



## Productivity Commission's inquiry into Disability Care and Support 2011

The Association of Special Education Administrators in Queensland Inc. (ASEAQ) welcomes this opportunity to provide feedback in relation to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into Disability Care and Support.

ASEAQ is a professional association that represents Principals, Deputy Principals and Heads of Curriculum in the 43 State Special Schools and 4 Special Purpose Schools as well as Heads of Special Education Services in the 583 State Special Education Programs in Queensland.

ASEAQ members acknowledge that:

- Australia is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities <sup>1</sup>
- the call made at Salamanca in 1994 of *Education for All*<sup>2</sup>
- the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) defines disability as any limitation, restriction or impairment that has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months and restricts everyday activities.

However there are a myriad of definitions and interpretations of definitions across jurisdictions and education systems and organisations within Australia. ASEAQ members identified this as a major issue to be considered in their response to the *Review of Disability Standards for Education 2005*<sup>3</sup> and their response to *Review of Funding for Schooling: Emerging Issues Paper*<sup>4</sup>

ASEAQ members continue to recommend that the federal and state governments determine nationally agreed definitions of disability and ensure that these nationally agreed definitions of disability are consistent in all relevant legislation and policies across Australia.

ASEAQ members expressed concerns about ensuring that both insurance schemes interlocked and meshed with existing schooling provisions. While not wishing to remove any responsibilities of individual schools, jurisdictions, systems or organisations to adhere to the *Disability Standards for Education (DSA)* it was highlighted within the ASEAQ submission that many schools have limited capacity to meet DSA responsibilities from with their available resources. ASEAQ members recommend that there needs to be close and

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<sup>1</sup> On 30 March 2007, Australia signed the Convention as one of the original signatories. On 17 July 2008, Australia ratified the Convention in New York and it entered into force for Australia on 16 August 2008. Australia acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on 21 August 2009. The Optional Protocol came into force for Australia on 20 September 2009.

<sup>2</sup> See the Salamanca Declaration <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0009/000984/098427eo.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/482C1E4B-9848-4CC3-B395->

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/ReviewofFunding/Documents/EmergingIssuesPaper.pdf>

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explicit links between any national insurance schemes and the *Disability Standards for Education*.

ASEAQ members identified the area of therapy service, provision and support as a particular aspect that too often is fractured for students with disabilities and their families. Students with disabilities may access a variety of providers via school, health systems and private organisations with too frequently little coordination and at worst treatments that contradict. ASEAQ members indicated that this lack of coordination of therapy service, provision and support for students with disabilities often resulted in students not having any therapy service, provision or support as each provider assumed that the other provider(s) would be supplying the therapy service and support. ASEAQ members indicated that it appears to be standard practice for Disability Services Queensland (DSQ) to cease providing therapy services to children with disabilities once these children commence schooling, again fracturing treatments and in some cases resulting in no further therapy service or support for some students with disabilities. ASEAQ recommends that any national insurance scheme be constructed to facilitate coordination of therapy service, provision and support for students with disabilities across all settings that accounts for a 24 hour day and 7 days a week need for therapy.

ASEAQ members identified that the provision, maintenance and modification of specialised equipment such as wheelchairs, communication devices and splinting is similar to therapy service, provision and support. All too often parents and schools are obliged to go charity organisations for the provision of such equipment. These are vital requirements for some students with disabilities and there needs to be both consistency and coordination of provision and support across settings and time. ASEAQ recommends that any national insurance scheme be constructed to facilitate coordination of therapy service, provision and support for students with disabilities across all settings that accounts for a 24 hour day and 7 days a week need for specialised equipment.

ASEAQ members support the ability to choose a school or program of education as a right for students with disabilities and their parents/caregivers. By this ASEAQ members mean real and informed choice that involves the full array of school options. Hence ASEAQ members do not support the limiting of choice through the use of the words *mainstream education* as mentioned on page 4 with in the *Productivity Commission draft report into Disability Care and Support (28 February 2011)*<sup>5</sup>. ASEAQ members view that terminology as limiting choice for some students with disabilities and their parents who prefer a differentiated and more specialised school location. It may be a breach of the *Disability Discrimination Action (DDA)* and the DSE to use the words *mainstream education* as it limits choice. See Appendix 1 for some information from recent Queensland State Government Budgets that highlights parent satisfaction with various school settings in Queensland. ASEAQ members recommend that any references to education setting,

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.pc.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0015/106512/key-features.pdf](http://www.pc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/106512/key-features.pdf)

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school type, or school location be worded to school of choice or education program of choice so that students with disabilities and their parents are not limited nor constrained in choosing from the available options.

ASEAQ members indicated that some students with disabilities and their families have made their choice of school or education program because of the transport assistance program provision. For some students with disabilities contract taxi or bus transport is provided to enable them to access a school or education program, however it is usually only to the closest school or program. This limits the choices available. ASEAQ recommends that any national insurance scheme be constructed to ensure that transport assistance programs for students with disabilities be provided to their school of choice or educational program of choice.

ASEAQ members stressed that assessment processes in relation to determining if a student has a verified disability must be simple, transparent and not unnecessarily repetitive. For those students with a disability that can be identified as life long there should be no need for continual periodic re-verification. This unnecessary and often invasive repetition of verification of diagnosis is debilitating to the students with disabilities and to their families. For example if a child is born with Downs Syndrome it is not something that they will ever “grow out of” and hence once an initial diagnosis is made that should suffice for life. ASEAQ recommends that any national insurance scheme be constructed to ensure that those students with a disability that can be identified as life long therefore should be no need for continual periodic re-verification.

ASEAQ members support early intervention as soon as possible for children with disabilities instead of waiting until a child commences schooling. This could mean that intervention could start immediately after birth. For example, with the introduction of Universal New Born Hearing Testing, babies at risk are known within 48 hours after birth. ASEAQ members are aware of the benefits of early intervention not just for the children with disabilities but also the capacity building that can occur within their family that in turn supports these children with disabilities. ASEAQ recommends that any national insurance scheme be constructed to ensure that early intervention is a key driver for families in determining educational choices and transitions.

## Summary of ASEAQ Recommendations

ASEAQ members recommend that

- the federal and state governments determine nationally agreed definitions of disability and ensure that these nationally agreed definitions of disability are consistent in all relevant legislation and policies across Australia.
- there needs to be close and explicit links between any national insurance schemes and the *Disability Standards for Education*.

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- any national insurance scheme be constructed to facilitate coordination of therapy service, provision and support for students with disabilities across all settings that accounts for a 24 hour day and 7 days a week need for therapy.
- any national insurance scheme be constructed to facilitate coordination of therapy service, provision and support for students with disabilities across all settings that accounts for a 24 hour day and 7 days a week need for specialised equipment.
- any references to education setting, school type, or school location be worded to school of choice or education program of choice so that students with disabilities and their parents are not limited nor constrained in choosing from the available options.
- any national insurance scheme be constructed to ensure that transport assistance programs for students with disabilities be provided to their school of choice or educational program of choice.
- any national insurance scheme be constructed to ensure that those students with a disability that can be identified as life long there should be no need for continual periodic re-verification.
- any national insurance scheme be constructed to ensure that early intervention is a key driver for families in determining educational choices and transitions.

The Association of Special Education Administrators in Queensland Inc. (ASEAQ) appreciates this opportunity to provide feedback in relation to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into Disability Care and Support.

If you have any queries or wish additional information please contact ASEAQ as in the footer.

Yours sincerely

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President ASEAQ

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## Appendix 1

Satisfaction of parents with Spec School				Est.Actual growth
Av over 6 up & down= + 4.2	2008-09 Target/Est	2008-09 Est.Actual	2009-10 Target/Est	
92.4% - 88.2% = 4.2% increase over 6	92%	92.4%	93%	1.0%
	2007-08 Target/Est	2007-08 Est.Actual	2008-09 Target/Est	
	92%	91.4%	92%	-0.3%
	2006-07 Target/Est	2006-07 Est.Actual	2007-08 Target/Est	
	92%	91.7%	92%	-0.3%
	2005-06 Target/Est	2005-06 Est.Actual	2006-07 Target/Est	
	89%	92%	92%	3.6%
	2004-05 Target/Est	2004-05 Est.Actual	2005-06 Target/Est	
	89%	88.4%	89%	0.8%
	2003-04 Target/Est	2003-04 Est.Actual	2004-05 Target/Est	
	89%	87.6%	89%	-0.6%
	2002-03 Target/Est	2002-03 Est.Actual	2003-04 Target/Est	
	89%	88.2%	89%	

Satisfaction of parents with State School <sup>6</sup>				Est.Actual growth
Av over 6 up & down = -0.9%	2008-09 Target/Est	2008-09 Est.Actual	2009-10 Target/Est	
80.1% - 81% = -0.9% decrease over 6	84%	80.1%	84%	1.0%
	2007-08 Target/Est	2007-08 Est.Actual	2008-09 Target/Est	
	84%	79.1%	84%	-1.3%
	2006-07 Target/Est	2006-07 Est.Actual	2007-08 Target/Est	
	84%	80.4%	84%	-2.6%
	2005-06 Target/Est	2005-06 Est.Actual	2006-07 Target/Est	
	78%	83%	84%	6.1%
	2004-05 Target/Est	2004-05 Est.Actual	2005-06 Target/Est	
	81%	76.9%	78%	-2.6%
	2003-04 Target/Est	2003-04 Est.Actual	2004-05 Target/Est	
	82%	79.5%	81%	-1.5%
	2002-03 Target/Est	2002-03 Est.Actual	2003-04 Target/Est	
	80%	81%	82%	

<sup>6</sup> in 2007-08 budget and since - this is stated as "Satisfaction of parents with their child's - state school" and in 2006-07 (and earlier) budget papers - this is stated as "Satisfaction of parents with their schools - those with a child with a disability at a primary or secondary school"

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