

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION REFERENCES COMMITTEE

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(Name and address supplied)

This is my family's submission in response to seeing an article in our local paper on Saturday April 27th concerning your inquiry into education provision for students with disabilities. My first concern was that this was the first we had heard of it and submissions were due on the following Monday 27th which gave us 2 days to contact you. This is indicative of our time with our sons education, you either learn about things too late or not at all.

We live in Northern NSW on a farm. Our son attends the same school as his siblings and is in the regular class. He is now in his 3rd year. He has a disability and significant support needs. Last year we were forced to lodge a Formal complaint against his 2 teachers and the Principal because of their treatment of both our son and ourselves. We were told that if we didn't like what was happening there were other schools we could take our son to. Comments were passed that if we wanted him integrated then he could do the same as the other kids even though this was physically impossible for him. The Teachers Aid and my husband and myself were told we could not communicate with each other. Our son has virtually no speech and we use a communication book with professionals who work with him, his teacher refused to use it or let the teachers aid use it, thankfully this has been re established now. Our son although not deaf uses Auslan sign language to communicate, parents and children have all been wanting to learn it so they can communicate with our son, as it is they learn French so why not Auslan, opposition to this idea has been firmly put in place by certain teachers whom we thought would embrace it.

We have meetings each year to formulate the Individual Education Program for our son these are spent organising funding for the next year. This funding automatically drops 10% but our childs disability doesnt! Explain that to me! So every year the parent has to fill out a parent appeal. What of those parents who cannot write letters or whose school doesn't support them in the procedure? How are those children to manage? In my mind the problems are many and the victims again are the person with the disability. The IEP has never been completed and many times great ideas are written down but never used. My husband has stopped attending these meetings because of the waste of time and funding he sees happening. The forms we have filled in have changed each year and I'd like anyone to have a go at slotting your child into this and that box. We are told Physical gets more than Communication so concentrate on that more. It is demeaning and unrealistic because at the end of the day the funding is not going to be adequate and what little is allocated is mis-managed in my view.

Inadequate and mis- managed funding Our son needs a sign language interpreter. He is not eligible to have one as he is not deaf or hearing impaired. To communicate he uses a mixture of Auslan sign and his augmentative communication aid. If his teachers aid was working under the role statement of sign language interpreter he would be more adequately supported. We have been told that his teachers aids role is as a Teachers Aid Special and cannot be anything else. I feel that this is because the teacher can use the teachers aid in many different roles then even if our son is not being supported. The teachers aid is with other children while our son is trying to tell his news and in other times when he would have benifitted from having an interpreter there. The first 2 years the amount of times that I heard "Shes My Aid " from the teacher was ridiculous. Can you tell me why my child who's first language is Auslan cannot have a sign interpreter because he is not deaf or hearing impaired but speech impaired!

Personal views and discriminatory attitudes from some professional (ie there are places especially for people with disabilities regardless of the individuals right to choose)

Development and Training . Nowadays people training to go into education have to complete a special education componant but the problems we have encountered have come from those teachers who are already in the school and have had no training in this area. Having said that there are training modules in the schools that should have been implemented on special education but the staff either have no interest or refuse to do them

Training for educators and parents to work together. This is our third child to attend this school and being rural and only having 125 children we have had a great relationship with the staff until our son with a disability started school. We have encountered the most horrible times and our son has been exposed to the most obvious discrimination.

More support for the schools and teachers in how to work in a class with children who encompass many differing needs educationally. In our sons case if Auslan was taught to all the kids from when he started in kindergarten he would be a very different child than he is now where he has been made to feel out on his own with his mode of communication and his difference has been emphasised. An example of this while practising singing, the teacher told all 3 classes to look at her conducting except our son who was to look at the teachers aid who was signing the song!

My submission is very quickly written and I would have liked to have spent more time on it. This is an issue that has been extremely hard to handle since our son started school because it could have been such a different positive experience in my mind instead he has learnt discrimination to its fullest and his needs in so many areas have not been met which is only going to impact upon him later in life when he is entering the workforce etc. accessible education as do their peers. I dont think its right that on top of coping with having a disability you have all these obstacles thrown at you too. We should teach our society to nurture and respect difference. Why not deliver this inquiry to the senate in a different language without an interpreter and see how frustrated you all become because that is what happens to my son on a daily basis at school!

I hope something good comes from this inquiry.

Regards

Anonymous
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