

Submission to Senate Education and Employment Reference Committee



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.

Chi.L.D. Association is Australia's leader in providing holistic, individualised programs utilising multidisciplinary approaches for children and young people with language and associated disorders to speak, learn & develop. We operate The Glenleighden School in Fig Tree Pocket, QLD; a Developmental Hub in Stones Corner, QLD and provide Outreach services throughout rural, regional and remote Queensland.

Access and attainment for students with disability in the school system are limited due to inadequate levels of support to mainstream and complementary special school programs and have a detrimental impact on students and families. Whilst the majority of students with language support needs do access mainstream programs, many of these students may suffer in silence and their needs inadequately supported due to the insidious invisible nature of the disability. For students with a language disorder, there will always be a cohort that requires more specialised support, most suitably provided by multidisciplinary educational teams with the resources, expertise and focus to assist. For those students whose objective is to transition to other educational opportunities or employment, targeted specialist programs that meet the individual needs of the student are critical for successful transition, best achieved through a collaborative approach involving the school, family and community stakeholders.

The social, economic and personal benefits of improving outcomes for students are evident in most settings, but none more so than with children with special needs. For students with language disorders, speech and language skills are severely disordered, not merely delayed, in linguistic knowledge and performance, and are considered to be the child's primary problem, even if other disabilities exist. Children and young people affected present with differing linguistic profiles, requiring individualised programs at school. Our School, The Glenleighden School, provides individualised programs to students with language disorders to facilitate transition of students into mainstream schooling or into post school options including employment.

Transition in and out of The Glenleighden School may occur at any time throughout the school year to accommodate the individual needs of students and their families. The intensive intervention that students receive during their time at the school has shown differentiated improvements in not only their communication but also in social interactions and academic performance. Given the heterogeneous presentation of the disability, not all students transition to mainstream settings. Anecdotal evidence from parents (see appendix) reflects the impact on student wellbeing by inappropriate placement of students with poor communication skills. For those students who remain until the senior phase of schooling, structured supported work experience has resulted in positive engagement in employment post school. As has been submitted, it is essential to have complementary mainstream and special school programs to adequately support children with disability and their special needs whether the objective is to transition to other educational opportunities or employment. Thus, appropriate levels of funding must be provided across the sector to facilitate the provision of student focused programs that are results orientated.



The cessation of the More Support for Students with Disabilities program and the indexing of funding for schools at the consumer price index after 2017 will have a detrimental impact on our school, mainstream schools, parents and students. Rather than a decrease in funding, an increase is required as current levels of support are inadequate to meet the needs of children with disability. This is even more evident in specialised school settings where the needs of the children are greater and costs of delivering appropriate programs increase due to higher staffing and ancillary expenses.

It is submitted that the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability has been a worthwhile process but action should be taken to ensure that this data be used to develop a needs-based funding system for students with disability. Further the role of specialised schools in the development of evidence-based best practice to design and deliver programs suitable for application in mainstream schools should be investigated. By recognising the role of both mainstream & specialised; adequately resourcing both and working in collaboration in the best interests of the child, better outcomes will be achieved.

An essential element of this is the early education of children with disability. Chi.L.D. advocates for the early identification of children with language disorders, early intervention and early education programs meeting their needs. In order to appropriately support these parents a renewed focus should be on the early years of the child's development.

In support of our submission please find attached letters from our parent community with experiences of relevance to the Senate Committee's considerations.

Hilary Martin
Chief Executive Officer
Chi.L.D. Association

Appendix

Parent Stories

Case 1

My son was born in September 1996, a perfectly healthy child who reached all his milestones and progressed as any other child would until he was around the age of 2. It was then that we noticed that he was no longer talking. The next few years became a minefield of health professionals, therapists, health programmes, and special education centres. We were told the best education available for my son was at a state school which had a special education unit. For 3 years my son attended a state school in a special education unit. The teachers he had during this time were great, but being in a unit with other children with varied disabilities created a new set of problems. It is near impossible for the teachers to cater to a specific way of learning when there are so many different disabilities in one room. As hard as they tried I don't believe it is a system that works. My son's language only progressed through private speech therapy and his "education" was minimal.

Half way through year 3 we were distraught. His education was going nowhere and we couldn't see it changing in the future. It was then that I found out about The Glenleighden School. Quite frankly it was the answer to our prayers: a school that catered specifically to our son's needs. Over the following years (2006 to 2013) we watched our son grow into the mature young man he is today. Being in an environment that understood and catered for his needs gave him the confidence he needed to learn, to grow, to develop social skills, to take pride in himself and his achievements. He left school with a positive attitude and he had a part-time job. He now has his licence and currently works for Big W part time (they are very happy with him and are looking at giving him more working hours). I see no reason why he won't be working full time in the future. My son has never been on unemployment and is no burden to society. He is an independent young man who holds his own. I believe this is because of the specific education he received from The Glenleighden School.

Schools like The Glenleighden School are vital for our education system. They allow children to grow into confident, functioning, contributing, valued members of society - and isn't that what every parent wants for their child!

Mother (name withheld)

Case 2

Nicholas was born with Velo-Cardio-Facial -Syndrome (VCFS) some 21 years ago. Everything in his life has been challenging, from crawling to walking to talking. At the age of 3 when Nicholas still was unable to speak we knew Nicholas would need extra support attaining all his milestones. We were very lucky to stumble across a private school (The Glenleighden School) that offered an education and therapy under the one roof.

At Glenleighden Nicholas went from being a frustrated toddler to a child with confidence. He attended the Glenleighden School for all of his school life (13 years) and during those years went from strength to strength learning and obtaining the skills needed to thrive outside the

school environment. Like many other families at Glenleighden we felt the immense social pressure to send our child to a mainstream school in case he was missing out on something. We believe we made the right decision not to change schools after observing other parents who had changed to main stream education were coming back with mostly negative stories of their children socially withdrawing after being bullied, no longer wanting to attend school and that the mainstream education facilities were unable to provide the adequate support the children required. In contrast our child was more than happy to attend school every day and we saw our child's confidence and abilities improving year after year.

Nicholas gained employment at Coles whilst still at school and has now been working there independent of support for 5 years. He is part of a dance crew that he attends 3 times a week which has taken him all over Brisbane performing and also to LA .He has had his driver's licence for almost 3 years and lives a well-balanced life that gives him independence and the feeling of success every day.

We feel that all children need to be given the chance to learn whether it is academically or with the life skills needed to be included into everyday situations. Nicholas has definitely exceeded our expectations and is now living his life with independence and the feeling of inclusion into our community. We are confident that the Glenleighden School played a pivotal role in our son's successful transition into society.

Silke (Mother)