



**Cora Barclay Centre**  
for the deaf and hearing impaired

6 Garnet Street, Gilberton, SA, 5081  
Telephone: 8344 2924  
Facsimile: 8344 9255  
director@corabarclay.com.au

The Secretary,  
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations & Education Reference Committees  
Suite S1.61 Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
[eet.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:eet.sen@aph.gov.au)

Dear Secretary

Please find attached the Cora Barclay Centre submission to the “Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities”.

This submission has been written in consultation with the Cora Barclay Centre Advocacy Committee, which consists of me, and five parents of children who are deaf or hearing impaired.

Fundamental to the philosophy of the Cora Barclay Centre Advocacy Committee is that education for students with a disability must be family-centred, free, appropriate and consistent. Education for students with a disability must be culturally appropriate as determined by the student, family and carers. Access to the curriculum must not be dependent on partial and inadequate funding.

The Cora Barclay Centre Advocacy Committee respectfully request input into the inquiry in person so that members may express first hand concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jill Duncan  
Director

---

Providing the **choice** of **listening** and **speaking** for children who are deaf and hearing impaired through education, advocacy and family support.

## **SENATE INQUIRY INTO EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

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

The criteria used to define disability must be updated to meet the international standard. International definitions include criteria such as -

- loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function,
- any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being,
- a disadvantage, resulting from a disability that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal for that individual.

The differentiation between levels of handicap must also be updated to include the notion of “functionality”. Mild, moderate, severe, profound are typical terms used to describe the degree of the disability. However, the functional impact of a mild disability may be profound.

It is never acceptable to have a label attached to a person. A disability must be taken in total context of the individual’s ability to function in the individual’s culture of choice.

### ***ii) the accuracy with which students disability related needs are being assessed***

Student disability related needs are not currently being assessed in a systematic and objective manner. Ad hoc assessment is usually completed as a reaction to a perceived disaster. Sometimes this is the result of a student with a disability who has been denied access to the curriculum on a long-term basis. Sometimes it is the result of placing the child in an inclusive setting without appropriate and consistent support. Sometimes it is a result of a misdiagnosis of abilities that has occurred and stayed with the child’s historical records.

Student disability related needs are generally based on economic rationalisation and not on the student’s individual need. There is little or no evidence based decision-making taking place on a consistent basis.

Specific funding must be set-aside in an effort to research better methods of assessing and assigning levels of support for students with a disability. Little research money is available for this.

Parents must be fully involved in the decisions related to the assessment process.

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

Students in rural and remote areas are at risk because teachers in remote locations are not generally trained in the area of special education, intervention is rarely

consistent and appropriate and there is a lack of a case manager to coordinate the comprehensive intervention needs of the student with disability.

Parents are aware of the type and amount of direct intervention their children require. However, the present system is failing children with a disability, as this intervention is not available.

Children with disabilities are not fully accessing the curriculum. The only way of rectifying this discrimination is for parents to either pay for additional intervention or to do with out.

Parents are not consulted. Decisions about children with a disability in educational settings are being made with little or no input from parents, yet parents may often have more knowledge than those making decisions.

When major changes are introduced into the type of education and intervention available to students with a disability, little or no consultation is offered.

Parents of children who are deaf or hearing impaired in South Australia are restricted in the education choices available. For example, if a parent wants direct intervention from a qualified Teacher of the Deaf then the student must be enrolled in a non-government school so that a non-government organization can provide the intervention. This is wrong.

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

The funding mechanisms within South Australia are not fair and equitable. Some non-government organizations receive State and Commonwealth Education funding for students with disabilities. Some non-government organizations also receive State and Commonwealth Disability funding. These two separate sources of funding for students with a disability are not coordinated and are often based on historical precedent.

Student services are often a result of the non-government organisation's ability to attract funding and not the student's need.

**vii) teacher training and professional development**

There must be standard minimum competencies for both teachers working with students with a disability as well as school assistants who work with students with a disability. National minimum competencies do not exist. If the potential of every student with a disability is to be maximised then the person(s) educating that student must be adequately trained.

Teacher assistants must be required to go through training courses to receive certificates accrediting them with the knowledge, skills and ability to work with students with a disability.

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

The State of South Australia relies heavily on non-government organizations to provide support to students with a disability in the school context. Funding is supplemental. This is wrong. Education for all students must be free and appropriate. Access to the curriculum must not be dependent on partial and inadequate funding.

Legislation must specifically recognise the impact of early intervention on long-term educational outcomes. Early intervention must be within the scope of the Education Departments of Australia. Children with a disability from birth to the age of four must be included in the education process. Education of children with a disability does not begin at the age of four as it does with the education of children without a disability. This is not reflected in legislation.

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

The Commonwealth, State and Territories must work collaboratively to insure that children with a disability from diagnosis through to nineteen years of age receive a free, appropriate and consistent education specific to the individual needs and culture of the child and family.