

Review of the loading for students with disability 2019–public submission

Australian Special Education Principals' Association

Stakeholder type: Peak Body

Jurisdiction: National

Submission

About ASEPA

The Australian Special Education Principals' Association (ASEPA) is the peak National voice of leaders in special education and is representative of all states and territories. ASEPA is a member of the International Confederation of Principals (ICP).

Question 1: Is the funding provided under the loadings for the top three NCCD levels of adjustment appropriate to support students with disability to access and participate in education on the same basis as other students?

Groups of students in our specialist settings who have extremely high complex needs and require 'extreme support' if they are going to access school education safely – as is their right (defined by international, national and state law). This group require 2 or 3 educators with them at all times. This is above the extensive level. This same group is supported through NDIS with 2 or 3 highly trained support workers. They require additional funding above that provided by an extensive adjustment.

NCCD requires the selection of a primary diagnosis which does not report on the complexity of the student, level of need and the adjustments required. It is not possible to, for example, separate ID from ASD from OCD from mental health and vice versa. At any one time one of these diagnoses will rise to the top and require the greater attention.

At the other end of the scale there is a cohort of students who do not meet criteria for supplementary but if they had additional support for appropriate adjustments would be successful and move away from requiring adjustments. Many of these students have learning disabilities and mental health needs.

- Size of school impacts on ability to provide access and participation. The larger the school the greater ability to be flexible and provide appropriate staff and adjustments. There is also a bigger pool of experienced and knowledgeable staff to provide mentoring, training and problem solving opportunities.
- Location of the school: rural/remote have poorer access to services such as medical/therapy/psychology, trained staff, educational options. When they do have access they usually cost much more money and are not regularly available.
- Complexity of school: cost of providing appropriate adjustments across a number of campuses, settings and outreach classes.
- Number of students with adjustments in a school impacts: documentation, planning, reporting, NCCD, NDIS, etc. Specialist schools do the majority of this work.

Stages of schooling are critical. The current focus on early years as research shows impact greater at this stage of development. There is a need for higher staff ratio in classes as schools implement intensive interaction pedagogies which require specialized equipment. Transition points also require additional supports and a student may move from requiring substantive adjustments to extensive in this period. Is there consideration of being able to move between levels of adjustment at different points.

Costs of supporting students:

NCCD processes demand significant amount of time from a senior staff member in a specialist school setting. Making sure all the assessments are done, documented and added to the spread sheet. This is on top of leading teaching/learning and supporting staff/families and guiding students. It all adds cost when the school's total enrollment is wholly within NCCD collection requirements. Some resources need to be made specifically for individual students and are costed as appropriate.

Equipment for SWD is expensive as usually specialist and particular to that student. Schools still provide the usual learning resources as they do for any student however on top of that is specific equipment that enables the adjustment to take place. A class of 8 students could require a range of individualized equipment and then it would need to be replaced frequently due to extensive wear/tear. Some resources need to be made specifically and these costs can be extensive.

Question 2: Are Australian Government assurance processes, undertaken to support the accuracy of information provided to calculate a school's Australian Government funding entitlement relating to students with disability, appropriate and sufficiently robust and how might they be effectively improved?

Assurance processes:

There is deep concern from state and territory principal associations about the transparency at jurisdiction level of what happens to the funding resource once this comes from the Commonwealth. NCCD funding, which at the Commonwealth level is directly related to the student and the adjustments made, does not flow directly to the student at the state and territory level. The funding is used to fund corporate services, disability programs, projects and other 'disability' initiatives which are not directly student related. The benefit to students in specialist schools would be dramatic if this money came directly to schools and the students.

The More Support for Students with Disabilities (MSSD) initiative (2012-2014) provided additional funding to government, independent and Catholic education authorities in each state and territory through a National Partnership and aligned Funding Agreements. Under those agreements, education authorities had flexibility to select from a menu of activities targeted at the needs of students with disability in each jurisdiction enabling the authorities to focus resources on areas with the greatest opportunity to effect positive change in schools.

This partnership agreement was highly valued by schools, despite significant reporting accountabilities, and this program saw funding go directly to schools with minimal system administrative costs minimizing the funding received by schools.

The final Evaluation report of the More Support for Students with Disabilities Initiative 2012-2014 reported that:

"As a modest, short-term investment the MSSD initiative achieved its major objective to build the skills of teachers and increase school capacity to better meet the educational needs of students with disability. There was general agreement across the jurisdictions that the MSSD initiative was a significant catalyst for change.

The initiative provided opportunities for authorities to get planned activities underway, or more broadly distributed, and to develop or refine innovative approaches. The initiative was successful on a number of levels. Some sectors referred to the support the initiative provided for broader strategic changes related to workforce capacity building and the introduction of new approaches to classroom teaching. Authorities saw the extension of the MSSD initiative as an opportunity to enhance programmes with promise and to expand their reach. For the 24 government and non-government authorities and associations: it generated or complemented systemic changes and in turn shifted policy and practice as the new approaches took effect. Most if not all authority's report that MSSD led to or dramatically accelerated change"

The Australian Special Education Principals Association supports any mechanism or process that ensures that a child's disabilities and the full complexity of their need is reflected in the educational funding that they directly receive. Individual adjustments require that commensurate funding be received by the child wherever they receive their education.

Matthew Johnson

President

The Australian Special Education Principals' Association. (ASEPA)