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Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References  
Committee.

Inquiry into the education of Students with Disabilities.

With regard to the Terms of Reference.

Point 1 A:

- i) Criteria differences between the States and Territories needs to be addressed as this creates comparisons to the detriment of the students; in so much as the funding allocation and the percentage recognised can be used as a way to make funding cuts that have serious implications on the students learning and the school systems ability to support the student. For example the NT may have recognised that it is formally supporting a 20% level of students with disabilities whereas another state may formally recognise only 3%. In most of the literature that I have read during my studies it would appear that the percentage is more likely to be around 20%. Also the area of Gifted and Talented students needs to be recognised. Criteria must also be informed by a wide range of settings and this must include and value the knowledge and skills within the home and school settings and not just based on a 'professionals' viewpoint.
- ii) Accuracy of students needs must include the practical aspect of service delivery and availability of resources, as well as the long-term best interest for the student.
- iii) Rural/Remote: the main issue relates to basic access to enough trained personnel for students with disabilities. There is a tendency in areas such as the NT for there to be a shortage of personnel which in turn leads to extremely heavy caseloads that in turn has a negative effect in retaining personnel. In areas such as the NT the issues of travel and access also exacerbate regular access to trained personnel.
- iv) Early Intervention: whilst this is generally a positive direction, especially in the long term, we are now faced with minimal intervention for students out of the key years of Pre to year 3. This will have an increasingly negative impact on students' achievements in high schools as well as the ability of school staff to support these students. I am not advocating stopping this program, but that in order to more

completely prevent further escalation of behavioural and academic issues in the following years, one way may be to appoint a full time aide to all classes in the Transition to Year 3 which would allow for more support and intervention for not only students with disabilities but also the next level being students with cultural issues; English as a second language issues or students with remedial needs that could well be missed in the earlier years resurfacing in upper primary as behavioural issues. This would lead to better Early Intervention as well as Prevention happening.

- v) Access to funding and support: it would appear beneficial for all schools to have access to an in-school special education teacher to promote the identification and support of students as well as to support the school teachers.
- vi) Funding of programs: As there is not a never-ending funding bucket of money, flexibility and creative use of resources including Inclusion Support Assistants must be developed. In the school I work in, we pool our resources of personnel and money thereby allowing us to maximise support across the primary school for all our students. Some students do not 'fit within' the average class or curriculum and need the flexibility of extra time, adapted curriculum, support resources etc that allows recognition of what they are achieving. In NSW for example there is an alternative Year 11/12 syllabus developing the students academic and personal strengths and abilities but with curriculum and time adapted to their needs. An appropriate number of schooling places for students with severe needs must be available, this is particularly crucial at high school years, where they cannot 'fit' into mainstream systems; I have heard parents preferring placement in a 'special high school' rather than added onto a mainstream school that cannot catered for their child's needs across all areas.
- vii) Teacher & Professional training: It is critical that ALL trainee teachers be educated in catering for students with special needs be that a Disability or Giftedness. With the schooling system that is in place today every classroom has around 20% of the students who have either some form of disability or are gifted. Waiting to 'specialise' in the fourth year of the degree does not prepare the new teacher for the reality of the modern classroom. This in turn adds to the increased numbers of students failing and thinking this is all they are worth in their future life, leading to increased dependency on the unemployment benefit or worse to crime. Teachers themselves if they are truthful, also come under severe stress as they try to adapt to their students needs; that is if the teacher does not adopt an attitude that runs along the lines of 'That type of student should not be in a mainstream class'. At present there is a world-wide shortage of teachers, we need to help them survive and become excellent teachers by educating them before they meet the pressures of the class, especially as educational policy is that it is illegal to discriminate against students with disabilities and that

the system is to accept and provide appropriate educational programs for the student.

- viii) Legislation: As it is legislation that schools must not discriminate against students with disabilities and that schools must provide appropriate educational programs it is imperative that not only should the Commonwealth, state and territory legislation all match; but also then demands Commonwealth, state and territory resource this legislation accurately thereby enabling the schooling systems to fulfil the legislation requirements. Legislation also informs the criteria used to define disability and this must be recognised as overlapping with the other points.