



## **Australian Education Union**

# **Submission to the Senate 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**

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## **Introduction**

The Australian Education Union (AEU) represents more than 186,000 members employed in public primary, secondary and special schools and the early childhood, TAFE and adult provision sectors as teachers, educational leaders, education assistants or support staff across Australia.

AEU members are well placed to advise on the education of students with disability, 76% of whom are enrolled in public schools. In preparing this submission the AEU has consulted widely among members employed in mainstream and special schools who understand the challenges students with disability face as well as anyone, save for the students themselves and their families.

The AEU welcomes this inquiry. We trust that senators will gain a full understanding of the state of disability education in Australia today and that this inquiry will be a catalyst for much needed improvement.

Despite numerous official reports over the past decade identifying serious deficiencies in the education of young Australians with disability, very little has changed. While governments have talked about the problem, children with disability have started and finished primary school without seeing any improvement.

There is a crisis in the resourcing of disability education. Inadequate resource levels mean schools are unable to provide thousands of students with the quality education they are entitled to. 84% of principals report having to divert resources from other areas of their budgets to assist students with disability. Official estimates of the number of children with a disability that goes unrecognised by education authorities and hence attracts no additional support for the school they attend range from 110,000 to 400,000.

The real story of chronically underfunded disability education is a human one. AEU members at the coalface know too well the frustrations of parents who know their child could achieve more with targeted support but that their school is not funded to provide it.

The inaction in this area is inexcusable given the most significant national review of schooling funding for 40 years provided a sound educational rationale for improved funding and a framework for delivering it. The Gonski Review identified disability as one of the key factors of disadvantage affecting school attainment and achievement. Additional targeted resources, the Gonski panel explained, as well as being a basic matter of equity, will keep more students in schools longer, raising their skill levels and ultimately lifting workforce participation, an important objective as Australia faces a declining working age population.

Given both major political parties went to the 2013 federal election promising an improved disability loading based on the Gonski Review's recommendations, it is galling to still have to be campaigning for a fair go for these children. The Abbott Government's refusal to keep its election promise to implement a disability loading which recognises the full extent of disability in our schools means that resourcing levels still remain far below actual need. Temporary additional funding provided through the More Support for Students with Disability national partnership provided a glimpse of what well targeted resources can

achieve. Again, the Abbott Government's failure to continue funding this beyond 2014 has led to schools being forced to abandon innovative programs that were making a real difference to students' lives.

Startlingly, with the cessation of the national partnership funding, total Commonwealth Government funding for disability education will decline in 2015 in real terms. If the Abbott Government proceeds with its stated intention to abandon the Gonski funding plan and fails to introduce a new loading, commonwealth funding for disability education will continue to decline in real terms, accelerating from 2018 when it will only be indexed by the CPI.

The AEU's key recommendation for improving education for students with disability is for State and Federal governments to commit to the full six years of Gonski funding including the overdue implementation of the full disability loading.

Other areas that need attention from this inquiry include the provision of initial education and ongoing professional development to enable teachers to provide the necessary support to students with disability. 63% of beginning teachers do not believe their training adequately prepared them to deal with students with disability.

All teacher preservice degrees should contain a mandatory unit on special education, and students should have access to advice from someone with expertise in disability education in their first two years of work. Ongoing professional development should also be made available to existing teachers.

There are also issues with the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD). There is no good reason why data from the process should continue to be kept secret. The commonwealth and all state and territory governments agree that results from the NCCD should be used to inform an improved disability loading. Further delays and secrecy over the process are unacceptable. With the first full implementation taking place in 2015, results and details of how they will be used to determine the distribution of funding must be published before 2016.

Australian politicians showed leadership in backing the National Disability Insurance Scheme. They must do so again and rise above party politics to complete the unfinished business of fixing disability education. Students and their families have waited long enough.

## Current levels of access and attainment

ABS figures put the number of Australian school students with disability at 295,000 or 8.3%.<sup>1</sup> This proportion has risen over the past decade alongside the level of recognised disability in the population. 76% of students with disability are enrolled in public schools compared to 64% of the student population overall.<sup>2</sup>

86% of students with disability are educated in mainstream schools, the result of a shift towards inclusion policies over recent decades. Inclusion was enshrined in the Disability Standards for Education 2005, which were formulated under the Disability Discrimination Act and state, “a person with disability is able to seek admission to, or apply for enrolment in, an institution on the same basis a prospective student without a disability.”

While formal equality before the law has been achieved, the reality in schools is different. A 2011 review of the Disability Standards found resource constraints were the major impediment to their effective functioning and this remains the case today. A 2015 survey conducted by Children with Disability Australia, found 23% of parents and carers have had a child refused enrolment because a school could not provide adequate support.<sup>3</sup>

After years in under-resourced schools, more students with disability drop out of education. Year 12 completion rates among people with a disability are 36% compared to 60% for those without disability.<sup>4</sup>

Families of disabled students frequently highlight the failure of the system to adequately prepare students for post-school life and its effect on further education opportunities. Despite school enrolment rates commensurate with their presence in the population of above 8%, students with a disability make up 6.8% those enrolled in vocational education and 5.5% of university students.<sup>5</sup> 15% of people with disability aged 15-64 have completed a bachelor degree or higher, compared to 26% of those without disability.

Children aged 3-5 with a disability comprise 6.2% of the total population in the age bracket, but only 5.6% of children enrolled in preschool.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ABS (2014) *Disability, Ageing and Carers: Young People and Disability 2012*.

<sup>2</sup> Productivity Commission (2014) *Report on Government Services*, Table 4A.31.

<sup>3</sup> Children with Disability Australia (2015). Education Survey  
<http://www.cda.org.au/Default.aspx?PageID=6723177&A=SearchResult&SearchID=8593684&ObjectID=6723177&ObjectType=1>

<sup>4</sup> ABS (2012) *Disability, Ageing and Carers 2014*

<sup>5</sup> NCVER (2014) *Students with a disability 2013*.

Australian Department of Education and Training (2014) *Selected Higher Education Statistics*

<https://www.education.gov.au/selected-higher-education-statistics-2014-student-data>

<sup>6</sup> Productivity Commission (2015) *Report on Government Services*. Table 3A. 14

## Impact of inadequate support

While legal inclusion has been mandated through the Disability Standards for Education, effective inclusion remains elusive. Halfway through the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020, its goal that “People with disability achieve their full potential through their participation in an inclusive high quality education system that is responsive to their needs,” remains unfulfilled.<sup>7</sup>

The inadequacy of support provided to students with disability is a matter of record, pointed out in numerous official reviews over the past decade

Shut Out, the consultation report prepared for the National Disability Strategy found that

“The education system continues to fail to respond to the needs of students with disabilities and, as a result, these students continue to lag behind on a range of attainment indicators.

The majority of submissions strongly argued that the current system has little or no capacity to meet the learning needs of students with disabilities and lacks the resources to ensure their full participation in classrooms and schools.<sup>8</sup>

The NDS document itself states ‘Targeted support is needed to assist people who are disadvantaged in education but mainstream education programs need to be designed for people of all abilities.’<sup>9</sup>

The 2011 Productivity Commission report that recommended the establishment of the National Disability Insurance Scheme found Australia’s overall disability support system “underfunded, unfair fragmented and inefficient.”<sup>10</sup> Insufficient funding and resourcing were raised at every consultation for the 2011 review of the Disability Standards for Education and in the majority of submissions as issues that prevented the effective functioning of the standards.<sup>11</sup>

The Review of Funding for Schooling (Gonski Review) found that disability was one of the key dimensions of disadvantage having a significant impact on educational performance and recommended a disability entitlement that reflects the true cost of adjustment schools are required to make.<sup>12</sup>

The 2010 NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into the provision of Education of students with disability and special needs heard that existing levels of funding were ‘grossly insufficient’ and called for substantially increased funding to ensure all students have equitable access to education.<sup>13</sup> A 2015 Tasmanian Government report identified, “existing resourcing models as

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<sup>7</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (2011) 2010-2020 National Disability Strategy. p. 53.

<sup>8</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (2009) Shut Out: The experience of People with disabilities and their families in Australia (National Disability Strategy Consultation Report). p.47-48

<sup>9</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (2011) 2010-2020 National Disability Strategy. p. 53.

<sup>10</sup> Productivity Commission (2011) Disability care and support. p.2.

<sup>11</sup> Australian Government (2012). *Report on the Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005*.

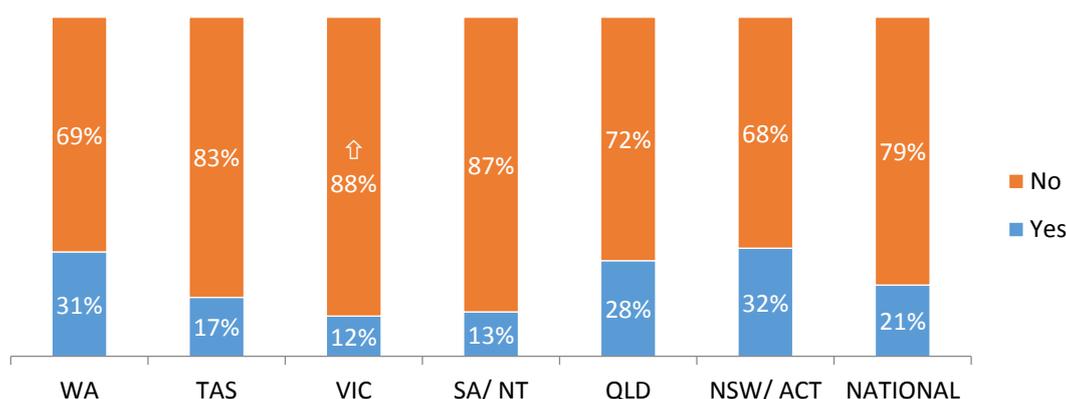
<sup>12</sup> Australian Government (2011) Review of Schooling Funding.

<sup>13</sup> NSW Legislative Council (2010) Inquiry into the provision of Education of students with disability and special needs. p. xv.

being a problem that means students with support needs related to disability are not getting support that is appropriate to those needs.”<sup>14</sup>

A nationwide survey of school principals in early 2015 conducted by the AEU found insufficient resources to meet the needs of students with disability remains a fundamental problem in Australian schools (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Schools with insufficient teaching resources to meet needs of students with disability**



Q: Overall, do you have sufficient resources to appropriately meet the needs of students with disability at your school? (Principals with students with disability n=709) Source: AEU State of our Schools survey 2015

Of course it is students with disability and their families who bear the brunt of funding neglect. The quotes in Box 1 from parents are a snapshot of what parents experience every day dealing with a system that is not adequately equipped to help their child. There is common frustration that their child is capable of achieving more at school and preparing themselves for a more independent and satisfying life, but this chance is being denied them by a school system that is not funded adequately. This frustration is evident in the Queensland Government’s School Opinion Survey, which consistently records the lowest levels of satisfaction among parents of students with a disability enrolled in mainstream schools.<sup>15</sup>

A parent’s frustration is captured in a submission to the Tasmanian Government’s recent Ministerial Taskforce Report

I see two boys wanting to learn but for reasons out of their control they don’t get the assistance needed. I have spent many a restless night worrying about these two boys’ futures. If both boys aren’t given the opportunities in the next few years they will become disenfranchised with education and end up on the disability pension.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Tasmanian Government (2015) Improved Support for Students with Disability. p.14.

<sup>15</sup> Boyle, C. & Anderson, J. (2014) Disability funding in schools shouldn’t be based on state. The Conversation 19/8/2014

<sup>16</sup> Tasmanian Government (2015) Improved Support for Students with Disability. p.13.

### **Box 1. Parents of students with disability on the impact of inadequate levels of support for their children**

“My 6 year old daughter is Aboriginal and was diagnosed with multiple disabilities (ASD, Global Delay & ADHD) just after she started in a mainstream kindergarten. She requires a modified program as well as continuous assistance to access the curriculum. Like other students in her age group she has only seven hours of funding support (teacher’s aide) a week, which doesn’t even cover her literacy and numeracy time. My daughter is at the very bottom of her class and will stay there unless she receives further support.”

**Kim Williams**

“Thousands of children, including my son, do not receive any additional support or funding because dyslexia, auditory processing and similar learning conditions do not fall within the definition of ‘disability’ used in schools. These kids, of average and above intelligence, have the capacity to learn but are currently ignored. Why is funding provided to gifted and talented programs but not the learning disabled?”

**Deborah Dickenson**

“I have two boys on the autism spectrum who also have ADHD. They are in year 3 and the lack of support in the classroom is starting to impact their grades. One of the boys is in a class of 30 and at least six children in that class require additional attention. Because the teacher has limited support not only do the children with additional needs miss out, so does the rest of the class because the teacher needs to give extra assistance to the six. Get this right now and these kids will grow up to get jobs and become contributing members of Australia. Get it wrong and they end up unemployed, on welfare and probably a drain on the public purse for the rest of their lives.”

**Deanne King**

Common complaints from parents dealing with the system include

- excessive wait times for official recognition of disability and funding approval
- arbitrary funding criteria that exclude a lot of students needing support
- students’ loss of funding when transitioning to secondary school
- students funded for only part of their education, such as two days out of every five
- funding arbitrarily cut off and students forced to reapply.

Parents trying to get the best outcome for their child from an under resourced school system commonly face other compounding challenges. 33.9% of children with a recognised disability hail from single parent families, compared to 18.4% of those without disability.<sup>17</sup> Research by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has found disability concentrated in areas with fewer economic resources.<sup>18</sup> Around 37% of people with primary carer responsibilities for someone with a disability are disabled themselves. Primary carers are

<sup>17</sup> ABS (2014) *Disability, Ageing and Carers: Young People and Disability 2012*.

<sup>18</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2009) *The geography of disability and economic disadvantage in Australian capital cities*.

likely to be in the poorest two-fifths of households and 53% receive income support as their main source of cash income.<sup>19</sup> Despite this, many parents see no other option but to pay themselves for private assessments and assistance.

As well as battling to get the best out of an under resourced education system, parents have to provide strong emotional support for their children who report high levels of difficulty fitting in socially (35%) and communicating (27%) at school.<sup>20</sup>

Raising a child with a disability can take a great emotional, financial and physical toll. Rather than finding schooling a supportive experience which provides their child with the education they need to achieve their best given their condition, a lot of parents find themselves having to fight the system to get their child an inadequate share of the limited resources available.

In addition to the proportion of young people with disability increasing steadily – it rose from 9.5% in 1998 to 10% in 2003 and 11.4% in 2009<sup>21</sup> - the pattern of disability and hence learning patterns as we know them are changing. Students are presenting with disabilities that are increasingly complex, unfamiliar and in some instances less visible. The change is due in part to rare and preventable causes of disability, such as foetal alcohol syndrome, and is influenced by the increasing survival rates of premature infants. In addition, rates of comorbidity – which is the co-occurrence of one or more disorders in the same child or adolescent either at the same time or in some causal sequence - are alarmingly high, with 40% of people in Australia who have an intellectual disability also experiencing mental health difficulties.<sup>22</sup>

A main source of the disability education resource squeeze is the large number of students with disability who receive no extra support at school. For 2012 the Productivity Commission calculated the number of school students that satisfied the criteria for funding for disability at 183,610, based on information supplied by states.<sup>23</sup> For the same year the ABS reported there were approximately 295,000 children aged 5-17 with disability attending Australian schools.<sup>24</sup>

Trials of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD, discussed in more detail below) in 2011 and 2012 returned estimates of disabled students among the total student population of 296,417 and 378,109 respectively, suggesting a much larger number than that recognised by education authorities.<sup>25</sup> The second year of the

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<sup>19</sup> ABS (2014) *Disability, Ageing and Carers*.

<sup>20</sup> ABS (2014) *Disability, Ageing and Carers: Young People and Disability 2012*.

<sup>21</sup> ABS Disability, Australia, 2003, 2009.

<sup>22</sup> NSW Teachers Federation (2014) *Public Education: An Inclusive System of Provision for Students with Disability*

<sup>23</sup> Productivity Commission (2014) *Report on Government Services*, Table 4A.31.

<sup>24</sup> ABS (2014) *Disability, Ageing and Carers: Young People and Disability 2012*.

<sup>25</sup> PricewaterhouseCoopers (2011) *Trial of a model for collecting nationally consistent data on school students with disability*.

PricewaterhouseCoopers (2013) *2012 trial of the nationally consistent collection of data on school students with disability*.

phased implementation of the NCCD in 2014 estimated the number of students with disability among the national student population at 598,824.<sup>26</sup>

The ABS estimated, based on its 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, that 133,000 students with disability were receiving no support or special arrangements at school. As Table 1 shows, these were overwhelmingly located in mainstream schools. 37,600 students with profound or severe core activity limitation receiving no support or special arrangements in mainstream schools indicates a crisis level of under resourcing.

As Figure 2 demonstrates, schools are having to spread scarce resources across growing numbers of students requiring special attention, many of whom do not have their conditions officially recognised and as such attract no extra funding. Quotes from school principals detailing how insufficient resources affect schools' ability to deliver educational equity are provided in Box 2.

**Table 1. Proportion of students with disabilities in mainstream schools receiving support, by type.**

	With profound or severe disability	All with disability
Special equipment (including computer)	8.6% (9,900)	5.6% (14,200)
Special tuition	35.1% (40,100)	28.5% (72,700)
Special assessment procedure	19.2% (21,900)	12.9% (33,000)
Other support	40.2% (45,900)	27.5% (70,100)
No support	32.9% (37,600)	50% (127,400)

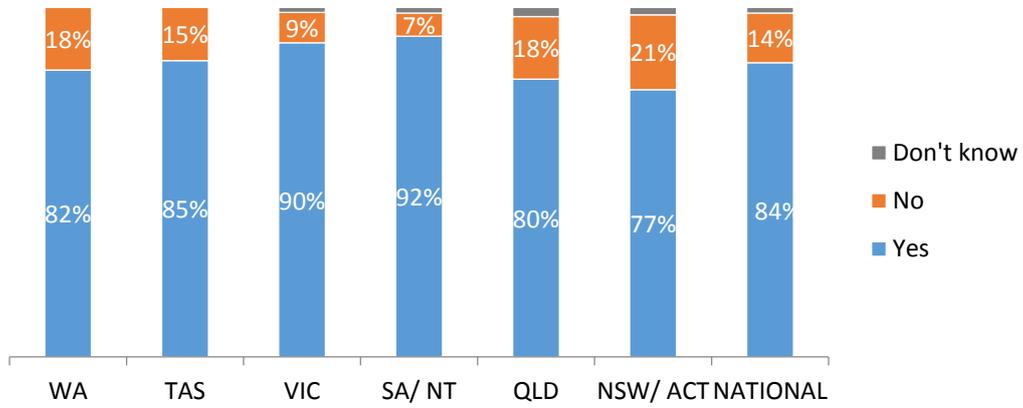
Source: ABS (2014) Disability, Ageing and Carers: Young People and Disability 2012.

A common scenario in mainstream classrooms is a teacher working with an aide who officially is allocated to provide special assistance to 2-3 students with a recognised disability. In reality the aide is working with larger number of students with learning difficulties whose conditions are not acknowledged and for whom the school receives no additional funding. None of the children needing assistance are receiving it at the level to which they are entitled and the learning experience for every child in the classroom suffers.

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<sup>26</sup> <sup>26</sup> South Australian Department for Education and Child Development (2015) *Phase 2 Report: 2014 South Australian Implementation of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability*.

**Figure 2. Schools using funding from other areas to fund students with a disability**



Source: AEU State of our Schools survey 2015. Question: Are there students with disability at your school who you have to assist using funds from other areas of your budget because they are ineligible for targeted government funding or the amount you receive is inadequate? (Principals with students with disability  $n=709$ )

## **Box 2. Quotes from principals on how inadequate support for students with disability impacts their school**

“We have no funding for children who are just outside the bottom five per cent and still need help, so we are using our Better Schools Funding to support them. Teachers are spending hours outside class on paperwork or preparing individual lesson plans, because otherwise it would reduce the time children get for support. We still have concerns with students not being funded for the entire term. We are in rural SA and there is a lack of expertise or access to specialist schools in our area. At times in the past we’ve struggled to get people to attend our site in a timely manner to undertake assessments but we’ve seen an improvement since a restructure earlier this year in some areas, although with a shortage of staff for some key positions this has continued to be an ongoing concern”

**Adrian Maywald, Lucindale Area School (SA)**

“We fund integration aides for several students who do not qualify under the PSD. These children typically have Autism Spectrum Disorder and/or behavioural issues. Many have complex family backgrounds and families with a limited capacity to support them. Several have toileting issues and require one on one assistance with personal needs. There is never enough money to support these basic rights.”

**Debbie Nelson, Mooroolbark East Primary School (Vic)**

“Children who are just above the cut off on the intellectual assessment scale (say IQ of 72 rather than under 70) miss funding but still require the assistance for improvement in learning outcomes. It would be advantageous for the school to be able to employ a teacher with Special Education or Autism training to assist in building the skills of teachers for good first teaching. The additional funding allocated by Gonski would enable us to bring this expertise into the school to support the learning of teachers and thus the learning for all students.”

**Kerrie Simpson, Parkwood Green Primary School (Vic)**

I have to divert money from other curriculum areas to employ additional Program for Students with Disabilities aides to ensure that children who require full time assistance and support receive it even though they're only funded at levels 2 or 3. I have a significant number of other students who are ineligible for funding but who still require support and assistance to be in a mainstream classroom, able to learn and not stopping other students from learning. Again, I divert money from elsewhere to provide assistance for them.

**Kim Stewart, Yarrawonga College P-12 (Vic)**

“Getting the right level of expertise and professional learning for the teachers to adequately support the students. Especially children with autism as their needs are varied. There’s a lack of support at the regional level. The support staff we have are fantastic it’s just there aren’t enough of them to go around. The demand for support is increasing especially with the increased diagnosis of children but the amount of speech and language, psychologists and English as an Additional Language support is inadequate.”

**Lynda Thompson, Mernda Primary School (Vic):**

“Insufficient funding overall. No funding for children who fall just outside parameters. The number of children needing additional support is growing but the sources and level of funding are shrinking. Staff who hold a role in supporting such children (i.e. Regional Support Staff) are just over-worked with growing case levels that cannot be managed.”

**Peter Clifton, Magpie Primary School, (Vic)**

“We have had to support a student with Autism Spectrum Disorder over the last 2 years with only limited (level 2) funding during 2015. He has had to be fully supported by an aide for the majority of class and yard times. This is one recent example of how schools need to take money from other budgets to enable very challenging behaviours to be moderated.”

**Brendan Miller, Footscray West Primary School (Vic)**

“Students are ineligible for support for things like language disorders. Students not previously identified but tested when they start with us but 'out of round' so funding is delayed. Serious psychological/psychiatric issues not funded.”

**Karen Terry, St Helena Secondary College (Vic)**

“I have students who require occupational therapy who do not have disability funds to cover them adequately. Hence, I use overall school funds to hire an occupational therapist on a weekly basis. I do fund a speech pathologist out of disability funding and she sees only students who are funded on the program but the parents often want speech, occupational therapy and an aide full time and the funds do not cover that amount of service. Overall, we do tend to offer a range of services and as such we have a good reputation for our work with students with disabilities. The challenge is to provide for individual needs within limited school budgets.”

**Leanne Sheean, Montmorency South Primary School (Vic)**

“It seems like no matter how severe a child's disability, the amount of support is limited. I.e. no child gets a fulltime aide yet many cannot be left unsupervised or simply can't work unless they have one-on-one. Also, time necessary for the making of resources is not considered. This is often significant, especially for students with autism.

”Children with autism are really missing out, as a mainstream school alone simply doesn't have the knowledge and skill to assist the child in reaching their potential. Children with autism in mainstream schools can be very disruptive and cause staff a great deal of stress, and distress.

There is a designated program for children with autism attached to Beckenham Primary in WA, which achieves amazing results. It is a half day program where children attend their local school for half a day and then the specialist program for the other half. However, their yearly intake is very small, probably around 20 students. “

**Jennifer Broz, Curtin Primary School (WA)**

“Many students have a learning or behavioural disability but it does not present itself as so severe that paediatricians will give it a diagnosis. With extra funding, these students would be supported and engaged in learning in the classroom, freeing up teachers to be able to better service all children in the classroom.”

**Rick Daly, Enfield Public School (NSW)**

“I have Kindergarten to Year 6 in the same room, a multistage class with two students with moderate disabilities and three mild. This makes teaching anything very difficult. I often feel I'm letting down the students who could be gifted and talented but I don't have the time or the energy to get to them most days as the behaviour and disabilities take so much time.”

**Sandra Bowden, Khancoban Public School (NSW)**

“We have the biggest special education program of any school in our region, which is 2.5 times the size of Victoria. We have students who are eligible for Special Schools but who come here because their parents want them to be part of our programs, and to be educated in a mainstream setting. We have about 100 students who require intensive specialist support, about 20 per cent of our total, as well as others who need some level of support. There are a lot of students who fall just outside the cut off for funded support, and so get nothing. That's ridiculous, because students don't go from being high-needs to having no needs, they still require some assistance. We have a major issue with getting students verified, which means delays in receiving support so we have to fund them out of our general budget.”

“We were one of the original schools to be part of the National Partnerships Program on disability. This delivered an extra \$340,000 in 2013, which we could use to really increase the support we provided. Unfortunately that dropped to \$140,000 last year because of the way the Qld Government calculated their Gonski distribution.”

**Rebecca Hack, Berserker Street PS, Rockhampton (Qld)**

“Only three of our 140 students have a disability that requires extra funding. That ignores the children with an intellectual disability who just miss out on the 70 IQ cut-off but need support in class. We also have a number of children who have suffered trauma early in life, with impacts on their development and ability to learn. Schools get no funding for these students and are left to find a way to help them manage school and to learn. The result is we have to pay extra for support staff out of other budget areas, because our funded support doesn't meet our need.”

**Kelvin Baird Charlton P-12 (Vic)**

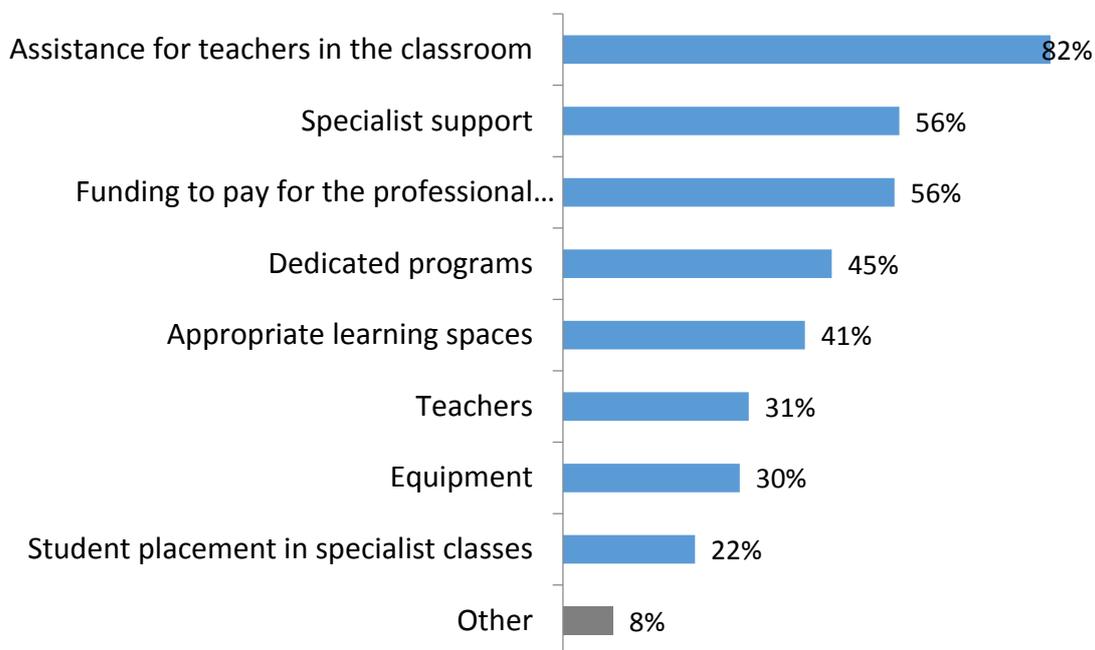
“We have roughly 270 students, including our kindergarten class. Of these we get support funding for five, and two for the 55-70 IQ funding but probably about 45 have some kind of condition that needs support, that's about 17 per cent. It's a huge number of students with different issues that we have to deal with out of our budget and through existing personnel. We are seeing more children arrive with mental health issues like anxiety, ODD and conduct disorder and behaviours that result from the circumstances that are in their homes, such as domestic violence or drug/alcohol abuse, and it affects how they can cope at school.

“It is a problem to get enough good quality support staff, because helping deal with students with high and additional needs, especially the ones who are prone to hurting staff or running away, causes stress and anxiety. Our funding has actually gone backwards by \$350,000 in the last couple of years because our National Partnerships Program funding has finished. More recently the Tasmanian Government has brought in budget cuts which again has reduced staffing.”

**Susan Richardson, Bowen Road PS, (Tas)**

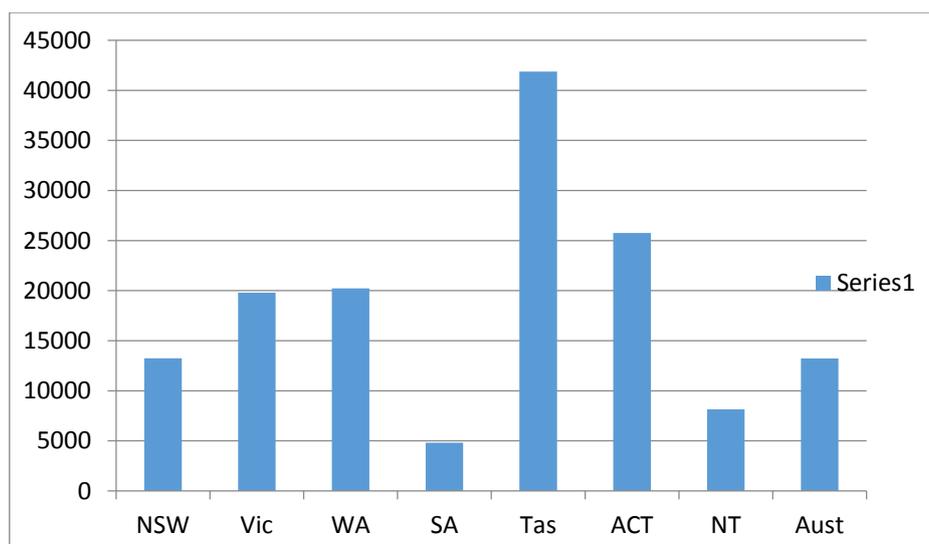
The AEU's 2015 State of our Schools survey found inadequate classroom support is of greatest concern for school principals, although as Figure 3 shows, adequate resources are lacking across all aspects of teaching. There are also large variations across states and territories in funding levels for students with disabilities, as shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 3. Disability resources reported as lacking by school principals**



Source: AEU State of our Schools Survey 2015 Question: What resources are you lacking? (Principals with students with a disability and inadequate resources  $n=560$ )

**Figure 4. Average targeted funding per targeted student with disability, govt schools 2009-10**



Source: Australian Council for Educational Research (2011). Assessment of current process for targeting of schools funding to disadvantaged students. p. 40.

## **Social, economic and personal benefits of improving outcomes**

Inclusive treatment of people with a disability is a hallmark of a civilised, democratic society. The Convention on the Rights of People with Disability (CPRD), ratified by Australia in 2008, enshrines the right to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life without discrimination. In regards to education, signatories to the CRPD agree to ensure that

- a. Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability
- e. Effective individualised support measures are provided in environments that maximise academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.<sup>27</sup>

Australia pursues inclusive education because we endorse the sentiment of UN's Salamanca Statement that inclusion provides the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building inclusive societies and achieving education for all. It makes a statement about who we are as a society: that we consider people with disability the equal of anyone else and not an inconvenience to be segregated. The Salamanca Statement urges governments to "give the highest policy and budgetary priority to improve their education systems to enable them to include all children regardless of individual differences or difficulties."<sup>28</sup>

Of course the strongest motivation for a providing high quality inclusive education is the improvement it can make to people's quality of life. As stated in the National Disability Strategy

People with disability want the same things as everyone else, whether that is forming personal relationships, having a family, taking part in continuous learning or enjoying retirement. Young people with disability have the same aspiration to grow up, get a job and leave home as other young people – and they deserve the same opportunity.<sup>29</sup>

A quality education is as much prerequisite for people with disability achieving optimal employment and health outcomes and enjoying a decent quality of life, as it is for those without disability, if not more so.

Giving true meaning to our international obligations on the rights of people with disability and acting on the many official Australian inquiries and reports that have identified grave shortcomings in disability education could be transformative. It would demonstrate to ourselves and others that we value truly the principles of equality and human rights that we claim to be guided by. Despite its considerable cost, there is no doubt that the National Disability Insurance Scheme is viewed by Australians as something to be proud of. Addressing the funding crisis facing disability education in Australian schools would likely attract similar public support if treated as a national priority by politicians.

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<sup>27</sup> United Nations (2008) Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, Article 24.

<sup>28</sup> UNESCO (1994) Salamanca statement and framework for Action on Special needs education. Article 3.

<sup>29</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (2011) 2010-2020 National Disability Strategy p.18

As the final report of the Gonski Review noted, “Lack of educational attainment has a negative effect on the employment prospects and level of income for people, with disability.”<sup>30</sup> Labour force participation for those with disability is 53% compared with around 83% for those without disability. The unemployment rate is higher at 9.4% compared to 5-6% for the broader workforce.<sup>31</sup> In line with these less favourable labour market outcomes, the average income for a person with a disability is around half that for a person without a disability.<sup>32</sup> OECD research has found that 45% of people with a disability in Australia live in or near poverty, more than double the OECD average of 22%.<sup>33</sup>

Various factors affect the employment and wage levels of people with disability, but lower school completion and further education enrolment rates play a big part. 2011 modelling by Deloitte for the Australian Network on Disability found that if the gap between the participation rate and unemployment rate for people with and without disability could be reduced by one-third over a decade resulting in the employment of an additional 203,000 people with disability, GDP would be 0.85%, or \$21.9 billion, greater in 2031.<sup>34</sup> Productivity Commission modelling estimates the effect of an extra 220,000 people with disability entering the workforce over a longer period to 2050 would result a GDP that is around 1%, or \$30 billion, greater in 2050.<sup>35</sup>

Workforce participation looms as an important issue for Australia. The latest Intergenerational Report estimates that the ratio of people of working age to those over 65 will almost halve from around 4.5 currently to 2.7 by 2055.<sup>36</sup> Increasing participation of those with disability is necessary if Australia is to adjust successfully to this reality. Future growth in the workforce is likely to be concentrated in technical industries. Most emerging jobs in these areas have few barriers to people with physical disabilities but require high education levels.

As well as economic returns, higher levels of employment deliver an important social dividend. Exclusion from work can affect physical and mental health, personal wellbeing and a sense of identity and self-worth.

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<sup>30</sup> Australian Government (2011) *Review of Funding for Schooling*. p.121.

<sup>31</sup> ABS (2014) *Disability, Ageing and Carers: Young People and Disability 2012*.

<sup>32</sup> Deloitte (2011) *The economic benefits of increasing employment for people with disability*.

<sup>33</sup> PricewaterhouseCoopers (2011) *Disability Expectations: Investing in a better life, a stronger Australia*.

<sup>34</sup> Deloitte (2011). *The economic benefits of increasing employment for people with disability*. (paper for the Australian Network on Disability). p.22.

<sup>35</sup> Productivity Commission (2011) *Disability Care and Support: Inquiry Report Volume 2*. p.941.

<sup>36</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (2015) *Intergenerational Report*. p.viii.

## **Impact of the More Support for Students with Disabilities program and impact of cessation**

The More Support for Students with Disabilities (MSSD) program was a National Partnership Agreement between the previous Commonwealth Government and the states. For the school years 2012-2014 it committed \$100 million per year to assist Australian schools to better support students with disabilities, contributing to improved student learning experiences, educational outcomes and transitions to further education and work. The funding was passed to education authorities (EAs) - government, catholic and independent - in each state based on the proportion of students with disability they enrol. It was then passed on to schools which were required to allocate the extra money to deliver one or more of 12 specified outputs. These outputs all involved building the capacity and expertise of teachers and schools to better meet the needs of students with disability.

An evaluation of the MSSD program conducted by PhillipsKPA for the Commonwealth Department of Education released in November 2013 found all but one EA had achieved all agreed output benchmarks. The positive impacts of the program were

- Greater cross-sectoral collaboration – The NSW Department of Education used MSSD funding to take a lead in developing online training modules. Other education authorities negotiated licensing agreements for the use of these or had similar training modules customised to meet their requirements.
- Positive attitudes from school staff towards the professional development initiatives made available through MSSD funding
- High value placed by time poor teachers and principals on the teacher release for training and planning enabled by MSSD funding
- Fostering of networks which emerged as a direct and indirect consequence of MSSD activity. 'Showcase' events were held at state and region levels and presentations on MSSD-funded initiatives became a common feature of professional association conferences and forums
- Reorientating of roles with special education teachers given more of a planning and guidance role, allied health professionals assuming a consultancy role in collaboration with teachers and support staff receiving special education specific training, something previously in short supply.
- Strengthened relationships with parents - this was an objective of many initiatives and was 'a clear, emerging, strength of the MSSD.' The iPad enabled learning program at WA's Coolbellup Learning Centre (Box 3) is one example of successful engagement of parents.

### **Box 3. More Support for Students with Disability initiative Coolbellup Learning Centre iPad project**

Coolbellup Learning Centre (CLC) is a primary education support centre in Perth's southern suburbs catering for students from Kindergarten to year six with a range of disabilities including intellectual, physical disabilities and autism.

CLC used money allocated under MSSD for its innovative iPad Project. This involved purchase of iPads for technology assisted learning and training for teachers and support staff in how to use applications. Information sessions were also held to engage parents in their children's use of the learning technology.

Evaluation methods included tracking individual students' progress. Elijah had never attended school before and had limited verbal English. He found it difficult to concentrate for periods of time and had difficulty following instructions. He had limited knowledge of basic concepts such as numbers, letters etc. Elijah had never used devices such as computers or iPads before.

With the help of staff trained in the use of iPads, after 10 weeks Elijah was able to recognize and write his name using the Magnetic Letters app. Using a whiteboard, Elijah was able to transfer his learning and wrote his name using a pen. He continued to learn more words and letters and basic sentence formation.

In 2013, after becoming competent with iPads, CLC students won a first prize in the Sunny Kids – Read2Remember iMovie competition.

Principal Pauline Winrow says the iPad project could not have been done without MSSD funding and 'completely changed the dynamic of teaching at the school.'

- A significant source of momentum within the MSSD was professional learning and the sharing of effective practices about the capacity of assistive technologies to open up means of communication and learning opportunities for students with disability. The trial of real time captioning in the deaf unit at Forest Hill Secondary College in Melbourne's outer east is described in Box 4
- Differentiation - the process of tailoring curriculum delivery to meet the needs of individual students - was accelerated under MSSD as a result of capacity building professional development of teachers and support staff and greater use of technology.<sup>37</sup>

According to the official evaluation, the MSSD was "largely a good news story, evolving to the point of making a positive and potentially sustainable impact, especially on classroom leadership and classroom practice."

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<sup>37</sup> Australian Government Department of Education (2013) Evaluation of the More Support for Students with Disabilities initiative.

**Box 4. More Support for Students with Disability initiative**  
**Forest Hill Secondary College trial of real time captioning for students with hearing impairment**

Beginning in 2012, students in the deaf unit at Forest Hill Secondary College in Melbourne's north-east benefitted from real time captioning during lessons.

Deaf and hearing impaired students in mainstream upper secondary classes received captioned text of a lesson within seven seconds of the teacher speaking. This was provided by trained captioners (working for commercial company Ai-live) located off site and connected via Skype to a microphone worn by the teacher. Captions appeared on a student's laptop or iPad. The text was also captured and emailed to students after a lesson. The captioning service was available in several different classes simultaneously.

Teachers involved in the trial believe it made a real difference to students' learning and motivation. A PhillipsKPA evaluation found it gave students a greater sense of independence in their learning.

Often, a teacher will continue to speak while writing on the board, moving around the room or looking down at their notes. This causes a problem for those students who rely on seeing the teacher's face to be able to use lip-reading to supplement what they can hear, and results in severe gaps in their learning. By having the live captioning, these gaps can be greatly reduced.

Captioning enables students to participate in class discussion. Without the live captioning they will often miss out on questions being asked by the teacher, or miss responses from their peers.

Content-heavy subjects, such as VCE level Psychology, Biology or Legal Studies, provide a challenge for both the interpreter and the profoundly deaf students, as they involve a lot of subject specific vocabulary and concepts. While normally the student may get a visual interpretation of the concept and the finger-spelt term, live captioning provides the written description as the teacher delivers it.

MSSD funding enabled the use of captioning in 2012 and 2013. The scheme did not continue in 2014. In the last term of 2014 funding was made available through the Victorian Deaf Education Institute to prepare for a more limited, real time captioning service with captioners located in classrooms. This did not begin until term 3, 2015 and will continue as a trial until the end of the school year. Staff report that while this provides a superior experience for students, funding only allows it to be provided in one classroom at a time.

Forest Hill staff believe substantial educational benefits would result from extending the service to students not profoundly deaf, lower secondary classes and other school activity such as assemblies.

Despite widespread satisfaction with Forest Hill Secondary College's trial of real time captioning it had to be forgone for 18 months due to the withdrawal of MSSD funding. It has returned to the school now, funded by a smaller grant from the Victorian Government, and is available to a reduced number of students.

"Significant gains" were apparent in the capabilities of teachers to better respond to the learning needs of students with disability. The high degree of take up and satisfying of benchmarks suggested a "significant appetite for the reforms MSSD helped deliver."

Unfortunate then that the winding up of this and other National Partnerships by the current Commonwealth Government and the abandonment of the Gonski Funding plan, means the resources are not available to build on the gains of MSSD. The loss of opportunities is evident in the examples provided here. With sustainable funding, the successful engagement strategy pioneered as part of Coolbellup Learning Centre's iPad project would have been repeated with new cohorts of students and parents and across neighbouring schools.

The Gonski Review panel paid close attention to the progress of National Partnerships and believed they provided a blueprint for how additional funding could be best utilised:

An evidence base is emerging from the National Partnership arrangements demonstrating that investment in integrated strategies that are responsive to local circumstances and need can be effective in improving outcomes for disadvantaged students. Critical elements in these strategies include building teacher capacity, strengthening instructional leadership and engaging parents and the broader community.<sup>38</sup>

Presciently, they warned "gains in student performance during the life of the National Partnerships may be lost when funding ceases."<sup>39</sup> This is precisely what has happened. With no targeted funding or disability loading to replace the withdrawal of MSSD, students with disability have lost out and successful programs and the innovation and experience derived from them have not been built upon.

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<sup>38</sup> Australian Government (2011) Review of Funding for Schooling p.145.

<sup>39</sup> Australian Government (2011) Review of Funding for Schooling p.145.

## **Future impact of indexing funding at CPI from 2017 & progress of needs based funding system stated in Australian Education Act**

The Review of Funding for Schooling chaired by David Gonski AC (Gonski Review) delivered its report in December 2011 after almost two years of work involving 71 stakeholder meetings, 39 school visits, receiving around 6,000 submissions and commissioning its own research.<sup>40</sup> After examining the resource characteristics of 1408 reference schools, at which 80% of students achieve national minimum NAPLAN benchmarks in reading and numeracy, the panel arrived at a schooling resource standard (SRS), a per student amount representing the recurrent resources required to support a student with minimal educational disadvantage.

The panel paid particular attention to the distribution of educational outcomes in Australian schools, finding lower achievement levels associated with five factors of disadvantage: socioeconomic status, indigeneity, school size and location, English language proficiency and disability. It was recommended that loadings be paid to schools on top of the SRS based on the prevalence of the various types of disadvantage faced by their student body.

For all the factors of disadvantage bar disability, the Gonski Review indicated a basis for calculating loadings. For disability, the panel found significant data and definitional issues hampered the finalisation of a how much a disability loading would be and to whom it should apply. It recommended that the nationally consistent collection of data on school students with a disability (NCCD) process being developed at the time be completed as a matter of priority and begin reporting from January 2013. The panel understood that the NCCD process would provide numbers of students with disability and the level of adjustment required to facilitate their education.

When the former Government incorporated the Gonski Review's recommendations into the Australian Education Act 2013 and the accompanying National Education Reform Agreement (NERA) with the states, an interim loading for disability was put in place pending finalisation of the NCCD. This involved no additional funding and was calculated by dividing existing education expenditure on school students with a disability by the total number of reported students with a disability. Reported students refers to those with a recognised disability that attracts some level of additional funding in the relevant jurisdiction as recorded in the Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services, not the larger number reported in the ABS Disability, Carers and Ageing survey.<sup>41</sup> Calculated this way, the loading was set at 186% of the schooling resource standard for each student with disability in a mainstream school and 223% for a student in a special school.

Under the NERA and bilateral agreements signed with the states, transition to every school in Australia being funded for the SRS would occur over six years 2014-2019. An NCCD-informed disability loading to be available from 2015 would complete the additional funding the Gonski Review identified as necessary to address the key factors of educational disadvantage. The SRS and loadings are integrally linked by an educational rationale based

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<sup>40</sup> Connors, L. & and McMorro, J. (2015) Imperatives in school finding: Equity, sustainability and achievement. Australian Council for Educational Research p.34

<sup>41</sup> Senate estimates EW0005\_14

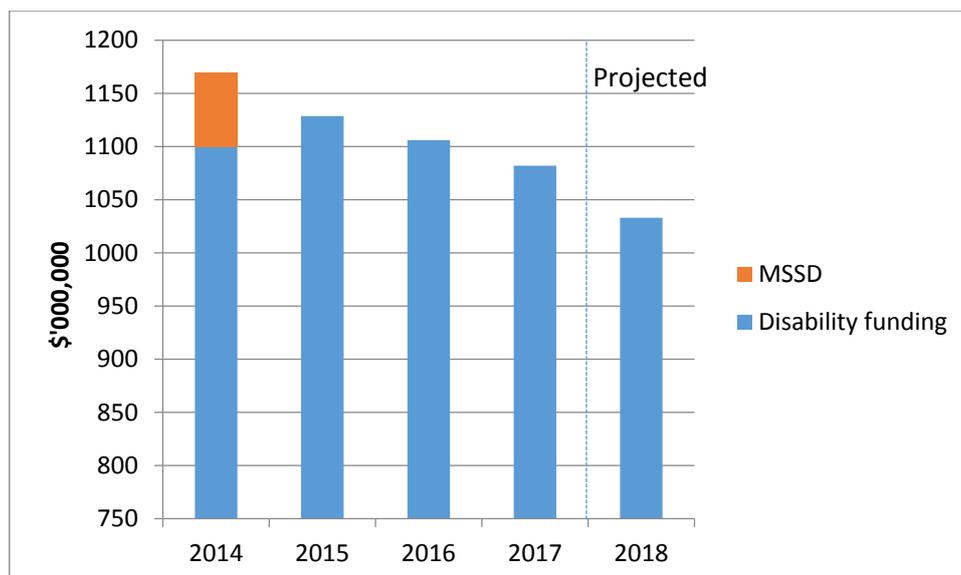
on the Gonski panel's work. The loadings only work to tackle disadvantage if they are additional to the SRS, the minimum amount needed to support a student facing minimal disadvantage.

The Abbott Government has abandoned the transition towards the SRS. From 2017 schools funding will only increase at the consumer price index. On disability funding, the government came to power promising to keep Labor's interim disability in place for 2014 and deliver an increased disability loading in 2015 informed by the NCCD. Introduction of the loading was subsequently pushed back to the beginning of 2016 school year, and the latest indication from the department suggests further delay is likely (see Box 5).

While deferring an increased disability loading, the Abbott Government appears to be indexing existing funding including the interim loading, most likely by the 4.7% per cent that the Labor agreed to in bilateral agreements. Official detail is difficult to come by, mostly limited to ministerial press releases touting the indexed funding as 'record amounts.' Funding allocations for disability are rounded to the hundreds of millions and no explanatory detail is provided.

A November 3 2014 media release from Minister Pyne stated the Commonwealth would provide \$1.1 billion for students with disability in 2014-15, \$1.2 billion for 2015-1, \$1.3 billion for 2016-17 and \$1.3 billion for 2017-18.<sup>42</sup> Spread across school years, accounting for the More Support for Students with Disability funding spent in 2014 (\$70million) and adjusting for rises in the ABS education wage price index, real Commonwealth funding 2014-2017 is illustrated in Figure 5. The cessation of MSSD has resulted in a real decline in funding in 2015. Real declines will continue under current policy settings and accelerate after 2017 if funding is only indexed by the CPI.

**Figure 5 Total real Commonwealth school funding for disability (\$ 2014, adjusted for inflation)**



<sup>42</sup> Christopher Pyne 3/11/2014 Record Funding for Students with a disability. Media Release

Source. Christopher Pyne Press Release 3/11/2014; Commonwealth Budget 2014-15, ABS Wage Price Index for private and public education and training 6345.0: June 2014-June 2015 increase of 3.03% used as expected increase for subsequent years; also accounts for projected increase in children with disability 3% p.a.). CPI increase 2017-18 used for projection, 1.5%.

It beggars belief that after a decade of reports pointing out how Australian schools are failing children with disability and less than four years after the Gonski Review called for urgency and provided a well-reasoned rationale for addressing the problem, the Commonwealth contribution to disability education is shrinking.

## Box 5. Minister Pyne's shifting commitments on a disability loading

### 2013

Both major parties went to the 2013 Federal Election with a policy of implementing the increased disability loading from 2015, in line with the recommendations of the Gonski Review. This was to be done based on the data obtained from the NCCD process.

An interim loading was put in place for the 2014 school year, however it is clear that this was only intended to be a temporary measure and that it did not take into account the full level of need in schools which was to be measured by the NCCD. The 2013/14 Federal Budget explained the loading as follows:

*“Students with a disability: schools will receive 186 per cent extra for each student with a disability in 2014, with further work to inform a more detailed loading from 2015.”<sup>43</sup>*

Later that year the Coalition's election policy document confirmed its commitment to match Labor on disability education and to implement the new disability loading formula.

*The Coalition will match the Commonwealth funding committed by Labor to extend support for students with disabilities for twelve months, while a new 'loading' formula is developed for these students. Current funding arrangements for students with a disability and learning difficulty are unfair and inequitable. Students with disabilities deserve better support so they can access the schools and education programmes that best suit their needs.<sup>44</sup>*

A media release from then Education spokesman Christopher Pyne on August 23, 2013 confirmed that, if elected, the Coalition would deliver a loading which provided more funding for students with disability and do it from 2015. It even confirmed that it intended to extend extra funding to students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties.

*“The Coalition today has welcomed the commitment to include students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties in the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability. If elected to Government the Coalition will continue the data collection work which will be used to deliver more funding for people with disability through the 'disability loading' in 2015.”<sup>45</sup>*

After the Abbott Government was elected it retained its commitment to an increased disability loading despite attempts to break its election promise and abandon Gonski funding after 2014.

### 2014

However the 2014/15 Budget, as well as containing no extra funding for Gonski agreements beyond 2017, did not put aside any extra funding for a full disability loading in 2015.

On May 16, 2014, a few days after the Budget, Christopher Pyne said that the Government “remained committed to the new disability loading from 2015” but added that the “extent of

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<sup>43</sup> Commonwealth Budget 2013-14

<sup>44</sup> The Coalition's Policy for Schools: Students first policy document (2013) <http://lpaweb-static.s3.amazonaws.com/13-08-29%20The%20Coalition's%20Policy%20for%20Schools%20-%20policy%20document.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> Christopher Pyne 23/8/13 Media release.

growth in students attracting the loading was not yet reliably known” with the possible implication that he did not believe there would be a need for extra money.<sup>46</sup>

The delays in the NCCD meant that data was not completed in time for the 2015 school year, and the final meeting of Education Ministers for 2014 confirmed that the new disability loading would not be introduced, and that the interim loading would be rolled over for 2015.

The Australian newspaper on November 3rd, 2014 quoted a spokesman as saying that “*the government was confident the issues would be resolved to introduce the loading in 2016.*”<sup>47</sup>

## 2015

Testimony at Senate Estimates in February 2015, confirmed the Education Department’s confidence that the NCCD would be completed in 2015, with data collection taking place from August to October, and the final data presented to Education Ministers at their final meeting for 2015.

On March 24<sup>th</sup> 2015 Minister Pyne confirmed the Abbott Government remained committed to “refining” the disability loading and introducing it in 2016, and that the data the loading was to be based on would be consistent across Australia from 2016 onwards.

*“In what is a significant achievement, this year is the first year in which all Australian schools will complete the data collection. The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on Students with Disability (NCCD) is on track to be introduced in 2016, as planned, allowing the Government and the States and Territories to further refine the existing loadings to better support students.”*<sup>48</sup>

However the 2015/16 Budget again failed to devote any extra resources to implementing the disability loading in 2016. Again, Minister Pyne repeated his claim that the \$1.3 billion being provided in 2015/16 would be the highest ever funding for disability in schools. He did confirm that the Government intended the NCCD to inform funding from 2016.

*“From 2016, for the first time ever, Commonwealth funding will be informed by the National Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) so that all students with disability are funded on the same basis, regardless of the state or territory in which they live.”*<sup>49</sup>

However a Senate Estimates hearing in June 2015 raised some doubt about this schedule, with Education Department Secretary Tony Cook raising the prospect that no extra funding would be delivered under the loading until the middle of the following year.

Mr Cook: *“It is a matter for government as to when government decides the loading will be implemented. In terms of 2016 we might make a payment in June or July. Therefore, the regulations would not have to change until before that point. But it is a matter for government.”*<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The Australian 16/5/14 Row over increased funds for disability

<sup>47</sup> The Australian 3/11/2014 Hidden toll of student disability

<sup>48</sup> Christopher Pyne 24/3/2015 Media release

<sup>49</sup> Christopher Pyne 12/5/2015 Media release

<sup>50</sup> Hansard of Education and Estimates Committee Hearings (2015) page 150

## **Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with a Disability (NCCD)**

As far back as 2008, the Council of Australian Governments agreed to work towards a nationally consistent approach to identifying students with a disability. This was seen as necessary to enable more accurate information to be collected about the number of students with disability, including their levels of need and would inform planning in the sector, particularly around commonwealth funding allocations.

Under the auspices of the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (now the Education Council) trials of proposed models were held in 2011 and 2012. Based on the 2011 trial, the proportion of students in the population with disability was estimated at 8.4%, or 296,417,<sup>51</sup> a figure very close to that returned in the ABS Disability, Ageing and Carers survey conducted the following year (295,000).

Satisfaction with the trials led to the phased implementation towards full data collection over the period 2013-2015. The NCCD model is based on the exercise of informed judgement by teachers and other appropriate school staff to determine the level of adjustment required to enable students with disability to undertake their education consistent with providers' obligations under the Disability Standards for Education. For a student to be counted as having adjustment made, their school must have made adjustments for a minimum of 10 weeks/one term. Adjustments are classified as being 'supplementary', 'substantial' or 'extensive' and the number of students for whom 'none' is required are also recorded. In 2013 20% of schools took part in the NCCD, and in 2014 76%. 100% of schools are expected to take part in 2015.<sup>52</sup>

The final report of the Gonski Review, delivered in December 2011, recommended that the NCCD inform the design of a loading required to address the educational disadvantage faced by students with disability. In August 2012 the Commonwealth and state governments agreed there was overlap between the two objectives and henceforth the NCCD process became entwined with the development of the disability loading.

In late 2014 the Education Council resolved that data emerging from the latest and largest NCCD cycle was not yet 'reliable or robust enough' to be used in the allocation of funding.<sup>53</sup> Full data for 2014 has not been officially released but is contained in a South Australian Department of Education and Child Development report. Nationally a disability rate of 16.3% was observed in the participating schools. For the 2014 South Australian implementation of the NCCD covering 66% of schools, students entered as having a disability were classified at the at the NCCD levels of adjustment in the following proportions

- supplementary – 53%
- substantial – 19.5%
- extensive – 10.5%

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<sup>51</sup> Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2011) Trial of a model for collecting nationally consistent data on school students with disability. (prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers) p.29.

<sup>52</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Education Council meeting 31/10/14.

<sup>53</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Education Council meeting 31/10/14.

- no adjustment - 17%<sup>54</sup>

Among the total Australian school student population this would equate to around 598,000 students with disability. Concern over the reliability of the data was the basis for a decision that disability funding continue to be based on the existing state and territory criteria, supporting only those with a formally recognised condition. This involved the breaking of an undertaking that the new loading informed by the NCCD would apply from the start of the 2015 school year. So concerned was the Education Council secretariat about potential negative stakeholder feedback that it distributed ‘key messages’ for state ministers’ use.

Also in 2014 PricewaterhouseCoopers was commissioned to investigate the costs of making the adjustments recorded in the NCCD process. Following observations and data gathering in 77 schools, it was determined the average costs of adjustments were

- supplementary - \$6,508
- substantial - \$14,422
- extensive - \$25,304<sup>55</sup>

In 2014 the interim loading amount for a student with disability in a mainstream primary school was \$17,244 (186% of the student resource standard). This applied to all verified students regardless of the level of adjustment they require.

In addition to delays and secrecy surrounding publishing the findings of the NCCD, the AEU has several other concerns.

- For 2015 the classification ‘none’ has been replaced with ‘support provided within quality differentiated teaching practice.’ The previous classification system had been considered satisfactory through the trial and development phase. It has the benefit of clarity. The new classification is likely to cause confusion and will compromise the comparability of data collected this year with that collected earlier.
- A 2015 Education Council information sheet advises that students should only be counted in the data collection if there is evidence of the school consulting with their parents and carers over adjustments to be made, as required by the Disability Standards for Education. Time-poor teachers often have difficulty arranging such consultations.
- Awareness: a 2015 Children with Disability parent survey found only 24% were aware of the NCCD even though it was conducted in around three quarters of schools in 2014.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> South Australian Department for Education and Child Development (2015) *Phase 2 Report: 2014 South Australian Implementation of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability*.

<sup>55</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Education Council meeting November 31/10/14. *Survey on the additional resourcing provided for levels of adjustment for students with disability* (report prepared by Pricewaterhousecoopers).

<sup>56</sup> Children with Disability Australia (2015). Education Survey <http://www.cda.org.au/Default.aspx?PageID=6723177&A=SearchResult&SearchID=8593684&ObjectID=6723177&ObjectType=1>

## **What should be done to better support students with disability?**

### **1. Implementation of the full six years of the Gonski funding agreement including urgent and overdue implementation of an improved disability loading.**

Australia's leaders stand condemned for their inaction on education of students with disability. Six years after the National Disability Strategy consultation report was published and almost four years after the Gonski Review handed down its recommendations, nothing has changed. Reports finding that schools are struggling to provide these students with a quality education due to resource constraints continue to pile up. The effects of this neglect are seen in lower attainment levels, underrepresentation in further education, reduced workforce participation and increased incidence of poverty.

The Abbott Government's rejection of the work of the Gonski Review and abandonment of the funding plan from 2017 is a betrayal of all Australian school students, but particularly those with disability. The Gonski panel was meticulous in establishing the schooling resources required to give every child a quality education. The panel further recommended that schools educating students affected by key factors of disadvantage receive additional funding. Acknowledging that it did not possess the expertise to determine the costs of adjustment required for students with varying levels of disability, the panel suggested this be done as part of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data for Students with Disability process. This work has now been completed. Both major political parties and all state and territory governments have agreed a new disability loading is needed and should be based on the NCCD.

In the Gonski funding plan agreed between the previous federal government and the states, additional funding from both levels of government to achieve the schooling resource standard and address disadvantage was phased in over six years from 2014. The refusal of the Western Australian, Queensland and Northern Territory governments to sign heads of agreements detailing Gonski funding commitments and the disinterest of the Abbott Government in ensuring funding commitments are met, make it difficult to determine if states and territories are maintaining pre-Gonski funding levels. There is a complete lack of transparency around what a number of states are doing with the additional funding they have received from the Commonwealth.

The Abbott Government came to power promising students with disabilities and their families an improved school funding loading by 2015. Any change now appears to be on the never-never. After the promise of the Gonski Review, students with disability and their families have had long-held hopes for more support cruelly ripped away. As things stand, when the 2016 year school rolls around we will have seen no real increase in support since the Shut Out report found the 'education system continues to fail to respond to the needs of students with disabilities' in 2009. In the intervening period thousands of children will have started and finished primary school.

Rather than address the funding crisis, the Abbott government is letting things slide. In 2015 total Commonwealth funding to support students with disability declined in real terms following the cessation of the More Support for Students with Disabilities program. This real decline will worsen after 2017.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme was conceived to enhance the quality of life and increase economic and social participation for people with disability. Following exhaustive research, a model and method of funding it were devised by government agencies. Public support for the scheme was developed as well as acceptance that the costs would be borne by the community. The outcome is a scheme that enjoys widespread support and gives meaning to Australia's commitment to social inclusion and the rights of people with a disability.

A similar situation faces school students with disability. The work of the Gonski Review and the NCCD process have established the need for increased funding and a framework for delivering it. It is high time our politicians showed some leadership on this issue. Providing students with disability the quality education that is their right requires the full and urgent implementation of the Gonski funding plan, including an improved disability loading.

### **Recommendations**

- **That, beginning in 2016, the Commonwealth Government introduce a loading to fund all schools for the adjustment they are required to make for all students with disability.**
- **That the Commonwealth Government commit to implementing the full six year transition to the Gonski funding model enshrined in the National Education Reform Agreement and the Australian Education Act 2013. This is essential to ensure the disability loading payments supplement the schooling resource standard, the minimum level of resources a school requires to deliver quality education.**
- **That, as part of making sure the Gonski funding agreement is honoured, the Commonwealth Government ensures that state and territory governments are maintaining pre-Gonski funding levels and adhering to indexing and additional funding commitments contained in relevant heads of agreement.**

## 2. Improved training, professional development and support for teachers

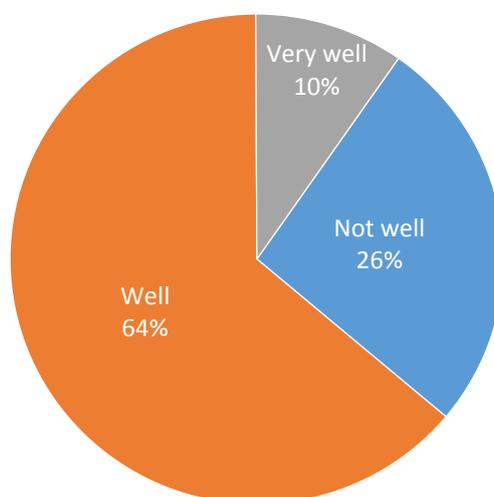
The education, training and support provided to those teaching students with disability in mainstream classrooms needs closer attention.

Submissions to the National Disability Strategy Consultation (2009) noted the long history of official reports pointing out the need to strengthen teacher education and professional development if inclusion is to succeed:

If teachers feel their training has not adequately prepared them for the many challenges of the classroom, and that little additional assistance is available to support them, they will be less likely to embrace the concept of inclusion.<sup>57</sup>

Given this problem has been officially acknowledged for a long time, it is worrying that a large proportion of teachers believe they arrive at school ill-prepared. A 2005 survey of Australian beginning teachers found fewer than half were satisfied with the preparation they received to teach students with disability.<sup>58</sup> As illustrated in Figures 6 and 7 from the AEU's State of Our Schools 2015 survey, although almost two thirds of beginning teachers say their preservice education prepared them well for the classroom overall, a large majority of serving teachers believe initial training and ongoing professional development is not adequate for teaching students with disability.

**Figure 6. Effectiveness of preservice teacher education**

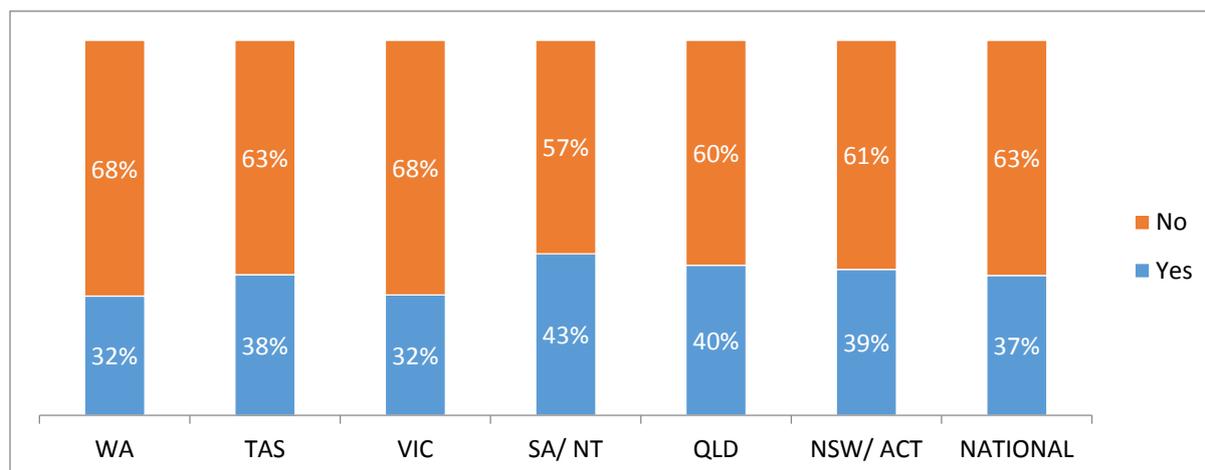


Source: AEU State of our Schools Survey 2015. Question: How well do you think your pre-service training prepared you for classroom teaching? (Teachers with less than four years teaching experience n=163)

<sup>57</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (2009) Shut Out: The experience of People with disabilities and their families in Australia (National Disability Strategy Consultation Report). p.50

<sup>58</sup> Louden, W., Rohl, M., Gore, J., Greaves, D., McIntosh, A., Wright, R., et al. (2005). *Prepared to teach: An investigation into the preparation of teachers to teach literacy and numeracy*. Mount Lawley, WA: Edith Cowan University.

**Figure 7. Adequacy of training and professional development**



Source: AEU State of our Schools Survey 2015. Q: Do you believe the training & professional development you have undertaken give you knowledge & skills you need to teach students with disability? (Teachers  $n=2,195$ )

Similar sentiments were evident among teachers with five years or less service in the Staff in Australia's Schools 2013 survey. Only 28% of primary teachers and 33% of secondary teachers felt their preservice education was at all helpful in preparing them for supporting students with disabilities.<sup>59</sup> Such responses are disappointing given the National Graduate Teacher Standards require the ability to “demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of legislative requirements and teaching strategies that support participation and learning of students with disability.”<sup>60</sup> Disappointingly, the report to the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* released in February 2015 did not address this issue in any detail.

Only one state, New South Wales, requires accredited teaching preparation courses include a stand-alone unit on special education, however most Australian university teacher education courses mandate the taking of one. A survey of Bachelor of Education courses at 34 institutions published in the Australian Journal of Teacher Education in 2012 found all but three included a core unit on inclusion/special needs. In discussion of where such courses might be deficient the Macquarie University research team raise several possibilities

- More than half of preservice teachers are being taught about special education by someone teaching outside their area of expertise, suggested by less than half of course convenors having academic qualifications or demonstrated expertise in special education
- A lack of focus on teaching strategies combined with lack of identified content on assessment (present in 44% of courses) and program planning (30%)
- Few courses specifically aiming to develop positive attitudes towards people with disabilities (13%).<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Australian Council for Educational Research. (2014). Staff in Australia's Schools 2013: Main Survey Report.

<sup>60</sup> AITSL (2011) Accreditation of Initial Teacher Programs in Australia: Standards and procedures.

<sup>61</sup> Stephenson, J., O'Neill, S. & Carter, M. (2012) Teaching Students with disabilities: A web-based Examination of Preparation of Preservice Primary School Teachers. Australian Journal of Teacher Education. 37(5).

### **Recommendations**

- **That at least one unit on special education be compulsory in all accredited Australian teacher preservice degrees.**
- **That some of the funding allocated under the 2015 Commonwealth Budget item Improving the Quality of Teachers and Teacher Education Courses be used to conduct research into improvements required to better prepare graduates for teaching students with disability.**
- **That all beginning teachers have access to advice from someone with expertise in special education during their first two years of work.**
- **That all teachers receive high quality, regular professional development to assist them to support students with disability.**

### **3. Greater transparency in the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on Students with Disability.(NCCD)**

The NCCD process presents the opportunity to understand the true level of disability in Australian schools for the first time. Conflicting statistics have created confusion and suggest large scale unrecognised disability. The inadequacy of current methods for classifying disability among students has been acknowledged at all levels of government. Recognising the “significant data and definitional issues” hampering progress to better funding arrangements, the Gonski Review recommended the NCCD be progressed as a matter of priority and that data be collected and reported from January 2013.<sup>62</sup>

It is now late 2015 and no data from the NCCD have been reported publicly. The work has been done on the additional funding required by schools to make the different levels of adjustments used by the NCCD. After two trials and two years of partial implementation the NCCD is being carried out in all schools in 2015. Any concerns over the reliability of the process will be best addressed with the NCCD *in situ*. The need for fine tuning cannot be used as reason to delay the publishing of data and introduction of a loading to support all students with disability. Ongoing secrecy and unnecessary delays undermine public trust in the process.

#### **Recommendations**

- **That data from the 2015 NCCD be published as soon as it is verified.**
- **That data from the 2015 NCCD be used to determine the distribution of a new loading targeted at all students with disability beginning in January 2016.**

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<sup>62</sup> Australian Government (2011) Review of Schooling Funding. p.184.

#### **4. Ongoing awareness of the importance of early childhood education for children with disability.**

The early education of children with disability happens in mainstream preschools/kindergartens and is supported through additional resources, mostly extra funding determined by number of students enrolled and the level of support they require. South Australia funds 10 dedicated inclusive preschool programs including at Bains Road Preschool, described in Box 6.

##### **Box 6. Inclusive preschool program, Bains Rd Preschool**

Bains Road Preschool is located in Adelaide's southern suburbs and has an enrolment of around 90 students. 11 children with a diverse range of disabilities receive 15 hours preschool education per week in the centre's inclusive preschool program (IPP). The IPP runs alongside the mainstream program but there is as much integration as possible. The IPP is staffed by two teachers employed at 0.6 and a fulltime early childhood worker.

Staff describe benefits of the IPP as

- providing staff with special education expertise
- the ability to tailor teaching that respects the developmental age of individual children
- giving children a sense of belonging and of being part of a community
- teaching all children at the site acceptance of diversity
- access to specialised equipment and services (e.g. Autism SA, Disability Services)
- consistency in staff and what those staff expect from children
- small numbers allowing for more one on one learning
- the chance to learn through modelling from other children.

The centre enjoys high satisfaction ratings from parents.

“My child is given opportunities to build language, social skills, self-help and independence, which are also helping him to regulate his emotions. He is given the opportunity to succeed, not being set up to fail. He would not cope without the program.”

**Parent one**

“My child would not be where she is today without the support of this kind of preschool. She has had so many opportunities to improve her motor skills, speech, language, writing and social behaviour. She has increased her positive behaviours in many situations that used to be extremely hard for her e.g. being with lots of people, communicating with people she doesn't know well. The Bains Road staff give me opportunities to see what I can do to help my child grow into an active community member, not be put to the side and forgotten about. Although in general most mainstream kindys will do their best to accommodate a child with disabilities, it just doesn't equate to what this program can provide.”

**Parent two**

Early intervention is crucial for children who have difficulty learning. The small numbers and close attention made possible through the IPP allow children to slowly build up their attendance and learning. This helps ensure that their early experiences are positive.

An issue for IPPs like this is the uncertainty over the universal access to early childhood education funding, which is only guaranteed to the end of 2017. Loss of this would result in the centre having to halve its enrolment in the IPP.

### **Recommendations**

- **That commonwealth universal access to early childhood education funding be guaranteed permanently.**
- **That inclusive preschool programs be made available more widely.**