



A FAIR GO FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY IN NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

An open letter to Members and Senators

I am writing to seek your response to the need for equitable funding for funding for students with disabilities.

At present, funding support for students with a disability depends on their school setting, with students in non-government schools receiving significantly less support than those in government schools.

The variation in funding to support these students is by no means trivial: it is not unusual for it to be ten times less the funding they would be entitled to in a government school.

This denies students with disabilities real choice. It causes heartache and further dislocation for families whose children can not all attend the same school. As if these families did not face enough difficulty, this adds to the emotional distress and complexity of their situation.

In the case of families for whom school choice involves principles of faith and belief, the lack of equitable funding provides an additional layer of discrimination.

We believe this appalling situation cannot be allowed to continue.

Policy principle and framework

Christian Schools Australia's submission is that funding should be based on a simple yet, we feel, unimpeachable principle.

For students with disabilities, it is the level of their need that should determine the funding available to them, not their choice of school.

Request

No aspect of funding is regarded as more in need of reform by our member schools than the inequitable position faced by students with disabilities. We are seeking your commitment to bring about a fair go for these students within the current term of Parliament.

This is *not* an issue to defer until the completion of the current Review of Funding for Schooling. Parties have acknowledged this as issue in successive Parliaments, and it has been the subject of previous reviews and investigations, but real change has not occurred.

This is a matter of principle that must be addressed regardless of future funding models.

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We would welcome your commitment to the following.

Commitments of principle

- a) The principle that for students with disabilities, it is the level of their need that should determine the funding available to them, not their choice of school.
- b) To implement policy based on this principle, so that Commonwealth funding (recurrent and targeted) provided for students with disabilities will be equitably distributed according to the need of the individual student and irrespective of sector or state.
- c) To support the achievement, through COAG and Ministerial Council processes, of the same principle regarding state funding for students with disabilities.

Suggested policy framework

- i. A nationally agreed set of definitions and classifications should be established as the basis of funding for students with disabilities across all jurisdictions and sectors.
- ii. Nationally agreed levels of funding should be identified based on the support required to achieve beneficial outcomes for students in each classification.
- iii. Students with disability should be assessed against the national criteria and funded accordingly.
- iv. Funding to meet the particular needs of students with disability should be regarded as a basic entitlement for that child, and therefore portable.
- v. Additional funding should be provided to groups of clusters of schools enabling the establishment of locally-based support services to strengthen practice in the inclusion of students with disabilities through teacher development in targeted areas of need, such as the education of students with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Real change

We urge you to consider that in the current term of Parliament you have the opportunity to make a real change to an injustice which has prevailed for too long. Thank you for considering this issue as a priority.

Sincerely ,

Stephen O'Doherty
CEO, Christian Schools Australia

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