

**NORTHERN TERRITORY RESPONSE TO INQUIRY INTO THE
DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION AMENDMENT (EDUCATION
STANDARDS) BILL 2004
6 December 2004**

Primary concerns relating to the transitional costs associated with the introduction of the Bill for the NT Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) are:

- Infrastructure – DEET is presently auditing its special schools infrastructure against current disability components of the building code, with a view to developing an upgrade program for these facilities. This legislation will potentially lead to a necessity to program upgrades to existing facilities in a shorter timeframe than currently anticipated, and more broadly into the mainstream than currently anticipated. Infrastructure enhancement costs will likely be created from the higher levels of access for students with disabilities than presently exist in mainstream schools, for example tap height, paving, toilets etc. Ramps are also a particular issue given the significant number of multi-storey schools in the NT.
- Staffing
 - Currently DEET's Special Education Policy supports inclusion of student with disabilities within mainstream settings. Within an urban setting a range of options exist under this policy that provide opportunities for the school and family to negotiate and determine the most appropriate educational facility for individual students. The same options are not available in remote locations and DEET has difficulties associated with staffing in remote schools, particularly with attracting staff trained in the area of special education. The legislation severely diminishes DEET's ability to negotiate alternatives, although it is recognised that the legislation provides for unjustifiable hardship, but this is yet to be legally tested.
 - Professional Development – DEET will be required to undertake professional development programs across the system to raise the awareness of implications from the Disability Standards for Education (DSE).
- Specialised equipment – DEET presently supports, in a significant way, equipment provision in Special Schools. It also has a small fund to support additional equipment needs of students with disabilities across mainstream NT schools. The amendments will create costs associated with increased expectation/mandating of provision of specialised equipment in mainstream.
- Information provision – the legislation has the potential to significantly increase costs for students enrolled. DEET will be expected to generate and provide this available information in a range of formats eg Braille, large print, communication intermediary within brochures, flyers, website and departmental documentation. Regular updates will need to be built into this provision.
- Monitoring of implementation – will require DEET to put in place systems that will monitor the consistency and adequacy of the DSE implementation and compliance. Staffing implications.