



Senate Standing Committees on Education and Employment: Inquiry into the Australian Education Amendment Bill 2017

NDS hopes the proposed amendments to the Australian Education Act 2013 will improve funding arrangements for children with disability. The amendments are a step in the right direction, but they need to be backed by adequate levels of funding for children with disability. Their efficacy will depend on the quantum of funds to be made available over coming years, which needs to increase from current levels.

NDS believes the funding method should be transparent and schools should be required to consult with families to determine how best to use additional resources to improve outcomes for students with disability in that school community.

Support for changes to calculation of disability loading

NDS supports the change in the calculation of the 'student with disability' loading. Modifying the calculation through use of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) should help identify the level of adjustment that a child with disability requires. Three different loadings to reflect the three highest levels of adjustment required for a student with disability are used in the NCCD.

The new funding arrangements will replace the current single formula that determines the loading for students with disability. This formula does not reflect the differing levels of adjustment required for students with a disability. The proposed Commonwealth recurrent funding mechanism will distinguish between supplementary, substantial and extensive levels of adjustment. This mechanism should help ensure that schools make decisions based on the needs of individual students. Schools should work in partnership with families to determine and prioritise the optimal adjustments.

While students with disability often require additional school resources and adjustments, it should be noted that skilled teaching approaches that promote genuine inclusion in the classroom typically benefit all children.

In 2016 the NCCD showed that 12.4 per cent of all Australian school students — about 470,000 students — received some form of support due to a disability that required additional funding. The gap in funding for 2016 was virtually unchanged from the year before — 269,000 students with a disability are in school without any additional funding for their education. That is more than double the number currently

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getting federal and state government assistance for their education, according to figures from the Productivity Commission.

NDS's 2017 Federal Budget Submission expressed disappointment that the long-awaited NCCD has not produced data of a quality that can be used. The Government commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers to review how the data was gathered. PwC's report, the Continuous Quality Improvement Project, concludes that the data is broadly reliable and of sufficient quality to inform policy at the national level.¹ It says the data is suitable to be considered as one component among others when developing policy at the jurisdictional and sector level. However, the report also concludes that the sample size is not sufficient to reliably assess data quality at the school level.

NDS hopes that, over time, the quality of the NCCD will improve, so that funding can be accurately directed to students based on need.

Indexation of school funding

Indexing school funding for children with disability based on CPI does not take into account the experience that educational costs generally increase faster than the CPI. Were indexation to be wedded to CPI, over time the resources available to children with disability would reduce.

NDS, therefore, supports the proposal of a minimum indexation rate set at 3%, with provision to set a higher rate of indexation through regulation. For 2019 and 2020, it is intended that indexation of the base amounts will be 3.56% to provide funding certainty while the sector transitions to the new arrangements.

A new floating indexation rate will apply from 2021. It will be a composite index, made up of 75% of the Wage Price Index and 25% of the All Groups Consumer Price Index. The adequacy of this to keep pace with costs and wages growth needs to be monitored but, in theory, it is a more suitable approach than indexation at CPI (particularly as a minimum indexation rate will be set at 3%).

Stronger commitment to fully accessible education by 2020

While the proposed amendments to the Act will lead to a better funding mechanism, the benefits of this will not flow for some time. Children with disability require additional support in schools now and they need assistance in ways beyond the reach of this Bill.

In a recent submission to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee on the National Disability Strategy, NDS highlighted the need for a stronger commitment

¹ Department of Education, PwC 2016 NCCD Continuous Quality Improvement Project, Final report, February 2017 found at [http://www.educationcouncil.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/Reports%20and%20publications/PwC%202016%20CQIP%20Final%20report%20-%20accessible%20version%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.educationcouncil.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/Reports%20and%20publications/PwC%202016%20CQIP%20Final%20report%20-%20accessible%20version%20(1).pdf)

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to fully accessible education.² All governments should be encouraged to implement the following measures to accelerate compliance with the Disability Standards for Education by 2020:

- make adherence to the Standards a mandatory part of school registration
- provide some non-individualised funding to schools that is dependent on progress made towards Disability Action Plans to ensure children with disability are welcome and supported in schools;
- educate school communities about disability inclusion; and publish progress on Disability Action Plans on the ‘my school’ website;
- strengthen training for all teachers on the skills to teach and include children with disability, and promote related professional development;
- ensure specialist advice is available, such as how to modify the curriculum for a particular child, promote positive behaviour for children with disability and reduce the use of restrictive interventions; and
- establish joint planning between schools, families and the NDIA

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National Disability Services is the peak industry body for non-government disability services. It represents service providers across Australia in their work to deliver high-quality supports and life opportunities for people with disability. Its Australia-wide membership includes over 1100 non-government organisations which support people with all forms of disability. Its members collectively provide the full range of disability services—from accommodation support, respite and therapy to community access and employment. NDS provides information and networking opportunities to its members and policy advice to State, Territory and Federal governments.

² Details of this inquiry can be found at http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/AccessibleCommunities