



Australian Associations of Christian Schools

Incorporated in ACT
ABN 39 288 207 931
Email: info@aaccs.net.au
Telephone: 02 6257 3026
Website: www.aaccs.net.au

PO Box 6140 or
3 Karri Street
O'CONNOR ACT 2602
Facsimile: 02 6257 6637

Submission to:

The Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation
Committee

on the

**Inquiry into the Disability Discrimination
Amendment (Education Standards) Bill 2004.**

Peter A Crimmins, Executive Officer
Australian Associations of Christian Schools
Tel: 02 6257 3026
PO Box 6140, O'Connor ACT 2602
Email: pcrimmins@aaccs.net.au

(1) THE AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATIONS OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS (AACS)

AACS is an Association of **253** Protestant Christian **schools** across Australia. These primary and secondary schools educate over **80,000 students** and employ some **5,000 teachers**. The schools are to be found in every Australian State and Territory.

Protestant Christian schools that are members of AACS **serve largely middle and working class Australian families and communities**. This is borne out by the SES scores of the schools. Increasingly, these schools in urban, regional, rural and remote communities are reaching out to the disadvantaged. Increasing emphasis is being placed on the education of indigenous students and the mainstream education of students with disabilities.

(2) THE INQUIRY

The Australian Associations of Christian Schools (AACS) was only **notified today**, 3 December 2004, of the Inquiry by the Senate into the Disability Discrimination Amendment (Education Standards) Bill 2004.

In that notice received by email was the requirement that brief **submissions** be provided to the Senate **no later than am Monday 6 December 2004**. This hasty call for an inquiry by the Senate hardly provides stakeholders with adequate time to consider and prepare their submissions in a way that does credit to both people with disabilities and the stakeholders. However, the matter is of such import to AACS and its member schools that this submission has been prepared for the Senate Committee consideration.

(3) THE EDUCATION SECTOR

AACS represents non government Protestant Christian schools in the education sector.

AACS has made submissions on behalf of its members to the **Senate Inquiry into Students with Disabilities** (one submission) and to the **Productivity Commission Review of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992** (two submissions).

The report of the Senate Inquiry was disappointing.

The Productivity Report was far more wide ranging and in its final form took account of the proposed Education Standards as part of the DDA Act.

(4) CONSIDERATIONS

Increasingly, non-government schools are mainstreaming education for students with disabilities. The Productivity Commission Final Report, 30 April 2004, notes that while more students (with disabilities) are attending mainstream government and non government schools (p 83), for the period **1991 to 2002 the number increased in independent non government schools by 250% (p 85)**.

Non government schools are, however, at a serious and significant cost disadvantage in providing education of both a quality and quantity comparable with that offered to students without disabilities. Christian schools are supportive of integrated

mainstream education for students with disabilities but they are concerned that their integration has not been supported with adequate resources; staff training and specialist education assistance (cf. Productivity Report pg 441).

There is a cost shift in social responsibility by governments when students with disabilities are enrolled in non-government schools. Currently, **students with disabilities would attract, on average, an additional \$20,000 in a government school. In a non-government school, the same students would be lucky to attract an additional \$4,000 from government sources.** The cost, therefore, shifts socially from the government sector to parents and non-government schools authorities and their communities (cf. Productivity Report pg 442).

AACS recognises the support provided by the Commonwealth Government for students with disabilities in non government schools. State and territory governments are uneven in their support for and definition of students with disabilities in non government schools. This is clearly discriminatory. **The additional government funds, above the Average Government School Recurrent Cost (AGSRC) for students with disabilities should be the same across all sectors of schooling.**

The Productivity Commission considers that government education funding arrangements should aim to ensure that school students with disabilities have the same range of education choices as do other students. Their **choice of school** should be influenced by the same factors – such as location, income, culture, religion and education needs – as for other students (cf. Productivity Report pg 444).

These cost differentials will be exacerbated with the introduction of the Disability Standards for Education into the DDA 1992. While non government schools may be able to sustain cases of '**unjustifiable hardship**' it is inconsistent with both the purpose and intention of Christian schooling as well as the Act that students with disabilities should be treated differently to other students. Consistent with the findings of the Productivity Commission Report, AACS would advocate that the funding for students with disabilities '**should follow an individual student with a disability if he or she changed to, or enrolled in, a government or non government school.**' (cf. Productivity Report pg 444).

Peter Crimmins
Executive Officer
AACS
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