



National Disability Services

ACT

ABN: 52 008 445 485

 A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE OFFICE	
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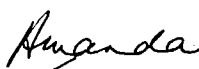
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Ms Amanda Bresnan MLA
Chair
Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs
ACT Legislative Assembly
London Circuit
Canberra ACT 2600




Dear Ms Bresnan

On Thursday 25 June 2009, the Legislative Assembly for the ACT referred to the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs for inquiry and report the level of unmet need for educational services for all students with a disability in ACT government and non-government schools, with particular reference to:

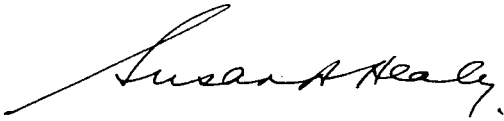
- community and parental experiences, satisfaction and attitudes;
- educational outcomes;
- the findings of the Special Education Review into leading international and Australian practice in curriculum and pedagogy for students with disabilities;
- the provision of services, such as therapy and transport, to support educational needs of students;
- post-school options, transitions and later year pathways for students with a disability; and
- any other related matters.

Please find attached a submission by the ACT Division of National Disability Services. I welcome the attention of the Committee to this important area of community need and note the importance of equipping all children in our national capital with the support they need to achieve the best possible educational outcomes.

I note that the Department of Education and Training is undertaking a review of their *Access to Student Records* policy. The outcomes of this review may be of relevance to your own inquiry.

I trust this submission will be of use to the Committee in its deliberations and welcome the opportunity to contribute. Please contact the ACT Manager of National Disability Services, Ms Louise Gray, on 6283 3213 if you would like to discuss any aspects of this submission further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Susan A Healy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Susan Healy
ACT Chair

December 2009

ACT DIVISION OF NATIONAL DISABILITY SERVICES
INPUT TO ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY INQUIRY
~ NEEDS OF ACT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY ~

Community and Parental Experiences, Satisfaction and Attitudes

NDS ACT supports the inclusion of students with disability in mainstream schools and is keen to see principals and teachers focussing on raising awareness of respective needs and experiences.

NDS ACT notes feedback from families, the disability service sector and employers that the life skills and work-readiness skills of graduating students appear to be declining. This is largely attributable to the curriculum and teaching strategies not being developed with the future needs of each student with disability in mind. NDS ACT would welcome a review of current curriculum to ensure that each student is receiving individually planned education programs which facilitate positive learning and life outcomes in the long term.

- NDS ACT believes that Principals have a critical role to play in driving effective outcomes for students with disability and this should be an accountable measure. To this end, NDS ACT would welcome an outcomes based reporting framework.

Educational Outcomes

The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI), measuring children in their first year of formal schooling, found that more than 23 per cent are developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains, strengthening the case for governments to establish adequate funding arrangements for students with disability.

Of the more than 261,000 children (98 per cent of all children in their first year of full-time school), around 11,500 (4.4 per cent) were given 'special needs status' because of chronic physical, intellectual and medical needs. More than 10 per cent of all children were identified by teachers as requiring more assessment.

- NDS ACT believes it is essential that research such as this is not left unaddressed. NDS ACT would like to see government funding reflecting a practical response to the needs of this significant percentage of children. At a minimum, it is essential that the further assessment of the identified 10 per cent of children be progressed to ensure that future schooling needs are identified and acted upon.

NDS ACT sees benefit in improved linkages with local Australian Disability Enterprises to maximise employment opportunities for people with disability and to enhance the capacity of those organisations to expand their business and thus generate further employment opportunities.

- NDS ACT again notes the restrictions which inappropriate curriculum and teaching strategies can place on the capacity of students with disability to transition to effective educational outcomes.

NDS ACT notes the disappointingly poor outcomes reported in the State of the Service report on public sector employment of people with disability. NDS ACT believes that the ACT public service should take action to address the continuing low level of employment outcomes for people with disability and recommends that they be asked to report on strategies being implemented in this regard.

Findings of the Special Education Review into Leading International and Australian Practice in Curriculum and Pedagogy for Students with Disabilities

NDS ACT notes that the final report has been submitted to the ACT government for consideration. NDS ACT looks forward to receiving a copy of the report, at which time we will be happy to provide further comment.

Provision of Services, such as Therapy and Transport, to Support Educational Needs of Students

Transport continues to be a concern in the ACT and this is apparent in the limitations around access to wheelchair accessible taxis and accessibility to buses. The Department of Education and Training have conducted several reviews in the area of transport but a viable long term solution remains problematic. This is a high cost area of service but one which is essential if participation is to be maximised.

Therapy ACT is the major provider of therapy services in ACT schools and is clearly stretched to capacity. Assessments often have an inappropriately long lead time and, while the therapists themselves are effective, they are constrained by the additional demand placed on them as they seek to educate teaching staff as to how to implement each individual learning program. Where staff changes occur, this problem becomes exacerbated.

- In an environment of limited resources, this is one area which must not be ignored as it establishes a sound learning base for each student.

Post-School Options, Transitions and Later Year Pathways for Students with a Disability

The transition from school to further training, employment or other lifestyle options is an area requiring constant refreshing. Of key importance is putting in place mechanisms to allow early identification of needs, preferences and options to allow individual planning to occur for each child. NDS ACT believes that planning must occur in the early stages of high school rather than being left to year 10 and it is critical that teachers be educated as to the options available. With many parents reliant on teachers for advice and information, any gaps in knowledge have the potential to flow through to detrimental planning outcomes. As such, a structured program of education and training for teachers may be of benefit.

The work of the Interagency Transition Committee, of which NDS ACT is a member, is working collaboratively with government departments and the service sector in establishing transition programs from school to post-school in the ACT. Through this process, the sector has identified five key foci:

- Better assessment and streaming;
- Good planning for the future;

- Early connections;
- Appropriate resourcing;
- Integrated service responses.

All of these relate to early planning and effective linkages and, accordingly, must be factored in to the strategies implemented for all students with disability in the ACT.

NDS ACT recommends that strong working links be established between DHCS, DET and the disability services sector to facilitate effective pathways, choices and connections.

16 December 2009