and professionals in particular, to achieve ever more ambitious goals. The present time is seen by AFSEA to be crucial with respect to persons with disabilities.

It will be “enlightened self interest” to ensure that all members of our society are increasingly included and not marginalised by conditions such as disability. Rhetoric, alone is not enough; it must be converted to reality.