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Senate Select Committee on School Funding Investment
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Children with Disability Australia (CDA) is the national representative organisation for children and young people with disability aged 0 to 25 years. The organisation is primarily funded through the Department of Social Services and is a not for profit organisation.

CDA's vision is that children and young people with disability living in Australia are afforded every opportunity to thrive, achieve their potential and that their rights and interests as individuals, members of a family and their community are met.

Students with disability typically experience poor education experiences and outcomes. It is the view of CDA that the present education system is failing students with disability and there is an urgent and critical need for reform. CDA has strongly advocated for a national plan for education reform and students with disability. This should include clearly articulated aims, objects and measurable outcomes. Further, it needs to be grounded in a firm evidence base to provide a blueprint for embedded and systemic reform. A national plan should ensure that equal rights to participation are afforded and are a lived reality for every student with disability. Increased funding is a key component of the reform required.

CDA welcomes this latest Inquiry into the *Effect of reduced Commonwealth funding for state and territory provided schools*. CDA notes that there have been numerous previous inquiries which have clearly articulated the current experiences, barriers and reform required, yet meaningful change has not yet occurred.

Please find enclosed for consideration comprehensive submissions previously provided by CDA to the Inquiry into the *Development and implementation of national school funding arrangements and school reform* (2014) and the 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* (2016).

CDA is inundated with concerns regarding education. A typical school experience for students with disability involves limited choice of school, discrimination, increased rates of bullying, limited or no funding for support, inadequately trained staff and a culture of low expectations. There are also increasing reports of restraint and seclusion, a further reflection of a system in crisis.

CDA has undertaken extensive advocacy to progress greater understanding and awareness of the direct experiences of students with disability and the critical need for reform in education. Students

with disability and their families are exasperated from constantly battling negative attitudes, tight school budgets and inflexible education authorities to try and ensure their children can access education.

The *Australian Education Act 2013*, which implemented needs based reforms, contains only temporary provisions for the funding of schools for students with disability. There was a clear expectation that the expanded loading for students with disability would be finalised during 2014 and be implemented in 2015. This was a bi-partisan position during the 2013 Federal Election, with the Coalition promising to provide an amended loading in 2015 which would “deliver more funding for people with disability.”¹

The promise shifted to 2016 with then Education Minister Christopher Pyne stating in June 2015 that “every child in Australia with a disability will be able to receive the correct loading, as they should, to match their disability” from 2016.² The *Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability* has now been collected for five years, and has been modified and extended each year. In 2015, 99 per cent of schools were surveyed. The Education Council however still has not released this data which is stated is the major informant of an amended disability loading.

Funding delayed is opportunities denied. If increased funding is not secured this year, students with disability will continue to have limited pathways for their future. Many young people with disability will be on a fast track to unemployment and welfare dependency unless the much needed reform of our education system occurs.

This is not good enough. It is grossly unfair to the children and their families and is not in the long-term interests of this country to have students denied the benefits of education. Federal and state governments must recognise that the current system is not working and increase funding to ensure students with disability can access education and be assured of being safe and valued learners. It is well overdue that funding for students with disability is fixed.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry. CDA would welcome the opportunity to speak directly with the Committee and can provide further information if required.

Yours sincerely

Stephanie Gotlib
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

¹ C Pyne 2013, *Bi-Partisan Support for Nationally Consistent Data Collection – Students with Disability and Learning Difficulty*, Morris, viewed 3 March 2016, <https://goo.gl/JSz41v>.

² C Pyne 2015, *Speech – Wednesday 17 June 2015*, House of Representatives, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, viewed 3 March 2016, <http://goo.gl/kW3cJN>.