

Queensland Teachers' Union

Submission

Australian Senate Inquiry - Current levels of access and attainment for students with disability in the school system and the impact on students and families associated with inadequate levels of support.

August 2015



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1. Introduction

The Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Education and Employment Committee inquiry into current levels of access and attainment for students with disability in the school system and the impact on students and families associated with inadequate levels of support.

This submission will not address all the terms of reference relevant to the inquiry but will focus on those that are most relevant to QTU members who work with students with disability (SWD) in the Queensland state school sector.

The QTU supports the Australian Education Union (AEU) submission provided to the Committee.

Please find attached to this submission statements (Appendices A-E) from six QTU members who work with students with disabilities.

2. Background

Consistent with the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, and the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, 2008*, the QTU defines students with disabilities (the target population for the delivery of special education services) as including those students:

- with disabilities;
- with learning difficulties/disabilities;
- who demonstrate significant behavioural and adjustment difficulties;
- who have significant mental health and medical conditions.

In order to achieve quality learning outcomes, these students require reasonable adjustments via support programs and services and/or other resources which are complementary and additional to those which are provided to students in general.

The QTU reaffirms its belief that the public education system needs to value and maintain a range of services, programs and educational settings to ensure the inclusion of all students. Service delivery models that are inclusive must be flexible, to allow for the movement of students and/or staff across a range of programs.

Resourcing for students with special educational needs is by its very nature intensive. This resourcing must continue to ensure adherence to philosophies of equity, social justice and inclusivity.

The QTU believes in and promotes the notion of a needs-based resourcing model. The QTU believes that access, participation, engagement and successful learning outcomes for students with special educational needs will be achieved with:

- the provision of adequate staff (both teaching and non-teaching) and other relevant resources according to a needs-based model;
- access to a range of services and programs funded through a needs-based model; and
- facilities that are specifically designed, built and maintained to meet the needs of students.

3. Current levels of access and attainment

Queensland state schools provide education for the majority of students with disabilities. Queensland state schools provide education for 29,432 students with a verified disability as at February 2015. This represents 5.6% of total school enrolments, compared to those (2.9%) approximately 7,470 students with a disability who attend non-government schools. Fourteen (14) % of students with disabilities (4,131) attend special schools. Eighty-six (86) % of students with disabilities (25,336) attend a state primary or secondary school.

The QTU recognises that a significant percentage of students with disabilities undertake the majority of their schooling in a regular classroom and that many of these programs are delivered in rural and remote locations and are multi-aged.

The federal government currently provides students with disabilities (SWD) funding for 5 percent of student enrolment.⁴

The above figure (5.6%) regarding students with disabilities in Queensland state schools shows that the proportion of students with a verified disability is in excess of the figure the federal government uses to determine its funding for students with a disability. In addition the 5.6% figure under represents the actual number of SWDs in Queensland state schools because it only reflects those students who have been identified through the Queensland Department of Education and Training (DET) Education Adjustment Program (EAP). According to DET the Education Adjustment Program (EAP) is a process for identifying and responding to the educational needs of students with disability who require significant education adjustments related to the specific impairment areas of:

- autism spectrum disorder (ASD)
- hearing impairment (HI)
- intellectual disability (ID)
- physical impairment (PI)
- speech-language impairment (SLI)
- vision impairment (VI).

The above impairment areas do not align completely with the definition of students with disabilities either in the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* or the *Disability Standards for Education* both of which have a much broader definition which covers a much larger cohort of students. In the recently completed Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) process in the Queensland state schooling sector, DET reports that 26% of students have been identified with a functional disability.

In the *Australian Education Union (AEU) State of Our Schools Report 2015* 39 % of principals reported that at least one in ten (10%) of their students have a disability that requires assistance in the classroom.²

The report also identified that 16% of principals have over 20 percent of their students with a disability and that this percentage increases to 24% in relation to low socio-economic status schools.

Research shows at least 100,000 students with disability are not getting any funded support in our schools.

⁴ Media Release, March 24, 2015, Australian Education Union – Federal Office, Melbourne.

² *Australian Education Union (AEU) State of Our Schools Report 2015*, Australian Education Union

4. Impact of inadequate support

Research shows at least 100,000 students with disability are not getting any funded support in our schools.

The *Review of funding for schooling – final report*³ (or commonly known as the “Gonski Review”) included reporting on educational equity and disadvantage. Gonski cited evidence of the impact of disadvantage on student outcomes in key areas, notably that of students with disabilities.

The *Review of funding for schooling – final report*⁴ recommended schools should receive additional funding (called a loading) for all students with disability to cover the extra costs of ensuring these students were able to access a similar education to those students without a disability. Due to the lack of consistent definitions of SWD across the country, the then federal government provided an interim loading that provided additional funding for those SWD who were already eligible for state government assistance. The current federal government said at the last election that they would change the eligibility loading to apply to all students with disability who needed assistance. This has not yet occurred. If this commitment is delivered then students with disability will have better access to the education system.

Federal Gonski funding started in Queensland in 2014 (despite there being no Gonski agreement signed by the then Newman State Government).

This funding is provided to schools through the Great Results Guarantee (GRG) program. However this funding is not being distributed in line with the Gonski principles of funding going directly to areas of need. The funding is far short of what is required to enable higher levels of access for students with disability in the Queensland school system. In 2014 and 2015 the Great Results Guarantee funding has not been directly provided to schools to target the SWD cohort. The QTU acknowledges that some SWDs will have benefited from some of the GRG funding but it has not been delivered to schools consistent with the loading methodology outlined in the *Review of funding for schooling – final report*.

The *AEU State of Our Schools 2015 Report* states that eight out of ten principals (79%) do not have the resources they need to educate the number of SWD at their schools. SWDs’ learning is suffering as a result.

Queensland state schools provide education for the majority of students with disabilities. Figure 1, below, shows that almost double the amount of students with a disability attend government schools compared to non-government schools (5.1 % versus 2.5%)⁵. Students with disabilities are classified as those students who satisfy the criteria for enrolment in special education services or programs provided by the government of the state or territory. These criteria vary across jurisdictions, for example, South Australian data includes a large number of students in the communication and language impairment category. This subset of students is not counted by other states/territories. Other states/territories fund

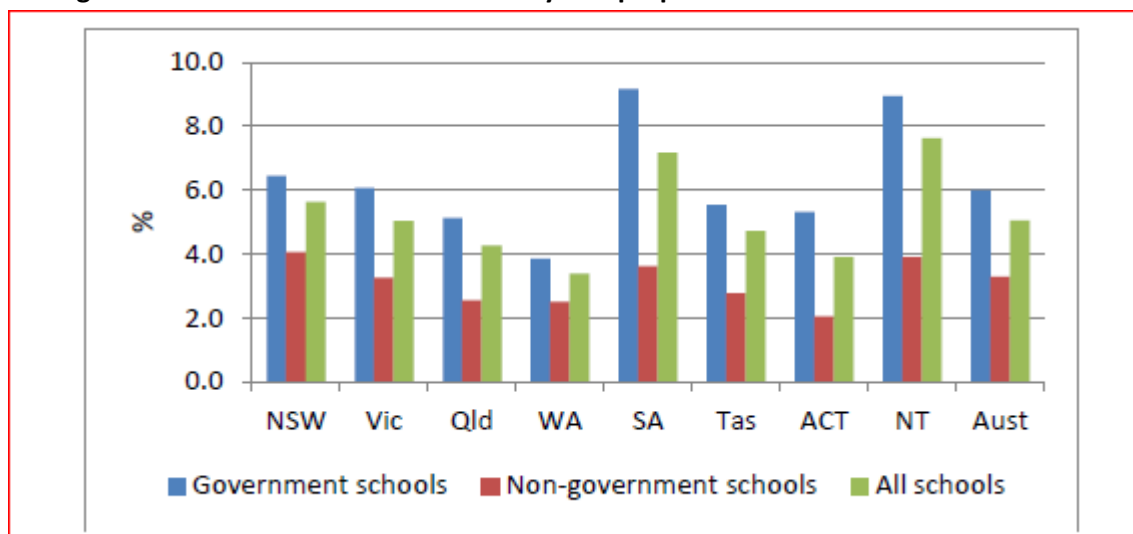
³ Australian Government (2011) Review of Schooling Funding

⁴ Australian Government (2011) Review of Schooling Funding

⁵ SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2013, *Report on Government Services 2013*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, Chapter 4 School Education, Attachment, Table 4A.27

these students with other specific programs. Hence South Australia has a larger cohort represented in the figure below.

Figure 1: Funded students with disability as a proportion of all students.



5. Future impact on indexing funding at CPI from 2017 and progress of needs based funding state in Australian Education Act

The QTU requests the Committee to refer to the Australian Education Union's submission in relation to the above terms of reference.

The QTU wishes to restate the allocation of additional funding from the federal government to the Queensland State Government in 2014 and 2015 has not been allocated consistent with the loading methodology outlined in the *Review of funding for schooling – final report* and students with disabilities are not being provided with the funding recommended in the report. There is no evidence that there will be an increase in the student with disability loading from 2016.

6. Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with a Disability (NCCD)

The QTU has to date supported the NCCD because the *Review of funding for schooling – final report* recommended that the NCCD inform the design of the loading required to address the educational disadvantage faced by students with disability.

The QTU supports the concerns raised by the AEU in its submission regarding the 2015 implementation of NCCD.

QTU members have supported the NCCD to date because of its link to improved funding and access to education services for students with disabilities. If the NCCD does deliver these outcomes, QTU members will reconsider their preparedness to participate in the data collection process in the future.

7. What should be done to better support students with disability?

The QTU recommends the following:

1. The implementation of the full six years of the Gonski funding agreement including an improved disability loading.
2. Improved undergraduate programs to assist teaching students be better equipped for teaching students with disability.
3. Improved professional development programs for teachers and other school-based officers who work with students with disabilities. This should include support for teachers to obtain additional qualifications to assist in providing education to these students.

Appendix A

Statement from a Head of Special Education Services (HOSES) of a Special Education Program attached to a Queensland State School.

At our school we as a Leadership Team have concerns around the following issues in relation to students with disabilities:

Prep students are no longer able to access Prep and ECDP – this creates difficulties with transition as students are not enrolled at school prior to starting Prep and therefore there are legal concerns around transition occurring in the prior year. Students have to start Prep full time after coming from a very well supported and specialised program at the ECDP – into classes that are bigger and have significantly less staff and resourcing.

The allocative model for GO support does not reflect the true needs of a complex school. This impacts on the service that can be offered to families and students with disabilities. Support around verification and “testing” can become hectic at particular times of the year. The verification expectations of GO impact on the general delivery of GO services.

The understanding in the parent and wider community needs to be addresses. Private practice services and Paed Services and Disability Services tell parents that a verification will bring hours of support and services and that schools can provide significant hours of teacher aide support. Parents expect this to be delivered as soon as a diagnosis or verification is made – this is not the case as based on Day 8 and Term 3 deadlines. Difficulties with parents understanding how students are supported in the classroom, the playground and general school. Understanding how SEP are funded and that an SEP Unit does not mean more support for individual schools.

Lack of support in Prep for SWD. They are given a nominal amount of funding regardless of needs as they cannot be verified prior to school – should be resourced differently.

We have significant concerns around the lack of SEP qualified and or experienced staff – difficult to find staff on a short and long term basis. This impacts on students, classrooms and SEP staff who need to support the inexperienced contract and supply staff.

There is a huge discrepancy between the acknowledgement of broader definition of disability – resourcing based on NCCD – 26% but 4% SEP. This does not reflect the needs of students with disabilities – only those with verified disabilities. Classroom teachers are expected to teach all students – one classroom can have a reading range from 1-27 levels and students operating on ICP’s several years above and below as well as teaching the actual year level curriculum.

Teacher training does not prepare students for the actual classroom and the needs of all learners.

Appendix B

Statement comprising a summary of feedback from QTU members in a Queensland State Secondary School

There are difficulties in transitioning students with disabilities into the workplace. This is particularly problematic for those without a verified disability but may have received substantial modifications to their curriculum.

Developing social skills in students with a disability is a massive factor and often the school focus is largely on their curriculum adjustments.

When mainstream schooling is not suitable for students with a disability, the alternatives available are very limited and the ability of schools to fund alternate programs is limited.

Many students require additional support in the classroom but funding limitations mean that this may not be as extensive as is required.

In many situations, there is a problem with parents not wanting their students to have access to the additional support that might come with the verification of a particular disability. This makes it much harder for schools to give students the optimum level of support.

There is limited support provided for the development of individualised programs, particularly in high schools. When a student might have up to 10 teachers, it can become very difficult to organise the time to develop the most appropriate programs for students. The availability of more teacher time to develop these individual programs would enable teachers to offer meaningful adjustments to the curriculum in order to ensure the best chance at success for students.

Mainstream teachers are being expected to differentiate and/or adjust curriculum, write ICPs (or be available to have input into the writing of) and take ownership of all students learning but the availability of PD to support this is not available as yet (or very limited).

Appendix C

Statement by a Principal of a Queensland State School and a HOSES of the Special Education Program (SEP) at the Queensland State School.

We work at a State School in Brisbane where we have one of the largest primary school special education programs in a mainstream school in the Metropolitan Region. We would be very interested in making ourselves available at the Brisbane hearing for the Senate committee to provide more detailed first-hand information. Please find below some of the points we would like to make:

- *current levels of access and attainment for students with disability in the school system, and the impact of inadequate levels of support on students and families*

In recent years the proportion of students with a disability has increased significantly, as parents increasingly choose mainstream over special schools, and also due to increased diagnosis of disabilities such as ASD. The broader definition of disability under the National Disability Standards for Education has also highlighted the very high level of need within our school, beyond just those students with a disability recognised within the Queensland system. Our Queensland system, unlike some other states, does not recognise mental or emotional disturbance health related disabilities as a verified disability category for funding and staffing purposes. Queensland state schools do not have specialised facilities and programs within schools catering for the very complex and high impact needs of ASD children, as some other states have.

Many of our children with disabilities are required to be on Individual Curriculum Plans due to their variation from their peers with regard to learning levels. Implementing and teaching to these plans within a peer-based class placement is very difficult when limited support time is available. It is not unusual for a teacher to be responsible for at least two to five individual Curriculum Plans in addition to teaching the mainstream curriculum for the age appropriate level of the students in the classroom.

- *the social, economic and personal benefits of improving outcomes for students with disability at school and in further education and employment*

The pressures on our school as a result of such a high student needs loadings are significant and are having a high impact. We have noticed an increase in staff burnout, staff turnover and stress related issues. Due to the obvious need to put safety and health needs first, students with very high support needs require a very large allocation of support time (both teacher and teacher-aide) in order to simply have these most basic needs met, before learning needs are taken into consideration. This leaves very little support time for other students with disabilities. Challenges around managing very high needs students are exacerbated by poorly designed, old school facilities which serve only to increase the complexity of issues we need to manage.

Students who may be compliant but have extensive disability needs (eg students who are blind or have low vision) may not be having their disability specific needs met as effectively due to the large numbers of students with health, safety or behavioural needs. Thus, these students may not be reaching their academic potential, nor being adequately prepared for high school. Specialist staff used to be able to focus on areas of the expanded core curriculum with such students (eg. Braille reading, writing, maths and music, Orientation and Mobility, Daily Living Skills, Technology Training, Recreation Skills and so on)

but now have such large caseloads of student with wide ranging disabilities that there is limited time to cater for this group of students.

We have undertaken extensive professional development and research with our staff around current international best practice in the field of inclusive education. From this, we have learnt many new strategies to assist in managing the complex needs of our students in a mainstream setting. It has become obvious from this, that we do not have the staffing resources to implement high impact best practices, such as co-teaching, to any significant degree. Nor do we have sufficient funding allocations to provide the level of high quality professional development recommended to us by international expert Dr. Loretta Giorcelli, with our whole staff team. In order to truly implement inclusion effectively, we need support to undertake significant restructuring and re-culturing and receive more targeted support from our government Department. We have pursued a significant effort around the inclusion agenda at Aspley East State School and are very proud of what we have achieved with limited resources. We can only marvel at what should be possible if we are appropriately resourced. Co-teaching, carried out properly, is a prime example of how additional funding does not increase exclusion, rather it makes both teachers in the classroom responsible for all of the students in the room. It provides a model for meeting the type of complex and varied learning needs that are now common in many classrooms.

- *what should be done to better support students with disability in our schools*

Teacher training, professional development, increased numbers of human resources and appropriate facilities need to improve to better support students, and school communities.

There is currently no incentive in Queensland for teachers to undertake additional training in disability studies. Teachers are currently expected to source courses (courses in some disability areas are only available in one training institution in the country), pay course costs and study in out of work hours. With teachers already suffering increased rates of burn out, such additional commitments are seen by them as unreasonable. Subsidy support and time off for study commitments should be offered if we are to encourage more trained personnel.

- *the impact on policies and the education practice of individual education sectors as a result of the More Support for Students with Disabilities program, and the impact of the cessation of this program in 2014 on schools and students*

The More Support for Students with Disabilities money has been used in Queensland to provide online and face to face Professional Development in specific disability related areas. This has been extremely valuable but teachers will need continued access to these courses. The funding has also been used to provide additional personnel eg in upskilling staff in ICT for students with disabilities. Already some of these positions have been removed, so staff do not have access to these skilled personnel when they need them.

- *the progress of implementing the needs-based funding system as stated in the Australian Education Act*

There is little evidence of the implementation of this system. Queensland runs a fixed budget model for providing human resources for students with disabilities, rather than a growth based model. With south east Queensland being one of the fastest growing areas in Australia and, as mentioned above, the higher incidence of students with ASD, the fixed budget means less for schools each year.

- *the progress of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability and the findings, recommendations and outcomes from this process, and how this data will, or should, be used to develop a needs-based funding system for students with disability*

The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability highlights the numbers of all students with disabilities within schools. This data is based on teacher judgement across broad category areas and will not be accurate enough to inform resourcing. It is not moderated so the variations between schools could be quite significant. It should not be used solely to develop a needs-based funding system for students with a disability but rather be used to inform and build awareness of the high incidence of students with disability in schools. It should also be noted that not every disability requires the same funding and that the NCCD does not show the recommendations for support required for each disability. Nor does the data reflect the needs of students with multiple disabilities. Further data collection should aim to identify the resourcing needs for disability specific areas including low incidence disabilities.

- *how possible changes as a result of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability will be informed by evidence-based best practice of inclusion of students with disability*

The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability is not a record of best-practice. It is a record of what support is currently occurring across schools and is not derived from evidence-based research. The data collection process is based on school decision making and teacher judgement and the limited availability of resources and should therefore not inform best practice. Specific research and data collection is required across National and International forums to determine best practice of inclusion of students with disability.

- *any other related matters.*

Adequate personnel and facilities for working with students with ASD are needed in Queensland. Brisbane currently has 2 private providers in the area of Autism, who can come nowhere near addressing the community need. On approximately a weekly basis we talk with families from well outside our catchment who are desperate to find a suitable school for their primary aged child with ASD.

Meeting the expectations of parents, the needs of students and quite simply the right of every child to be treated with equity and dignity in their education journey is impossible under current resourcing levels, staff training qualifications and teacher workload demands. Many teachers and school staff support inclusive educational practices and want to do the right thing in this regard, but are limited, and sometimes misunderstood, when what they put in place is realistic for the resource and time available to them, but unrealistic in terms of meeting actual student needs.

Appendix D

Statement from a HOSES of a SEP in a Queensland State Secondary School.

I have been a head of special education for about 10 years and have had much experience with resourcing models over that time. One of the key determinants of our funding are the quartiles that our students are on. Over the years the profile questionnaire which generates the quartile for each student (EAP 36) has reduced in size until it is now quite a short and simple document, and we are encouraged to re-profile students whenever there is a significant change in their education program, or after 12 months. Consequently I began re- profiling all of our students who are now half way through their first year of high school – around 41 students in years 7 & 8.

When I saw the quartiles that their profiles had generated I was shocked at how low they were. I have to give myself credit for being able to estimate around which quartile a particular student should be on, as well as being able to understand and complete the EAP 36 form with considerable accuracy. These things considered I cannot understand why so many of the students were only on the first and second quartiles.

I put a post on the HOSES network asking if others had similar experiences and hence the link supplied to this email address. I do not know if I am only imagining that something has changed with the calculation of the quartiles – perhaps I am altogether wrong – but certainly lower quartiles means less resourcing.

Appendix E

Statement from a Support Teacher Literacy and Numeracy in a Queensland State School.

For many years I've been passionately concerned that literally thousands of Queensland primary school students, who have an intellectual impairment but receive no specialised support. If these same students were in NSW, they would receive special funding and be entitled to a whole range of educational support as being identified as ID students.

If it's good enough to have an Australian Curriculum, then I would expect that the benchmark at which we identify students as being ID, is also uniform across Australia.