

# A fair go for students with disabilities

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*Aim: to provide equitable choice in recurrent funding for students with disability.*

Current funding policies discriminate against students with disabilities, because they place very real limitations on their choice of a Christian or other non-government school.

This occurs because the additional funding available to students with disabilities in non-government schools is vastly disproportionate to that available in government schools.

A recent survey of CSA schools found shortfalls in funding of up to \$20,000 per student with disability.

The current arrangements are particularly difficult on parents with disabled and non-disabled children, and splits up the education of siblings.

CSA believes these additional resources are a fundamental entitlement of each child with a disability regardless of their choice of school. Inequitable funding should not prevent the parents of a student with disability from choosing a faith-based school community.

The amount of funding for students with disability in state schools is not the issue – CSA in no way wants to see funding for these students suffer. The issue is the need to bring funding for students in non-government schools at least to an equitable level. *New money is required.*

## Policy principles

CSA's policy objective on funding for students with disabilities can be simply expressed:

*The additional funding allocated to meet the specific needs of students with disability should be the same irrespective of their choice of school.*

To achieve this objective, we believe the following principles should inform the policy debate:

## Recurrent funding

1. Governments should work towards a common system of classification for students with disabilities (SWD), to apply to all students regardless of school choice.
2. The classification system should be based on a limited number of categories and developed around educational support needs (the West Australian model seems a good example).
3. The understanding of 'educational support needs' should include the achievement of outcomes for the student, rather than an 'accommodation model' alone (which flows more from ideas of 'managing' a student's disability). Parents must be fully engaged in the process of determining potential outcomes for their child.

4. Students with disabilities should be assessed against the classification system by suitably qualified professional practitioners.
5. The classification system should apply to students in all sectors.
6. The additional funding entitlement of the student, based on the classification system, should be the same irrespective of their choice of school, and (in the case of independent schools) should fully flow to the school. The additional funding should be regarded as an entitlement for each the child, and hence be portable.
7. The additional funding for SWD should be shared between federal and state governments, with the majority of funding coming from the federal government, following the pattern for general recurrent funding.

### **Support services**

8. In addition to school-based funding (student entitlements), money should be provided to systems or groups of independent schools to strengthen practice in the inclusion of SWD through teacher development in targeted areas of need, such as the education of students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Such funding should be equitably available across systems and independent settings, and based on current understandings of the level of need in the general population.

(Capital funding is not addressed in this position statement).

### **Commitment to students with a disability**

Christian schools are communities which live by a belief that as each person is made in the image of God, every person is valued. Our Christian school communities are not complete unless they are equally accessible to all.

Christian schools are committed to the principle that each child should be given equal opportunity to maximize their unique gifts and talents, with the objective of participating fully in the life of the community.

Despite the manifestly inadequate funding for these students from Government sources Christian schools have a high level of commitment to meeting their needs.

### **Survey of members**

In 2007 CSA surveyed around 50 schools about their provision of education for SWD. The survey is valid in 2009 as nothing has changed in policy since the survey was conducted.

Despite funding shortfalls the survey confirmed a substantial commitment to SWD, including those with high support needs.

- Severe and multiple disabilities represented for 59% of students reported on, the remainder being moderate (34%) and mild (7%).
- Over 94% of the students with disabilities had been clinically diagnosed. The most prevalent diagnoses were for autism and cerebral palsy.
- Schools were asked to calculate the resources required to meet the genuine needs of the students.
  - Less than \$ 1,000: 2%
  - \$1,000 - \$ 5,000: 18.4%

- \$5,000 - \$ 10,000: 20.4%
- \$10,000 - \$15,000: 16.3%
- 15,000 - \$20,000: 20.4%
- Greater than \$20,000: 22.4%
- The *average* estimated funding required to meet students' needs was approx \$15,000
- The additional funding received from government ranged between \$0 and \$26,000
- The *average* additional funding from all government sources was approx \$4,500

### Case studies

Schools were asked to provide examples of students with disabilities and their needs. Names have been changed.

The assertion by some that independent schools do not accept high support needs students is demonstrably untrue, as some of the case studies below demonstrate.

#### 1. *Anna, Prep.*

Anna is ascertained as Level 6 ASD. Her diagnosis includes PDD, global developmental delay, serious anaphylaxis [through taste, touch, smell], ADHD, limited verbal communication, low oral tone, asthma, heart murmur, unusual facial structure, vomiting of food regularly, tongue tied – may need medical treatment, dribbling from the mouth – has to be reminded to swallow, and difficulty communicating with others.

Anna's concerning behaviour includes not always wanting to do as requested, wanting to do tasks on her terms and in her way and time, attention seeking behaviours, and not responding to stickers or charts. Anna has difficulty with paying attention, following directions, and sitting to eat and complete tasks. Anna's behaviour is easier to manage one-on-one than in a group or class situation; praise for appropriate behaviour must be immediate.

Anna needs one-on-one monitoring in the classroom and in the playground by the teacher aide and teacher. Anna needs supervision when eating and must be separated from other students. Her toileting also needs to be supervised. Anna needs close supervision on excursions, special prep activities and sports days.

Because of her severe anaphylaxis, an education program for staff and students is essential; regular updating is essential throughout the year. Training in the use of the EpiPen is essential. Placement and safe-keeping of the EpiPen has been considered. An emergency program is in place.

Anna needs a specialized program to meet the needs of her severe level of impairment. It is implemented by the teacher and teacher aide and involves skills in speech, communication, social interaction, cooperation, basic academics, gross motor and fine motor movements. The school also accesses, on a weekly basis, the services of a physiotherapist, speech pathologist and occupational therapist.

Anna will need intensive support when she commences formal education in year one next year. She will need to work on an individualized program with significant modification to the regular curriculum. Specialized therapy support will need to be on-going. Teacher aide support, both in-class and in withdrawal, on a daily basis, will be essential.

## **2. Stephen**

We have enrolled for next year a child with spinabifida. He will need a teacher's aide and height adjustable change table as he cannot toilet himself, ramps to each part of the school for wheelchair access, IEP as his mental development is delayed, an aide to assist him to move from his chair to the floor and back again so he can join in with his peers as frequently as possible. This will put a major burden on our school financial resources. Most of his physiotherapy is conducted out of school hours, but there may be some times when he needs extra during school hours and his parents are willing to assist in this area.

## **3. William**

Will came to us after an unsuccessful placement in a state special school. He had severe multiple disabilities, and would simply wander the room touching people. Our first goal was to develop interactive communication and develop boundaries for behaviour. Within a month Will was responding to adult and peer signing, and was giving gestural responses to questions. One year later, he is communicating with 30 PECS, gestures and signs, and responding to about 50 more. He has also begun to say his first words. He will now sit with others and is beginning to participate in activities. This means a very high level of support and an alternative program in all areas, to our standard Year 6 curriculum.

## **4. Jonathon**

This student requires massive help in his learning due to his time in hospital and severe memory loss. His health condition is ongoing and unpredictable. He cannot cope with most written work and the teachers do the best they can with very little support.

## **5. John**

John, who has been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, needs a speech therapy session on a weekly basis and one to one teacher aide time on a daily basis. He is one of a class of 23 Prep children. The funding provided for Speech Therapy was used up after only 5 sessions. The parents have to pay for any extra sessions. The additional salary support from the Commonwealth Government does not cover the 170 hours of teacher aide time that we would like to give to John. It also has disappeared! The equivalent student in a Government school would automatically receive at least \$23 000 in funding but the parents want a Christian education for their child. They want him in a school that supports their approach at home.

## **6. Melissa**

This student was enrolled in a state public school and received the individual support of a full time teachers aide, funded entirely by the government. Upon being enrolled at our private school we receive only \$1600 per year in disability funding to contribute towards the cost of staff.

## **7. Derek**

Male student entered school at Yr7 level. Presented with mild cerebral palsy affecting speech, mobility and intellectual capacity. Funded at the mild level for past 5 years -approx \$1000 per year. College provided an Aide for 4 sessions per week, to work in class, English and Maths only. College set up VCAL for student in Yr 11 and 12 -one student only. Due to his high interest in steam trains, organised a weekly one day placement at Puffing Billy. Parents organised transport- 1hr each way. Student worked a modified English and Maths program.

Should graduate with peers having completed Yr 12, a happy, motivated young man. Level of funding almost negligible to the actual costs to the College - but welcome anyway!

#### **8. Adam**

A student with severe learning difficulties or ADHD does not qualify for commonwealth funding although they can be a demand on the schools resources.

#### **9. Joshua**

A student with moderate Autism receives 4 periods a week of Integration assistance in the classroom. He receives individual reading tutoring using volunteers twice a week. He attends 2 group intervention sessions weekly with a Special Education teacher. He receives about 15 sessions of speech therapy over the course of the year, incorporating some group work on social skills.

#### **10. Phillip**

This student has subjects which have to be modified - e.g. a completely modified sports course; heavily modified cooking. He has a teacher's aide one-on-one 95% of the time and requires assistance with toileting. On camps, he requires someone with him 24 hours per day and during the swimming season he needs two people to assist him in and out of the pool. His curriculum for academic subjects requires modifying for his computer and or enlarging. He is becoming more and more reliant on computers and smart boards but it takes more time to plan and prepare for and assess him.

#### **11. Joe**

A year 7 student with Asperger's Disorder being supported in a mainstream Independent School setting. This student has significant learning and behavioural needs. Staff interacting with this student must be highly trained and able to defuse volatile situations. Aide support is given for 18 lessons (out of a total of 35 lessons) each week. Additional support is required, however this student is already using substantial school funds. The student requires the equivalent of a .5 teacher aide, regular support by specialist teachers and the HOD Learning Support. Teachers are often required to attend inservice or meetings to discuss strategies for dealing with new issues. Support costs exceed \$15 000 per year, with \$6406 being provided through State and Federal funding. The school covers the difference (over \$8500).

#### **12. Jack**

Jack has only been at our school this year so we are feeling our way with his need level. Risk assessments for camps and outings show a very high level of need, most of which requires fairly intensive aide support. His toileting needs are high and although we are making his an IEP goal we anticipate an ongoing issue. We also expect that he will need to develop his use of technology to compensate for his motor weakness.

#### **13. Sally**

A female student in Yr 8, 14 years, with Mild Intellectual Disability. Requires alternative curriculum- not just modified requirements, however teachers are unable to provide such a program due to the regular secondary classroom pressures. The student has only \$1600 from Federal funding- this amount covers only approx 2 periods of support per week. Hardly enough to assist her through the demands of Yr 8. The school has to find other sources of funding to provide some additional support, however this is still inadequate for her needs.

#### **14. Jason**

A male 13 year old student in Yr 7. with Borderline Intellectual Disability. His psychological profile does not qualify him for the Federally funded LNSLN category, yet his needs are greater than many Federally funded students. He does qualify for Language Disorder funding through State funds, however this only covers 8 sessions for the year. Much attention is required to implement his ILP, which is challenging in a Secondary classroom. Fortunately, he is able to share the "aide time" from another funded child in his class, this is clearly not enough to provide both students with the support they need each day.

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