

Coalition Senators' Additional Comments

1.1 Coalition Senators would like to provide additional information to the Chair's Report to this inquiry to ensure there is a fair accounting of the facts regarding levels of Commonwealth funding.

1.2 Coalition Senators acknowledge that the barriers to education faced by students with disability and their families are significant. Evidence presented throughout this inquiry shows that the challenges faced by students with disability and their families in accessing education can have a detrimental impact on their lifelong learning goals and future employment prospects.

1.3 However an important point that the Chair's Report failed to acknowledge was that, although the Commonwealth provides a substantial financial contribution to school education, it is not the primary funder of schools in Australia. The fact remains that the Commonwealth provides one-third of recurrent school funding while the states and territories are responsible for the majority two-thirds portion.

1.4 In relation to Recommendations 1 and 2 of the Chair's Report, Coalition Senators reiterate that the Government is already committed to supporting students with disability on the basis of need and has committed record levels of funding. The Commonwealth is contributing more than \$5 billion from 2014-2017 rising by \$100 million each year: \$1.1 billion in 2014; \$1.2 billion in 2015, \$1.3 billion in 2016 and \$1.4 billion in 2017. The funding is applied according to Students with Disability Loading (SWD) introduced by this Government, which is exactly the same as the loading formulated by the previous Labor Government in accordance with the *Australian Education Act 2013*.

1.5 States and territories are responsible for the overall quality of school education in their jurisdictions. The Committee heard that some states do a better job of supporting students with disability.¹ School leadership, improved teacher training, best-practice teaching and an inclusive culture within schools are all significant factors which contribute to better outcomes for students with disability and Coalition Senators support the recommendations in the Chair's Report which address these issues. There was concerning evidence presented to the Committee that a number of schools, across jurisdictions and sectors, were blatantly disregarding the Disability Standards. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency by state and territory governments to ensure that schools comply and that students with disability do not experience discrimination or exclusion from the education system.

¹ *Committee Hansard*, 25 September 2015, p. 13.

1.6 As a nation we expect all Australian children should be afforded similar opportunities including access to a quality education regardless of where they live and their socioeconomic background. Coalition Senators commend the Government for the projects being undertaken to develop resources to support principals and teachers.²

Senator McKenzie

Deputy Chair

² *Committee Hansard*, 29 September 2015, p. 49.