

# Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee

## Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities

### Submission from Parents, The Glenleighden School,

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The Glenleighden School is an independent special school, in Queensland, for children with severe speech-language impairment (SLI). The parents of children at this school would like to contribute to the Senate Inquiry into the education of students with disabilities, from the point of view of clients of the currently unfashionable “special school.”

We have chosen the path of the special school because we believe that it offers our children, with their severe disability, the best chance to master their disability and to learn.

Speech-language impairment is less understood than other disabilities such as deafness or blindness in which successful techniques in education have long been established and adapted for use in the mainstream schools. This is not the case for speech-language impairment in which the student’s major difficulty is understanding language and communicating effectively. A document on the website of the Commonwealth Government Department of Education, Employment and Training states that an effective classroom is a “language rich classroom” (Dr J Elkins). These children can not receive the benefits of such a classroom because of their inability to use language. SLI has been included as a category for ascertainment in Education Queensland only since 1998 and programs to effectively teach children with SLI in mainstream schools are recent.

In contrast, SLI is well recognized in the USA and the United Kingdom. The Glenleighden School was established twenty years ago to teach children with SLI in a specialized setting with a multidisciplinary focus on education and therapy to maximize the child’s potential. Twelve such schools exist in the UK, but The Glenleighden School is the only such school in Australia.

We have chosen this school because of its demonstrated record of success in teaching of children like our own.

Many of our children have been in mainstream settings and failed. It is important that we convey the relief and gratitude that the families of these students feel when we found our way, by circuitous routes, to this school. The disability is understood and all facets of the program are designed to ensure that the child can learn despite the disability. It is a highly structured environment which provides the children with the order and security that allows them to focus on learning. This order can not be imposed in the mainstream because of the range and numbers of children.

Our children have been bewildered in the mainstream. They have been anxious, depressed and isolated. As young children, they are either the helpless class pet or the naughty child reviled by the class for interfering with its function. As older children, they withdraw or continue this disruptive behaviour.

This is a devastating disability with demonstrably poor long term outcomes in education and social integration. Mainstream education has not to date provided the successful outcomes that we so desperately seek for our children.

TGS supports the principle of inclusion in mainstream education when the child has acquired the necessary skills to be able to cope. We strongly endorse the work of this “special school” in seeking to provide our children with these skills.

**We urge the inquiry to consider two principles regarding the education of a child with a disability –**

- 1. the right of a child to an education that addresses his needs**
- 2. the right of a parent to choice in the education of their child.**

**We have chosen TGS, a special school, over a mainstream setting, because it best addresses our children’s needs.**