

Timboon P-12 School

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Submission to the Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities

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Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to your inquiry.

Timboon P-12 School is a school of some 720 students in South West Victoria. We currently have fifteen students throughout the school who are receiving additional support under Disability and Impairment program. These students range in age from six to sixteen. As we have students at both primary and secondary level, we are particularly conscious of how new issues can emerge as a student moves through the school. My comments on assessment criteria refer to the educational needs questionnaire and eligibility criteria currently used in Victorian schools.

1. The criteria used to assess eligibility should take into account the age of the student particularly in the communication area. It appears to us that the descriptors used for the different levels in "Receptive Communication" are written to discriminate between levels of understanding for a child very early in their schooling. They are inadequate for students as they move into the secondary years where the level of receptive communication required for meaningful participation is far beyond "understands conversational speech".
2. Similarly in the "Expressive Communication" area, there is a big jump between "Age appropriate" (Level 1) and "Speech intelligible to familiar listeners" (Level 2). While this may be a sensible scale for a Prep child, it is not adequate as a scale assessing the expressive communication of secondary aged students.
3. Review of a student's needs must take into account the student's capacity to function without the additional support previously provided. For example, a student's challenging behaviour can sometimes be avoided by an Aide's ability to read sometimes subtle early warning signs and initiate diversionary strategies. If the effective support is provided for students who show challenging or excessive behaviour, it is going to diminish the frequency of the behaviour. However, in no way does this justify a reduction in the level of funding support.
4. The last year of primary schooling is not an appropriate time to conduct a review which may result in a student's level of funding being diminished. The transition into secondary is well recognised as one which many students find difficult. A review immediately prior to this transition introduces an additional uncertainty at precisely

the wrong time. It would be more appropriate for the review to occur at the end of year 7 or 8, once the student is established in the secondary environment. Students who have an intellectual or some physical disabilities experience additional difficulties in the more complex secondary environment compared with the more familiar and consistent primary setting.

5. We currently use the Vineland test as a screening test for children's general level of functioning. Teachers often find this a difficult test to respond to many of the questions, as they cover situations which are remote from the school setting. We would question whether is the most appropriate test to use for this purpose. I don't know if there is anything better.
6. The criteria for gaining funding under the "Severe language disorder" criteria require that the need for the child's low level of language skills cannot be accounted for by "hearing impairment, social emotional factors, low intellectual functioning or cultural factors. Students sometimes fail to obtain funding under "Severe language disorder" criterion because of low intellectual functioning; and then find themselves ineligible under the "Intellectual disability" criteria because they are slightly above the cut-off score on the relevant standard test. These student slip through the eligibility net and I would submit that many of these students really do need extra support. The level of need which the teacher and school are trying to meet, remains the same, regardless of the cause.
7. Ideally, support should be provided for all students who need it to enable their effective participation in the regular school, regardless of whether the student meets other eligibility criteria. The emphasis on deciding if additional support is needed, and if so, at what level, should be based primarily on the degree of educational need. Further, the level of funding provided should match the value of the additional demands made on the staff and school in providing the additional support needed for a student who has a disability.

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