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Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Reference Committee
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Dear Ms Fileman

Thank you for your email to me on Monday 8 July 2002 requesting additional information on educational policies and procedures for students with disabilities and learning difficulties in Western Australian government schools.

I have pleasure in enclosing the supporting documentation.

I wish you every success with the Inquiry and I look forward to reading your report in due course.

Yours sincerely

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A/ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
STUDENT SERVICES

Att

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee

Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities

Submission from

Department of Education, Western Australia

July 2002



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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. This submission is in response to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee's inquiry into the education of students with disabilities. The intention is to address the Terms of Reference in the context of the Department of Education of Western Australia.

2. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, WESTERN AUSTRALIA: CONTEXT AND STRATEGIC APPROACH TO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

- 2.1. In April 2001, the Western Australian Minister for Education announced that the Department of Education would undertake a comprehensive state-wide review of educational services for students with disabilities in Western Australian government schools. The purpose of the Review was to enable the Department to ensure that the educational needs of students with disabilities are met through the provision of appropriate, effective and efficient services, resources and facilities.
- 2.2. Phase One of the Western Australian Review is completed and was reported on in *The Review of Educational Services for Students with Disabilities in Government Schools, Discussion Paper (December 2001)*.
- 2.3. The Review Team was guided by the Objects of the *Western Australian Act 1999* and the *Curriculum Framework (1998)*. Information was gathered through:
 - request for public submissions (over 250 responses from a broad range of stakeholders were received);
 - collection of information from key stakeholders; and
 - contracting by the Department of a consultancy group to undertake independent consultation with community members, special interest groups and school based personnel from a range of educational settings.

Six broad issues were identified and summarised as:

- Clear information during the enrolment process, coupled with the ability of parents to choose the form of education that best suits their child's needs, will support an accessible and inclusive education system. These processes will be flexible enough to enable smooth transition during schooling.
- Parents of a child with a disability will have the opportunity to make a genuine choice of enrolment with necessary adjustments to support optimal participation.
- Inclusive schools will be supported by the development of educational leadership and teaching that recognises diversity and ensures full acceptance and participation of all students.
- Schools will make informed decisions to support enhanced student learning outcomes using a collaborative approach. Whole school approaches and frameworks are designed to support all students with special educational needs.

Changes to students' programs are based on local decisions and a documented educational program.

- Development of a new funding model is proposed that is supported by an allocative mechanism based on students' learning needs. Schools will be supported in the flexible use of resources.
 - Services that are more co-ordinated, flexible and responsive to individual student needs are needed to ensure enhanced educational outcomes. Services provided by the Department and others will be based on strong collaborative partnerships to yield the best results. Partnerships and protocols are to be formed locally or at a system level.
- 2.4. Principles and indicators were developed which describe the characteristics of an education system that will deliver quality services and supports for students with educational impairments.

Principle 1

Providing access and participation

Students with disabilities have the right to enrol and participate on the same basis as other students.

Clear information during the enrolment process, coupled with the ability of parents to choose the form of education that best suits their child's needs, will support an accessible and inclusive education system.

The principle is visible in practice when:

- the right of students with disabilities to be enrolled on the same basis as other students is recognised;
- students with disabilities participate in an appropriate range of learning environments;
- parents are partners in all aspects of the education process;
- information about schooling options and the range of services is inclusive and accessible to allow for informed parental choice;
- enrolment procedures are collaborative, transparent and consistently applied; and
- effective transitions are made during all phases of schooling.

Principle 2

Supporting inclusive schools

All levels of the system value diversity and operate within an inclusive framework

Inclusive schools will be supported by the development of educational leadership and teaching that recognises diversity and ensures full acceptance and participation of all students.

This principle is visible in practice when:

- school communities value diversity;
- educators have the awareness and confidence to support students with special educational needs;
- educational leaders take a proactive role in advocating and ensuring equity for all students; and
- schools develop and adopt inclusive pedagogical and cultural practices.

Principle 3

Ensuring local decisions and adjustments

A range of effective and appropriate adjustments is provided to ensure access, participation and achievement.

Schools will make informed decisions to support enhanced student learning outcomes using a collaborative approach. Whole school approaches and frameworks support all students with disabilities in the context of students with special educational needs. Changes to students' programs are based on local decisions and a documented educational program.

This principle is visible in practice when:

- adjustments are informed through collaboration with parents and other relevant stakeholders;
- students' views are sought and are reflected in the educational program;
- adjustments are made at the whole school, classroom and individual levels. These adjustments are regularly monitored and reviewed;
- decisions about adjustments are made, where possible, at the local level;
- adjustments are culturally sensitive and minimise discrimination; and
- adjustments are recorded within a documented educational program as part of a broader accountability framework.

Principle 4

Implementing a new framework for resource allocation

Adjustments are provided on a needs basis and are equitably resourced.

Development of a new funding model is proposed. Supported by an allocative mechanism based on students' learning needs, the model will better provide for all students with disabilities in the context of students with special educational needs. Schools will be supported in the flexible use of resources.

This principle is visible in practice when:

- a consistent and co-ordinated system-wide procedure for the identification of students with special needs is in place;
- all stakeholders contribute to the identification and assessment of students' learning needs;
- a needs-based allocative mechanism provides resourcing for appropriate adjustments;
- schools are supported to be flexible in planning and implementing appropriate programs for students with special educational needs; and
- schools demonstrate accountability in the use of allocated resources.

Principle 5

Matching pedagogy with student needs

The system supports the development of pedagogy to meet individual student needs.

The continuous improvement of teaching and learning practice is identified as the most effective strategy for enhancing outcomes for students with disabilities in the context of students with special needs.

This principle is visible in practice when:

- evidence-based, effective models of teaching and learning for all students with disabilities are identified, promoted and implemented;
- benchmarks for effective teaching and learning practices are identified, promoted and implemented throughout the system;
- implementation and ongoing evaluation of effective teaching and learning practices are supported by the system; and
- partnerships with training providers are formed to ensure best quality pre-service and in-service training.

Principle 6

Delivering responsive services

The range of co-ordinated services provided is flexible and delivered according to student needs.

Students' individual needs will be addressed by flexible and responsive services.

This principle is visible in practice when:

- individual student needs are identified and responded to through a range of co-ordinated services and supports;
- support services respond to local school community contexts;
- school-based interventions are implemented as early as possible;
- services and supports are reviewed regularly to acknowledge changing school community and student needs; and
- system initiatives are monitored and reviewed.

Principle 7

Collaborating for better outcomes

Services are provided and supported by collaborative models and partnerships.

*Services based on strong collaborative partnerships yield the best results.
Partnerships may be formed between service providers locally or at system level.*

This principle is visible in practice when:

- service providers and staff work together to create seamless service delivery to students;
- schools engage in collaborative models to ensure effective response to student needs;
- collaborative partnerships define responsibilities and expectations that are monitored and reviewed; and

- protocols between service providers and the Department are ratified at the system level.
- 2.5 Working parties focussed on each principle are meeting and recommendations for the final report for the Review are due for completion by the end of September 2002. Recommendations will cover enrolments, the development of inclusive schools, provision of appropriate adjustments for students with disabilities, development of allocative mechanisms for both targeted and differential funding, professional development and support for all teachers to assist them to provide more appropriate programs for students with special educational needs and interagency cooperation.
- 2.6 It is anticipated that the full impact of the Review will not be realised until 2005.

3. RESPONSES TO SENATE INQUIRY TERMS OF REFERENCE

3.1. The criteria used to define disability and to differentiate between levels of handicap

3.1.1 The Department currently defines disability in line with *The School Education Act 1999* in which disability is defined as a condition

- (a) which is attributable to an intellectual, psychiatric, cognitive, neurological, sensory or physical impairment or a combination of these impairments;
- (b) which is permanent or likely to be permanent;
- (c) which may or may not be of a chronic or episodic nature; and
- (d) which results in:
 - (i) a substantially reduced capacity of the person for communication, social interaction, learning or mobility; and
 - (ii) a need for continuing support services.

3.1.2 Differentiation of level of handicap and placement decisions is further guided by The Department of Education **Enrolment Policy**. In part this states:

Under the *School Education Act 1999* children are not compelled to enrol in a particular school. Although the Act is premised on parents/guardians having a choice of schools, the underlying principle is that no child should be denied access to his or her local neighbourhood school.

The Act provides for two types of schools: local-intake schools and non-local-intake schools. When it is under enrolment pressure a school can be declared to be a local-intake school by establishing a local-intake area for the school. Then, all compulsory-aged children who live in the local-intake area are guaranteed enrolment if there is an appropriate educational program for them at the school. If the Principal determines that there is no appropriate educational program available for the child at the school, it is the Principal's responsibility to facilitate the child's enrolment at an appropriate school. For children with an intellectual disability, this will occur by referring them to the district placement committee through the school psychologist.

Local-intake areas **do not** apply to pre and post-compulsory children. All eligible pre-compulsory children are guaranteed a place in a pre-compulsory program at a government school as near as possible to their home, although not necessarily at their local school. Kindergarten children may be accommodated at a community kindergarten. All pre-compulsory children, regardless of the degree or type of disability, are eligible for placement in regular mainstream pre-compulsory programs.

Schools offering post-compulsory programs will need to ensure that they have sufficient classroom accommodation to meet the needs of post-compulsory students enrolled at the school. This may require schools to rationalise their programs in Year 11 in order for class sizes to be viable in Years 11 and 12.

The enrolment of a child at a government school, regardless of whether it is a local-intake school or a non-local-intake school, is dependent upon the availability of an appropriate educational program for the child.

Appropriate educational programs are defined as those which:

- maximise each child's life opportunities, according to their abilities, interests and potential through the planned implementation of an outcomes focussed approach to learning and teaching devised in accordance with the Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 Education in Western Australia (Curriculum Council 1998);
- they reflect the rights of a child to education as expressed in international conventions to which Australia is signatory; and
- for students with a disability must take account of reasonable adjustment of what is appropriate in a given situation and does not oblige the Department to provide adjustments which would impose unjustifiable hardship.

*Department of Education
Enrolment Policy 2001*

3.1.3 Definition and differentiation of disability comes under most focus when parents or school personnel seek alternative placement or access to special funding to assist students. District placement committees receive referrals on or after enrolment and usually identify processes, which involve assessment by a school psychologist. This almost invariably involves an intelligence assessment. Other information areas reviewed may include; school achievement information, current individual educational planning, any conditions which may effect learning or health and safety at school, any therapy, agency or medical services currently or previously utilised and any current medication.

3.1.4 As a consequence of historical policies and programs approximately 3% of the student population is currently defined as having a disability enabling them to access targeted funds.

Table 1 - Total number of students with disabilities across education levels (2001)

Education Level	Individual Disability Type	Individual Gender	Value	
Pre-Primary	Autism	Female	20	
		Male	80	
	Hearing Disability	Female	40	
		Male	41	
	Intellectual Disability	Female	74	
		Male	155	
	Language Disability	Female	52	
		Male	173	
	Physical Disability	Female	40	
		Male	68	
	Visual Disability	Female	17	
		Male	14	
	Primary	Autism	Female	50
			Male	297
Hearing Disability		Female	174	
		Male	203	
Intellectual Disability		Female	1007	
		Male	1760	
Language Disability		Female	186	
		Male	542	
Physical Disability		Female	265	
		Male	375	
Visual Disability		Female	111	
		Male	146	
Secondary		Autism	Female	29
			Male	84
	Hearing Disability	Female	152	
		Male	158	
	Intellectual Disability	Female	664	
		Male	1016	
	Language Disability	Female	14	
		Male	22	
	Physical Disability	Female	191	
		Male	242	
Visual Disability	Female	179		
	Male	172		

Table 2 - Total number of students with disabilities (2001)

Individual Disability Types	Value
Autism	560
Hearing Disability	768
Intellectual Disability	4676
Language Disability	989
Physical Disability	1181
Visual Disability	639
Total	8813

The majority of students with disabilities attend their local mainstream school and are supported by a state-wide visiting teacher service from the Centre for Inclusive Schooling. The percentage proportion of students with disabilities relative to the whole state school student population is 3.31%; of this percentage, 1.5%-2.0% of students with disabilities are educated in mainstream schools. The average cost per student of educating a student with disabilities in a mainstream school is \$14,500. There are additional services provided which would add to this cost.

Students with intellectual disabilities residing in the metropolitan area and larger country towns are required to enrol in an education support school, centre or unit. Students with intellectual disabilities in remote and smaller rural locations where there are no education support facilities within reasonable travelling distance attend their local mainstream school with support from the local district education office and the Centre for Inclusive Schooling. The majority of parents of students with an intellectual disability who are offered a place in an education support facility take up this placement. A number of parents of students with disabilities however, have approached the Department of Education seeking placement of their child in a regular school. In response to this demand, the Government has provided an additional placement option for a limited number of students with intellectual disabilities.

Education support schools, centres and units

The present options for placement of students with intellectual disabilities are education support schools, centres and units. The percentage proportion of students with disabilities relative to the whole state school student population in special schools, centres and units is 1.5%. The average cost of educating a student with disabilities in a special school is \$26,000.

Education support schools generally cater for students whose level of disability are such that their needs can only be met with intensive medical and therapy support.

Table 3

2001	Facilities	Students
Education Support Schools	10	883

Education support centres are located on regular school campuses and generally cater for students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities. Partner schools provide opportunities for integration in mainstream classes whenever possible.

Table 4

2001	Facilities	Students
Education Support Centres	51 centres	2153

Education support units are classes located in mainstream primary and secondary schools and generally cater for students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities.

Table 5

2001	Facilities	Students
Education Support Units	105 units	Approx 1100 students

Students with autism

Students with autism who also have an intellectual disability attend an education support school, centre or unit. The Department of Education has established two withdrawal programs for pre-primary aged students with autism who will attend mainstream schools after completing the program.

Students who are deaf and hard of hearing

The majority of students who are deaf or hard of hearing attend mainstream schools. A small number of students attend specialised schools for the deaf. The Cottesloe School for Children with Hearing Impairments provides oral education for 28 primary-aged hearing-impaired students. Units at Melville, John Forrest and Belmont Senior High Schools provide similar services to secondary aged students. The Mosman Park School for Deaf Children caters for 23 pre-primary and primary-aged students using Auslan signed communication. Shenton College Deaf Education Centre provides both aural and signed communication programs for secondary aged students.

The WA Institute for Deaf Education coordinates the provision of statewide services to all deaf and hard of hearing students. Students who are deaf or hard of hearing are supported by a visiting teacher service.

Students with a vision impairment

Students who have a vision impairment attend their local school and are supported with specialised resources and visiting teacher support from the Vision Impairment Service.

Students with physical disabilities

The Centre for Inclusive Schooling provides support in the form of visiting teachers to students with physical disabilities who attend their regular school. Specialised equipment, building modifications and professional development were provided to staff involved in the education of these students.

Additional Services and Supports

The Department also provides a range of services for low incidence students with disabilities with high support needs.

Students who are deafblind

Students who are deafblind present unique educational needs to the Department's service delivery systems in terms of the heterogeneous nature of their dual sensory impairments and the complexity of design and delivery of effective education programs. In collaboration with the Western Australian Deaf Blind Association, the Department employs a deafblind consultant to coordinate the program and to coordinate service provision for students in government and non-government schools who are deafblind.

Students with medical and psychiatric conditions

The Hospital School Service, which incorporates Princess Margaret Hospital School, Royal Perth Hospital School, Stubbs Terrace and Grevillea House Psychiatric Units, Bentley Hospital Psychiatric Unit, Andrew Relph School and Boordhaark Visiting Teacher Service, provides services to hospitalised students and secondary-aged students with significant psychiatric and behavioural disorders.

Students experiencing difficulty with Learning- low support needs

Students experiencing difficulty with speech and learning.

A comprehensive Speech and Language Strategy that addresses the needs of the full spectrum of students with speech and language difficulties and impairments has been implemented across the state. The Strategy details provision of services in mainstream classes through to access to specialised services and support.

Students with learning difficulties

A Learning Difficulties Service, which operates from the Centre for Inclusive Schooling, provides statewide services to districts and schools to support students with learning difficulties in mainstream schools. A Perth-based team of five support officers supports the implementation of the Curriculum Improvement Program (CIP) and the *Making the Difference* Strategy with a focus on students experiencing difficulty with learning. Other support officers located in Schools of the Air provide support to home tutors who are providing programs for students in remote locations experiencing difficulty with learning.

The sustained and intense activity associated with the Curriculum Improvement Plan has seen a refocusing on teaching and learning strategies which are more likely to enhance the educational outcomes of all mainstream students across the diversity of students that mainstream entails. The CIP focus on student centred learning, the Principles of Teaching and Learning and the agreed values create a climate and professional practice which supports the provision of services to meet the special educational needs of students with disabilities.

3.2 The accuracy with which students' disability related needs are being assessed

3.2.1 *The Review of Educational Services for Students with Disabilities in Government School, Discussion Paper December 2001* seeks to move

system orientation from category based assessments to assessments of educational need. The changing legislative and strategic frameworks that commenced significantly in Western Australia with *Better Schools* in 1987 have led to a degree of devolution including the local management of education support placements. This has increased the likelihood of key stakeholders, collaborating in the needs assessment and educational planning for students' with disabilities. Assessments are now most likely to be a result of collaborative processes involving service providers from a range of disciplines, parents and or caregivers and community special interest and support groups.

- 3.2.2 Research into the accuracy with which students' disability related educational needs are assessed is developing. Our Department is currently working in collaboration with the Western Australian Institute for Child Health Research and anticipates some significant research will be published in the near future.
- 3.2.3 Intuitively, there is concern about the accuracy with which students' disability related needs are being assessed where the student is from non-English speaking, Indigenous or low socio-economic background. It is likely, for example, that Indigenous students are disproportionately represented in the population of students identified with an intellectual disability.
- 3.2.4 Currently, funding for students with intellectual disabilities is linked to the provision of services as an identified education support student. Consequently, it is likely there is some bias towards the identification of students with an intellectual disability and away from students with other disabilities with less direct and transparent funding and service provision mechanisms.
- 3.2.5 It is significant that in 2001 Western Australia identified, for Commonwealth funding, the smallest percentage of students' with disabilities in government education of all the states and territories. This figure has remained relatively constant at least since 1997, while other states have shown increases. With the changing state, national and international context it is anticipated that this figure will increase.

3.3 The particular needs of students with disabilities from low socio-economic, non-English speaking and Indigenous backgrounds and from rural and remote areas

- 3.3.1 The impetus for *The Review of Educational Services for Students with Disabilities in Government Schools* was in part from the pressure towards inclusion of diverse groups of students and the formalising of this direction in *The School Education Act 1999*. The principles already identified in the Review will enable the Department to better meet the needs of students with disabilities and ensure that barriers to successful inclusive practice are minimised.

- 3.3.2 A substantial body of research suggests that students from low socio economic and Indigenous backgrounds experience less favourable life outcomes in health and education. Other research is unequivocal in indicating that people with disabilities also experience less favourable outcomes in these areas. This suggests a concept of double disadvantage.
- 3.3.3 The *Schooling in Rural Western Australia Report, 1994* reviewed whether there were differences in school performance among rural and metropolitan students. No major differences, which could be attributed to school location, were found across the compulsory years of schooling. Analysis of Tertiary Entrance Scores demonstrated that some students were disadvantaged, but not because they attend schools in rural and remote areas, but because of social and economic characteristics of their families and communities. This, and other research highlights the pervasive negative effect of low socio-economic status on health and education outcomes across diverse groups.
- 3.3.4 The publication by the Disability Services Commission of Western Australia of a profile of disability in Western Australia and the Department's information on the distribution by Postcode of students with disabilities, together with the ABS data, provides an opportunity to substantively map current numbers and projected growth of students with disabilities. This would include information on Indigenous students, students from low socio economic and non-English speaking backgrounds and rural and remote areas. Only a small percentage of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds will present with learning difficulties or disabilities that require specialist intervention.
- 3.3.5 In the context of the provision of services for students from non-English speaking backgrounds, the Department recognises that during the process of second language/dialect acquisition learners often demonstrate language patterns and behaviours that may cause teachers concern. The emergent language patterns are normal and a highly regular component of the second language/dialect acquisition process, which may take up to 7 – 12 years. Student learning behaviours, particularly in the initial stages after newly arriving in Australia or starting school for the first time, may be inappropriate to the Australian classroom-learning context. These diverse patterns of language and behaviour may result in misdiagnosis of students' ability and development leading to inappropriate responses. To avoid inappropriate, ineffective and even harmful program interventions, all judgments about culturally and linguistically diverse learners development and achievement are undertaken in the context of second language/dialect acquisition processes and the student's background experiences (eg. their migration experience, previous schooling experiences and cultural background). This is achieved by the use of ESL/ESD assessment materials (ESL Scales, ESL Bandscales) and/or by seeking the advice of ESL/ESD specialist professionals.

3.3.6 Western Australia covers nearly one-third of the entire Australian continent. There are approximately 250,000 students in Government schools who may live anywhere in this area. The provision of services to small populations, an often-individual student with high needs, presents significant resourcing and operational challenges. The specific location of these students may often also change. These challenges are shared by other Government agencies involved in supporting students with disabilities. They may result in less available, less sophisticated and reliable support. Special programs which require a critical mass of students and high level employee skills are most easily supported in the metropolitan area and may prove practically impossible to establish and maintain in rural and remote areas even if there were no significant funding constraints.

3.4 The effectiveness and availability of early intervention programs

3.4.1 The provision of early intervention services has been shown to have long-term benefits for the individual and communities. Research to this effect has influenced the provision of educational services in Western Australia since the late 1970s. Resourcing dilemmas arise in the context of policy that relate to the extent of provision of services outside the compulsory years of schooling and the interface with services provided by other State and Commonwealth Agencies. Submissions to our Review highlighted community and professional endorsement of early intervention and it is anticipated that final recommendations will strengthen our Department's already firm commitment to enhancing outcomes for students with special educational needs with strategic early intervention programs.

3.4.2 The commitment to all government school students was enshrined in our 1998 Plan for Government School Education and made explicit the need for the continuing development to support the inclusion of the diverse range of students in our state. The *Curriculum Improvement Program* promotes the acceptance of a diverse range of students in regular classrooms and supports education practitioners to develop skills and attitudes to support inclusion. It explicitly promotes inclusive pedagogy. The *Making the Difference - Students at Educational Risk Strategy* includes policy, guidelines, resources and programs to assist schools and education districts to address the needs and issues for students at educational risk K–12. This strategy focuses on early identification and intervention and promotes prevention.

3.4.3 Vision Impairment Service

- The Department of Education has a long-standing commitment to provide support for parents of children with a sensory loss and to develop the crucial areas of early literacy and numeracy. Currently the state-wide Vision Impairment Service is supporting 20 very young children and their families by home visiting to model appropriate interactions and literacy and numeracy experiences, to provide relevant information about the eye conditions and to act as a support and

advocate at specialist appointments. An additional 25 children are being supported at their local kindergarten and pre-primary.

3.4.4 **Early Intervention Services for students with speech and hearing difficulties**

- Resources have been developed to assist classroom teachers with early intervention for children in the early years with speech and hearing difficulties. These resources include the *Literacy Net*, *Do You Hear What I Hear? Resource Package*, *Time for Talk* and *Kids Talk*. professional support to assist classroom teachers with early identification and intervention for students K–12 are available from the Centre for Inclusive Education. These services include support from the Learning Difficulties and Speech and Language Outreach Teams.
- The Western Australia Conductive Hearing Loss/Otitis Media Strategy addresses the educational issues associated with conductive hearing loss for children 0–8. These initiatives include guidelines, interagency collaborative research, the production and dissemination of resources and classroom sound field amplification.
- The National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy for Conductive Hearing Loss includes initiatives for children 0–8 that focus on assessment and intervention, research, screening, referral and medical intervention, family and community education, improving classroom teaching practice, building partnerships and intensive tuition to fast track literacy and numeracy development.
- The Department has five metropolitan Language Development Centres in the metropolitan area that provide intensive early intervention programs for eligible students K–4 with speech and language impairment.
- A Speech and Language Outreach Service has been established to provide professional support to classroom teachers and district teams for students K–4 with speech and language impairment. These services operate through the local Education District and will be fully operational by 2004.
- Some education districts and schools have established early intervention and prevention programs for children with speech and language difficulties K-3. Many of these have been collaboratively developed with local Department of Health Speech Pathologists eg Peel Oral Language Program.

3.4.5 **Students who are deaf or hard of hearing**

- The Department provides a statewide co-ordinated service for children who are deaf and hard of hearing through the WA Institute for Deaf Education. The Institute through a multi-campus approach aims to make available a comprehensive range of educational services from the

age of diagnosis (eg. as young as three months of age) through to the end of high school.

- The following programs assist and support the parents of deaf and hard of hearing infants and pre-compulsory schooling age students.
- Spoken Language Programs for Infants and Children aged 0-3 years - the Early Intervention Centre provides an Auditory-Oral early intervention program for children aged 0-6 years and aims to equip children with the skills that will enable them to integrate into their local pre-school or pre-primary setting.
- The Playgroup Program - for children aged 0 to 3 years offers two half days per week and incorporates an individual language and Parent Guidance session with a Teacher of the Deaf, combined with stimulating activities available in the playgroup.
- Home visits by a Visiting Teacher of the Deaf are offered to families with children in the 0 to 3 years age group who are unable to attend the EIC Playgroup program.
- Spoken Language Programs for Infants and Children aged 4-6 years - the Early Intervention Centres (EIC) Kindergarten/Pre-Primary Program offers three full days per week and incorporates an individual communication development session with a Teacher of the Deaf. Parents are encouraged to attend at least once a week and to continue the program out of school hours.
- The Visiting Teacher of the Deaf Support Program is an advisory and support service offered to those children attending their local preschool and pre-primary school in addition to attending the EIC Kindergarten/Pre-Primary Program. Professional resources are provided to the pre-school detailing audiological information and suggested teaching strategies.
- Sign Communication Programs for Infants and Children aged 0-3 years
 - the Bilingual Bicultural Playgroup provides an opportunity for deaf and hearing children 0-3 years to come together in a welcoming and positive environment that accepts and appreciates the culture and language of the deaf and hearing communities.
- The Weekly Home Visiting Program Sign Language Specialist Teacher provides weekly home visits for children, aged 0-3 years to support the Bilingual Bicultural Playgroup. The aim of the visits is to encourage receptive and expressive sign language development through play, while providing an ongoing consultancy for parents on a one-to-one basis. Instruction in sign language or the provision of up-to-date information on Deaf Education, including speech and audiology, is available for the parents.

- Sign Communication Programs for Children aged 4-6 years - the Mosman Park School for Deaf Children Kindergarten provides an inclusive program for children who communicate through sign language.
- Infants and Pre-school Children who reside in Country and Remote areas - Visiting Teachers of the Deaf reside and work in many country areas including Albany, Bunbury, Esperance, Geraldton, Karratha, Manjimup, Broome, Kununurra and Hedland. These Visiting Teachers of the Deaf are located in these areas and are trained to provide support to the parents of children who are deaf and hard of hearing of all ages, including parents of children in the 0-6 years age group. The main tasks of a visiting teacher of the deaf are to give specialist support in amplification management, speech, language, and auditory skills development, and where required sign language. These teachers also provide support to the parents and provide professional guidance to playgroup and pre-school teachers.
- Parent involvement - at the Early Intervention Centre and the Bilingual Bicultural Sign Language programs, parents are invited to attend their child's individual sessions on a regular basis, as well as participating in video sessions, formal interviews and group meetings at regular intervals. Parents have access to resources that are made available for loan from the WA Institute for Deaf Education's Resource Centre.
- Cochlear Implants - The WA Institute for Deaf Education provides a range of services including speech processor management, mapping and cochlear implant developmental assessment. At present it services some 40 children with cochlear implants including a number in the infant and pre-school age group.
- Sign language classes in Auslan are provided for parents and community members at the WA Institute for Deaf Education. Parents of children who are of early intervention age are invited to attend the weekly classes and can join at anytime during the year.
- Additional parent support - parent contact evenings are held at the WA Institute for Deaf Education each school term. These sessions provide information for families of deaf and hard of hearing children and the opportunity to meet and talk informally over tea or coffee. These sessions are particularly of benefit to parents of newly diagnosed children who have a hearing loss.
- The Institute also provides an extensive network of over fifty existing parents of deaf and hard of hearing children who have offered to participate in the "Parent Support Network". These parents make themselves available to speak and meet with parents of newly diagnosed children. This contact list is provided to parents on their initial visit to the Institute.

3.4.6 **Autism Spectrum Disorders**

As part of the system initiative *Improving Assistance to Students with Disabilities*, the State Government allocated an additional \$400 000 in 2001/02 to support a range of supports for students with autism spectrum disorders, taking the total allocation to the Autism Project to \$678 000 in this financial year (\$278 000 recurrent). One of the key initiatives has been the establishment of two withdrawal units for pre-primary aged students incorporating Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) principles and discrete trials as the key components of the teaching pedagogy. An independent researcher who conducted a longitudinal evaluation of the program found that the students made outstanding gains in all areas of their development in excess of those expected of a similar student cohort who did not have autism and had maintained these gains 15 months after exiting the program into mainstream education. Based on his conclusions that the program demonstrated world best practice, the Department will expand the number of programs to three in 2002.

3.4.7 Early intervention services for students with intellectual disabilities

In Western Australia the Disability Services Commission has responsibility for the provision of services for children with disabilities up to the age of four years of age. Some education districts and schools have established early intervention and prevention programs for children with intellectual disabilities for children from pre-primary to year 3. Many of these have been collaboratively developed with the Disability Services Commission in response to community needs.

3.5 Access to and adequacy of funding and support in both the public and private sectors

- 3.5.1 The main revenue contribution to the education of students with disabilities in Western Australia is from the state government. In addition, funding is received from the Commonwealth for students with disabilities. In Western Australia this funding has remained relatively constant to around 3% of the government school population since 1997.
- 3.5.2 Mechanisms are established which fund students with disabilities in the main identified categories for disabilities. Hence, when a student is categorised as having an intellectual disability, funding is allocated, linked to that student. Students with an intellectual disability who attend education support units, centres and schools further benefit from a more direct flow on of funding which is allocated to the establishment, maintenance and renewing of these resources.
- 3.5.3 Concerns relating to the access and adequacy of funding emerge in relation to the categorisation approach to disability resourcing. Gaps occur when students are considered to have special educational needs but do not “fit” any of the current categories for funding. Example, it has been long recognised that students who are assessed as in the IQ range 70 to 90 have special educational needs. These students currently are outside any of the systems level special category funding programs and policies. A further example is demonstrated in students with learning disabilities and/or

psychiatric disabilities who currently fall outside most categories for funding.

3.5.4 The *Psychological Health Education Assistant Trial* was instigated in 2000 following the inclusion of categories of psychiatric, neurological and cognitive disability in the School Education Act 1999. The program enables students with psychological health issues to access the mainstream curriculum and to enable schools to accept and demonstrate management of these students. Evaluation at the end of 2001 indicated the trial was successful in supporting schools to assist identified students access the mainstream curriculum. Fifty-one of the 53 students in the trial remained in mainstream settings.

3.5.5 It is anticipated that by ensuring the integrated management of the improvement process, around *The Review of Educational Services for Students with Disabilities in Government Schools*, that the major concerns relating to the current situation of access and adequacy of funding will be addressed.

3.5.6 Significantly, strategies are being put in place through professional development and organisational cultural change which attempt to emphasize the value of the work of individual employees in addressing service needs by appropriate pedagogy in a positive and individually empowered organisational culture.

3.5.7 *The School Education Act 1999* legislates the rights of students with disabilities in the context of a broadened definition of disability. It is anticipated that the continuing impact of this legislation will increase the number of students identified with special educational needs and make it unacceptable not to provide appropriate services. The increased identification will have greater impact in Western Australia because we currently identify the smallest proportion of students with disabilities in government schools of all states. This will increase the need for funding and support.

3.6 The nature, extent and funding of programs that provide for full or partial learning opportunities with mainstream students

3.6.1 Currently around 90% of students with disabilities enrolled in Western Australian government schools attend regular schools, or regular schools with special education centres or units attached; the remaining 10% attend education support schools. Individual education support schools develop projects to enable learning opportunities for their students in mainstream schools and/or with mainstream students. These include satellite classes, collaboration for special occasions and projects and a number of special projects around learning opportunities. A successful example here, is collaboration with a senior high school group of students participating in a special program in their school to assist in attendance, behaviour and learning improvement. These students travel by train to the education

support school and work with and alongside adolescent students with severe disabilities. Evidence based evaluation has highlighted significant improvement in learning outcomes for both groups of students.

- 3.6.2 In 1995, the Department of Education together with Disability Services Commission established the Inclusion Program Pilot that enabled five students with intellectual disabilities to enrol in their local school. The Pilot was evaluated as successful and in 1997 the state government committed \$3.6 million to the Inclusion Program. The objective of this Program was to enable 50 students with intellectual disabilities to access supported education in their local school by the end of 2001. Professional support and additional teacher and education assistant time was provided to each school participating in the program. The number of students was slightly increased because of identified cost savings. In 2001 there were 57 students with the full range of intellectual disabilities participating in the Program in years 1-12 across metropolitan, regional and country schools. The number of students participating has increased to 83 in 2002.

3.7 Teacher training and professional development

- 3.7.1 Previous reviews of services for students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties have focused on the issue of teacher education. Both the *Report from the Ministerial Taskforce, the Education of Students with Disabilities and Specific Learning Difficulties* (Shean Report, 1993) and the earlier *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into Education in Western Australia* (Beazley Report, 1984) made strong recommendations in relation to pre-service education in disabilities for all teachers.
- 3.7.2 *The Disability Services Plan 1995* endorsed the recommendation “that all pre-service teacher education programs contain general information about disabilities”. All teachers trained in Western Australian universities must complete a compulsory education support unit in their first year of study. Applicants for employment who indicate they wish to teach designated students with disabilities are employed and placed in priority order dependent upon the number of units they have studied. Teachers with four or more units are given “authorisation” and receive highest priority.
- 3.7.3 Pre-service training in special education provided through universities appears to be highly variable. The following information provided by Curtin University provides an example of courses available.

There is an extensive program of teacher training and professional development provided by the Faculty of Education, Curtin University of Technology.

1. Teacher Training

Bachelor of Education – (ECE, Primary, Secondary) and Grad Dip Ed (Secondary): all students must complete one core compulsory unit of 14 weeks x 2 hours per weeks’ instruction in the education of students with special needs. This program utilises an Australian textbook and refers to key policies (eg Students at Educational Risk) and documents (eg the Education Support Package) utilised by schools in WA. The

unit has been recognised by the WA DOE Special Education Accreditation Committee.

Bachelor of Arts (Training and Development) –lecturers training to teach in TAFE and/or with private providers of T&D are required to undertake one core compulsory unit (14 weeks x 2 hours per week) that examines the five targeted equity groups (Aboriginal, Women, People with Disabilities, NESB, Rural & Remote). This unit is available on-line and has been recognised by the WA DOE Special Education Accreditation Committee.

Specialist Training

Undergraduates wishing to develop specialist expertise may undertake up to four elective units in special education and they may also complete field experience (3 weeks) or Assistant Teacher Practice (ATP) in an educational facility for students with special education needs (eg Education Support Centre, or a Language Development Centre). The current units available offer specialities in specific learning difficulties, inclusive education policies and practices, classroom management strategies, educational and developmental implications of the major disabilities, social and recreational contexts for students with disabilities. Current enrolment averages 50 –70 students per semester and all elective units have been accredited by the WA DOE Special Education Accreditation Committee.

2. Teacher Professional Development

Teacher professional development opportunities are available through the provision of postgraduate coursework and postgraduate research supervision in the field of educating students with disabilities. The programs for the Master of Educational Studies (Coursework only), Master of Education (Coursework plus project) and Doctorate of Education (Coursework and dissertation) enable teachers to complete up to four one-semester units in topics associated with the educational management of students with the major types of disabilities, specific learning difficulties, inclusive education policies and practices and to undertake a major case study of a student with a disability. These units are available on campus and also on-line. The introduction of the Postgraduate Education Loans Scheme (PELS) in January 2002 has seen enrolments increase to about 15 - 20 students per semester and has been welcomed by many women teachers who lacked the disposable personal income to pay upfront fees (\$960 per unit, for a minimum of 8 units to complete an M.Ed Studies).

The M.Ed (Research) and PhD provide Higher Degrees by Research opportunities for advanced opportunities to student the education of students with disabilities. Since 1995, the Senior Lecturer in Special Education Dr Heather Jenkins has supervised 19 teachers who have undertaken local research projects associated with the education of students with disabilities.

Professional accreditation:

Professional accreditation of units has been given by the West Australian Department of Education (the major employer of teachers in WA), which has recognised all these units as specialist teacher qualifications in special education.

- 3.7.4 Information from the other three universities in Western Australia indicates that there is a significant variation between courses in whether the perspective is directly related to categorisation and identification of disabilities or is more focussed on meeting special education needs of students in a range of educational settings.
- 3.7.5 In service training in the Department is brokered at school and district level with the support of the central Student Services Team and the Centre for Inclusive Schooling. The sophistication, content and focus of the training, varies across the sixteen districts. It is influenced by a complexity of factors related to district demographics, school, district, state and national priorities, the availability of funding and the employment conditions of employees.
- 3.7.6 It is anticipated that the integrated approach to the current Review in the context of the Department's *Curriculum Improvement Program* and *Students at Educational Risk Policy* will bring strong recommendations in this area.

3.8 The legal implications and resource demands of current Commonwealth and state legislation

- 3.8.1 An examination of the resource demands of current Commonwealth and state legislation is strongly represented in the *Review of Education Services for Students with Disabilities in Government Schools*.
- 3.8.2 The *Review* follows similar reviews in other states and is designed to bring government school services for students with special educational needs in to line with community expectations and relevant legislation. As has been the case with other states it is anticipated that the implementation of the review recommendations, expected to take place over three to five years, will entail significant expenditure. Factors which will impact on the budget include:
- The broadening of the definition of students with disabilities
 - The recommendation that students with special educational needs be planned for within the recommendations of the review (up to 18 % of students K-12)
 - The need to build appropriate facilities for students with severe and multiple disabilities on integrated campuses
 - The building inclusive schools initiative 2003 to 2007
 - Professional development and curriculum support materials for all teachers from 2003.