

## **ADVOCACY ACTION INC**

*“systemic advocacy to improve life for people who have a disability”*

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**Submission on behalf of**

**ADVOCACY ACTION Inc**

**to the**

**SENATE EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION  
REFERENCE COMMITTEE**

**Re Inquiry into Education of Students with Disabilities**

Advocacy Action Inc is a small community organisation. Our goal is to arrive at a point where community includes all people with disabilities as valued members. In order to do this diversity must be celebrated, segregation not accepted and genuine relationships considered paramount. Advocacy Action Inc works to secure systemic change that will result in inclusion for people with disabilities and the subsequent strengthening on community.

In keeping with this goal Advocacy Action Inc seeks an inclusive education for all children with disabilities. This is a goal that has been achieved in other dominions throughout the world. We seek this opportunity for all children with disabilities in the ACT.

### **Terms of Reference**

#### **(1)(a)(i)**

A major issue arises when a child's educational needs are coloured by a definition of disability and mechanisms that differentiate between levels of disabilities. By their very nature, these practices place focus on the deficits of the child. There is a resultant stigmatisation, categorisation and development of expectations based on a whole range of false and antiquated assumptions. Like all other children, educational outcomes will only be achieved for children with disabilities when the focus is placed on the supports that are

required to meet their individual learning requirements. This means moving away from traditional mechanisms of assessment.

**(1)(a)(ii)**

Currently the ACT Department of Education and Community Services is considering a mechanism to determine the needs of school children with disabilities. This is an issue that has been pursued for the past six years. During that time we have learnt that there are different ways of considering needs of school children with disabilities being used in Australia. Parents of students have rejected the majority of these strategies. It is clear that positive strategies are being used in other domains. In the United Kingdom the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice operates positively to strengthen the rights for access the mainstream education and increases involvement of the student and their parents in decision making processes. In addition, the UK education planning tool (Individual Education Plan) focuses on augmenting the curriculum goals of students with disabilities. These positive practices are significantly different from those practiced in Australia.

**(1)(a)(iii)**

In an educational system that focussed on providing access and support based on individual educational needs issues such as a students socio-economic status, language, location or Indigenous background become irrelevant. They become another individual need that must be addressed in order for the child to secure educational outcomes.

**(1)(a)(v)**

It is paradoxical that the Education Standards of the Disability Discrimination Act serve to restrict access and appropriate support for many students with disabilities. Indeed the draft standards promoted extensive “lawful” discrimination and exclusion for students with disabilities. Concepts such as “unjustifiable hardship” and “reasonable adjustment” have recently been used to exclude a child in the ACT from their rightful access and support. This is a dire situation and urgently needs to be addressed.

**(1)(a)(vi)**

In 1999 a national study of inclusive education was conducted. The study was part of an international report card put together by UNESCO. All States and Territories rated very low on curricular inclusion. There is no evidence to suggest that this situation has improved. The anecdotal evidence strongly supports the fact that students with disabilities are not well included in curricular pursuits. Indeed the culture often implies that this is an unrealistic expectation for children with disabilities. This is a common issue across Australia.

**(1)(a)(vii)**

Educational staff are not prepared to deal well with inclusive education for children with disabilities. Many staff have concerns that they do not have the skills to deal with a child with a disability in their classroom, let alone provide an educational program for that child. This issue must be addressed before educational inclusion will become a reality for students with disabilities.

I hope that the concerns that have been raised will be considered in the Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities. There has not been an extensive investigation of each issue in the submission. However, each issue is a major systemic concern that has a negative impact on the appropriate education of all children with disabilities.

Jacque Ford  
Advocate

