

# **PACIFIC HILLS CHRISTIAN SCHOOL**

ABN 11 001 832 828

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## **SUBMISSION**

**TO**

## **SENATE INQUIRY**

**ON**

## **THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

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# OVERVIEW

## **PACIFIC HILLS has ...**

An established history of Christian

- Educational excellence
- Community and
- Integration of students with disabilities

From small beginnings in 1979 of 8 students and 1 teacher to now over 1200 students and 140 staff God has called many to ensure a distinctive servanthood community is present for the nurturing and teaching of young Australians to become global citizens.

## **OUR VISION is ...**

To provide a Christian educational community as a centre of teaching and learning excellence founded on Biblically based beliefs, values and behaviour.

## **OUR SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION...**

Has been to integrate disability students into normal classroom situations, while at the same time providing educational leadership in the Christian school movement. At present we have forty one students with disabilities that are integrated with our student enrolment of over 1200.

The community of Pacific Hills provides a comprehensive education programme for students of all abilities. As a co-educational school all students are encouraged to learn what it means to serve and be served and to understand the dynamics of compassion, grace and hope in an era of change, technological advances and broken family relationships.

As a member school of the Associations of Australian Christian Schools we support the recommendations made by this body.

# SUBMISSION BY TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Inquire into the education of students with disabilities, including learning disabilities, throughout all levels and sectors of education, with particular reference to:
  - (a) whether current policies and programs for students with disabilities are adequate to meet their education needs, including, but not limited to:
    - i) the criteria used to define disability and to differentiate between levels of handicap,

**Submission:** The criteria to define disability does not take into consideration how the child is performing in the classroom given prior teaching. A child may be labelled 'mild intellectual disability' but is performing in the 'moderate level of intellectual disability'. No consideration for this current performance is taken into consideration.

Students with disabilities should be categorised for funding purposes as severe, medium or mild.

- ii) the accuracy with which students' disability related needs are being assessed,

**Submission:** The accuracy of a students needs cannot be shown on an IQ score. We suggest some form of Curriculum Based Assessments, especially in the area of learning disabilities. Some students do not have a 'label' but educators know that they need help; we require a measure that takes into consideration children who are at risk educationally, for whom there is no 'label'.

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

**Submission:** Non-English speaking students who enter the school system after their initial school, and for whom they are not classified as new arrivals, and may still be in great need of language support, should be entitled to additional funding.

- iv) the effectiveness and availability of early intervention programs,

**Submission:** Students who attend "Prep" (Year 1 minus 2) at a non-government school cannot access early intervention funding or support. A student with disabilities whose parents wish them to attend part-time prep at the school to which they will attend are not entitled to any funding. However, funding is available at the pre-school and in Kindergarten. That is discriminating against the child with disabilities because he/she cannot access Prep due to lack of support whereas the non-disabled child can access Prep.

- v) access to and adequacy of funding and support in both the public and private sectors,

**Submission:** Pacific Hills from the beginning was established on the principle of providing students with a disability the opportunity of an education integrated with students with no disabilities.

**Buildings were designed and planned to accommodate disabilities. Ramps and lifts were installed, staff employed and resources purchased to specifically meet the special needs of integrated students. A student carers system is established to ensure students with disabilities are integrated socially.**

At sports carnivals participation is encouraged. For example blind students have a co-runner to assist in races and students in wheel chairs are enabled to participate in school dramas and musicals. Integrated students participate in yearly camps and expeditions.

3-4% of our student population have disabilities and Pacific Hills has established a high profile of caring for students with disabilities.

**Pacific Hills is NOT a Special School but its history of assisting families whose children have disabilities is SPECIAL.**

At Pacific Hills we have specialist teachers and resources to assist students with disabilities. Because of the higher teacher/student ratio required it HAS cost Pacific Hills between 2 and 3 million dollars more than if the students were in mainstream classes without specialist support.

Pacific Hills will continue to provide for these students irrespective of whether the Commonwealth or State Government recognises the great need to provide funding.

The consequence of Pacific Hills meeting what it believes is a social and educational responsibility of a caring community, is that overall provision of facilities has been significantly curtailed.

The New South Wales State Government provides no extra funding to non-government schools for students with disabilities. Since a significant number of parents who have children with disabilities choose Pacific Hills it is estimated this saves the State Government approximately \$500,000 - \$550,000 per year compared with educating them in a government school.

**THIS REVIEW SHOULD ADDRESS AS A FIRST PRIORITY THE PRESENT DISCRIMINATION AGAINST STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO CHOOSE NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLING.**

The Northern Territory, the smallest of the territories and States has recognised the needs of students with disabilities and funds \$3,700 per student per year.

We understand other States/Territories (Western Australia and Australian Capital Territory) have improved funding of students with disabilities, but as yet we do not have details. When we obtain information on funding levels we will provide details.

Funding of integrated students with disabilities in non-government schools should be linked to the AGSRC for primary and secondary schools according to the following index.

Severe	=	2.5 x AGSRC
Medium	=	2.0 x AGSRC
Mild	=	1.5 x AGSRC

This funding be in recognition of the increased staffing, facilities and resources needed to cater for the disabilities factor of students. The funding being additional to the normal stream of funding for non-government school students.

Further, students with a learning difficulty are not funded individually as per their level of need. Funding is available for reading and numeracy, but that is a general overall grant per school and does not take into consideration the particular needs of students that may need ‘fading’ funding, where a program may be necessary for a term and then monitored as the program is ‘faded’ out. We cannot apply (in the non-government sector) and receive funding for children who have a communication disability unless it is coupled with another disability. However, in another state, this is not the case. Why can a disability be recognised in one state and not another, when all states are accessing Commonwealth Money.

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

**Submission:** We are a school that fully integrates all students with disabilities. However, we are not given additional funds to support teachers in the classroom to deal with these additional responsibilities. The level of funding for a student with disabilities in a mainstream school as opposed to a special school is significantly different. This inequity between “Special Schools” and other Schools needs to be resolved. Pacific Hills with 41 children funded with Special needs is larger than many “Special Schools”, yet receives a miniscule portion of additional funding for these students.

- vii) teacher training and professional development, and

**Submission:** Teacher training and professional development needs to be on-going and mandatory. There needs to be targeted professional funding that is accredited to tertiary registration. Therefore a tertiary institution could deliver mandatory professional training for teachers already in the teaching service, at little cost to the teacher.

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

**Submission:** The proper role of the Commonwealth, states and territories should be to deliver funds that are equitable to both the non-government and government sector.

Pacific Hills strongly supports transparency and accountability of educational outcomes and utilisation of funds received in both the government and non-government schooling sectors.

For schooling to be removed from divisive public debate, processes such as registration, accreditation, educational and financial reporting need to be the same for both government and non-government schools.

Fairness and equity can be achieved if both capacity of parents to pay and level of resourcing of schools are components of our Commonwealth, State and Territory Government funding framework.

At the beginning of a new millennium when we are preparing our students to be members not only of the Australian community but also global citizens, it is an opportune time to implement a new funding framework that is fair, equitable, transparent and accountable.

We would like to invite the committee to visit Pacific Hills Christian School with a view to experiencing and seeing first hand the Special needs programs we are implementing, and to discuss our submission further. A visit can be arranged by contacting Mrs Judy Walker, Personal Assistant to the Principal on 02 9651 2733.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'EJ Boyce', with a small checkmark to the right.

Dr EJ Boyce OAM  
Principal