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To Mr. J. Carter,

Enclosed is a submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee's Inquiry into Academic Standards of School Education on behalf of DALE Christian School in Newcastle.

As a school catering for students with special needs, DALE Christian School is very interested in the improvement of the Australian education system and the way it affects the lives of students.

The submission discusses some aspects of the effectiveness of the current curriculum, issues regarding VET courses, recognition of achievement in Life Skills programs, as well as educator training to assist students with special needs.

DALE Christian School would appreciate any information about the outcome of the Committee's consideration of this submission.

Yours Sincerely,

Natalie Bowden

On behalf of DALE Christian School

A Submission

to the

**Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and
Education Committee's**

**Inquiry into Academic Standards in School
Education**

By Natalie Bowden

On Behalf of

DALE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

SUBMITTED:

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1. Executive Summary

Established in Newcastle, NSW in 1997, DALE Christian School caters for students with special needs in Years 7-10, incorporating Life Skills programs with Stage 4 and 5 outcomes.

DALE Christian School submits this report in response to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee's Inquiry into Academic Standards Terms of Reference:

1. Whether school education prepares students adequately for further education, training and employment

DALE Christian School proposes that the Committee recommends

- a review of the time period in which compulsory hours of LOTE are to be taught;
- the relevance of core Life Skills curriculum components to be reviewed;
- increased accessibility of VET courses for Year 10 students;
- increased recognition of a combination of Life Skills and Stage 4/5 outcomes attainment;
- increased recognition of completion of Life Skills programs in the broader Australian community
- more effective addressing of personal social and emotional issues in the standard curriculum taught in mainstream schools through improved teacher training.

2. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to present to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee specific ways in which the current education system should be improved.

Background information, current issues and suggested recommendations were relayed by special education teacher Jessica Dawes on behalf of DALE Christian School, and some information was obtained from the school website

(<http://www.spcc.nsw.edu.au/index.php?c=6&PHPSESSID=631c884c8ddf98e660c8ba52261c1031>).

As a special school, DALE Christian School is interested in improving the Australian education system for the benefit of its students and other students with similar experiences.

Established in 1997, DALE Christian School has experience in teaching students with special needs and in this report has put forward 6 recommendations to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee to help ensure these needs are met.

The terms of reference for the Inquiry into Academic Standards addressed in this submission are:

1. *Whether school education prepares students adequately for further education, training and employment, including, but not limited to:*
 - a. *the extent to which each stage of schooling (early primary; middle schooling; senior secondary) equips students with the required knowledge and skills to progress successfully through to the next stage; and*
 - b. *the extent to which schools provide students with the core knowledge and skills they need to participate in further education and training, and as members of the community.*

The key matters to be addressed in the submission to the Inquiry into Academic Standards include: a review of the time period in which compulsory hours of LOTE are to be taught; the relevance of core Life Skills curriculum components; accessibility of VET courses for Year 10 students; increased recognition of full and partial Life Skills outcomes attainment; and more effective addressing of personal social and emotional issues in the standard curriculum taught in mainstream schools.

3. Acknowledgements

Compiled by
Natalie Bowden

With information and assistance from
Jessica Dawes
(special education teacher at DALE Christian School)

In Cooperation with and On Behalf of
DALE Christian School

4. Background Information: About DALE Christian School

DALE is an acronym for Dynamic, Alternative Learning Environment. DALE Christian School, located in Waratah, Newcastle, NSW, caters for students from Years 7 -10 who have experienced difficulty learning in a mainstream school. It is recognised as a special school and is accredited by the Board of Studies to deliver the School Certificate. The school encourages students and the community to understand that DALE is not a short-term, intervention program, but a school that students can feel they can be proud to belong to. Integration back to a mainstream setting is encouraged if appropriate.

There are 28 students currently enrolled at the school and come from across the entire region of Newcastle, travelling up to 1½ hours to get to school.

Several students enrolled at DALE display challenging behaviour; however, all students have individual learning needs and follow Individual Education Plans. Some students have been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, ADHD, Oppositional Defiance Disorder, Cerebral Palsy, Dyslexia, mild intellectual disability or moderate intellectual disability.

Through the curriculum, implementation and management of the school, we attempt to cater for special needs of students. There is a high ratio of staff to students who work on class fulltime; two teachers and five full-time support staff (youth workers and teacher's aides). There are also several volunteers who assist throughout the week.

Resources available and frequently used include: 15 computers; a woodwork room; mechanics area; basketball court; and kitchen.

For many learning activities, students are placed into small groups of 3 – 8 students. Ability, interest, mixed-ability and co-operative groups are all used at different times and for different purposes. Students work independently on individual Maths, English and academic programs for around 6 lessons a week. All students are involved in the SEIL program (Supporting Each other In Life).

5. Key Issues

Since 1997 DALE Christian School has been working with children with special needs and now proposes some changes to improve the current education system and the way in which students learn within it.

The Terms of Reference of the Inquiry into Academic Standards calls for recommendations regarding

- 1. Whether school education prepares students adequately for further education, training and employment.*

DALE Christian School responds with the following suggested amendments.

5.1 100 hrs of LOTE to be taught over 2 years of Stage 4

Languages Other Than English (LOTE) is compulsory for all Stage 4 students, even for those who are identified as having special education needs and those who have been disengaged from learning. It has been specified by the Board of Studies that the mandatory 100 hours of LOTE be taught within a 12 month period. DALE Christian School asserts that for their students there is no reason why the 100 hours could not be taught over the 2 years of Stage 4.

5.2 Identify and omit irrelevant aspects of curriculum for special schools

DALE Christian School has identified the minimal relevance of some core components of the curriculum for students who have been disconnected from school and are planning on moving from School Certificate level to employment. For example, in English, drama and poetry are unnecessary topics as are advanced algebraic and trigonometry topics in Mathematics. The school is calling for further review and omission of irrelevant aspects of the curriculum. Resources and topics that are relevant for trade courses and increase employability are of high significance for the school and its students.

5.3 VET courses to be made more accessible to Yr 10 students

VET courses and content seem to be only accessible for and available to students enrolled in Years 11 and 12. Many of these courses and options would be relevant for and of interest to students in younger grades who are contemplating trade employment options. Indeed, many students who are interested in trades, apprenticeships and traineeships are precisely the students who are keen to leave school in Year 10. DALE Christian School holds that its students could benefit from these programs and as a result even be retained in educational settings for longer if they are given earlier access to such courses.

5.4 Greater recognition for attaining a mix of both Life Skills and Standard curriculum outcomes

The all or nothing approach to Life Skills outcomes has limited the current curriculum. DALE Christian School has students who are working at Stage 4 or 5 outcomes in some topics while they could work towards Life Skills outcomes in other areas of the same subject. Although it is recognised that some students work on a modified program, it is currently not considered appropriate that they be given recognition for the Life Skills outcomes that they are working towards. DALE Christian School is calling for recognition for these outcomes in conjunction with Stage 4/5 outcomes.

5.5 Increased recognition of Life Skills outcomes across the wider community

Recognition of Life Skills programs by other educational services and community organisations is currently minimal. Although the Board of Studies has increased the level of recognition of Life Skills outcomes, there is still a considerable stigma towards this component of the curriculum. Increased education of the community and other educators regarding Life Skills outcomes may minimise this issue. By enabling educators to use Life Skills Outcomes in conjunction with other outcomes will also enhance their validity and effectiveness.

5.6 Additional training for educators to more effectively engage special-needs students

There are an increasing number of students who are reaching DALE Christian School in Years 7-10 who have found mainstream schools unsuitable. Students have learning difficulties, experienced social exclusion or have been excluded due to behaviour. This indicates that the current situation in many mainstream schools is that they are not meeting the needs of students. Teachers are not able to use the current curriculum to engage students. Curriculum guidelines are not meeting the social and emotional needs of an increasing number of students, or are simply not being applied in an effective manner. Although syllabus and supporting guidelines are generally thorough and can be adapted and modified to meet the educational needs of students with special needs, educators within mainstream schools would benefit from additional training regarding innovative methods to engage these students, and more effectively meet their educational needs.

6. Conclusion

Through working closely with students with special needs, DALE Christian School has identified some ways that school education can be improved in order to prepare these students more adequately for further education, training and employment. The school is calling for a review of the time period in which compulsory hours of LOTE are to be taught; the relevance of core Life Skills curriculum components to be reviewed; increased accessibility of VET courses for Year 10 students; increased recognition of full and partial Life Skills outcomes attainment; and more effective addressing of personal social and emotional issues in the standard curriculum taught in mainstream schools through improved teacher training. To implement DALE Christian School's recommendations would greatly benefit many students and overall would improve Australia's academic standards.

7. Recommendations

DALE Christian School proposes that the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee recommend the following changes to the education system:

1. *100 hrs of LOTE to be taught over 2 years of Stage 4*
2. *Identify and omit irrelevant aspects of curriculum for special schools*
3. *VET courses to be made more accessible to Yr 10 students*
4. *Greater recognition for attaining a mix of both Life Skills and Standard curriculum outcomes*
5. *Increased recognition of Life Skills outcomes across the wider community*
6. *Additional training for educators to more effectively engage special-needs students*

8. Sources

**Consultations with special education teacher at DALE Christian School
JESSICA DAWES on behalf of DALE Christian School**

St Phillip's Christian College – DALE Christian School

(<http://www.spcc.nsw.edu.au/index.php?c=6>) accessed 20/04/2007