



## Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

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Submitting as a: Teacher  
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### Summary

I'm cooked.

Please read it.

### Main submission

Measuring educational success in today's current climate employs a very neo-liberalist economic rationalism approach. Utilising this business model assumes we are as educators striving towards competition against other systems and creating wealth. We are responding to the needs of the business community. Unfortunately schools are not in the business of making money, and instead are raising holistically equipped citizens.

Currently we only measure literacy and numeracy through NAPLAN and the HSC. School quality and educational success is hard to measure, but should include qualitative measures like student wellbeing, engagement, happiness, safety as well as the quantitative measures already existing. This is strongly supported by research but ignored by governments pursuing the above approach.

School funding can be used more effectively and efficiently for disadvantaged, vulnerable and academically advanced students. One key issue currently is student behaviour management which has significant impacts on student learning together with student and staff wellbeing. The profession is losing quality experienced teachers, and has a very high attrition rate of beginning teachers due to the inclusion of students with special needs without the commensurate support. This support needs trained qualified staff, specialist teachers and adequate funding for the development of personalised learning support plans, risk assessments, health care plans, behaviour plans, out of home care plans, and the extraordinary amount of time this requires, if an effective valuable multi-disciplinary approach is employed. Currently, teachers are extremely time poor, feel very out of their depth and leading to significant stress. Many of the programs and plans developed only offered lip

service to the true educational welfare and support needs of schools teachers students and parents alike.

A notable concern is the continued moves to make access to integration funding reliant on more and more requirements. Four years ago there was a significant shift in this area, when schools were offered a lump sum payment per year dependent on the size of their school for students who were previously funded below \$6000 per year. This had an enormous impact on students with health care needs or single disability classifications such as autism. Many schools lost enormous amounts of funding, example North Haven Public School lost over \$120000 in one year. This was endemic across the state. At the same time all specialist itinerant behaviour and integration teachers to those schools lost their positions. This left a huge void in professional support and development to schools. Learning and support teachers were now required to fill this void with the only training available as online courses. None of these people have the required qualifications or experience to meet the needs of their school populations this continues to remain an enormous deficit to the inclusion of students with special needs. Currently schools are required to complete access request submissions for new and emergent students with special needs. There is a raft of challenges faced by these learning support teams meaning that many schools and students no longer can access the funding and support they are entitled to. It requires strong experience in identifying students with support needs in collecting necessary documentation from paediatricians, psychologists, speech and occupational therapists and other allied health care professionals, the lack of which jeopardises most applications. There is a coding of criteria that most applicants have very limited understanding of, and which has become ever increasingly more difficult to achieve. This complexity is driven by an attempt to reduce expense. This is easy to prove. A student in 2014 with autism could achieve a social competency of 4, however today the requirements only allow her to apply for a level 2. This particular student is no longer able to apply for receptive expressive language as they do not have a current speech pathology report. Many schools no longer feel applying for support will be successful and are beginning to give up.

The ability for kindergarten teachers to identify students for early intervention is seriously lacking due to lack of access to specialist teachers and poor knowledge of disabilities and the complexity of the system of codes and the system. I have been in this field for 25 years, hold NSW regional and Australian quality teaching awards it took me three years to any funding for a clearly needy autistic student. For those three years without support this student has caused immeasurable teacher stress, classroom disruption, peer frustration, parental discontent and behaviour resource absorption.

The severe lack of access to student counselors only exacerbates the problem and the frustration.

There continues to be a severe inequality in the way funding is allocated:

1. students often require a co-morbidity of disability to access funding however, hearing and vision students have no such difficulty. Students with autism in particular can create far more teacher stress and disruption to learning. Students with autism do not attract itinerant support teacher time whereas hearing and vision students do.
2. Students from SSP behaviour schools have obviously demonstrated the level of challenge and support they require. This a very costly enterprise. Those however who for a raft of circumstances return to mainstream do not transfer any additional funding or support and these students and schools are left to flounder.
3. Students from support classes can access assisted travel. If they choose to return to the mainstream setting they lose this entitlement. This marginalizes many families who are unable to afford this expense for example a student whose behavior is so extreme he was only able to be maintained for 1 hour a day in a special support class, was forced to move to a school where no support classes were available. He now attends 3 hours a day however parents can no longer pay the \$160 per day to get him to and from school. It has always been impossible for him to catch the school bus due to the many safety concerns he causes. This jeopardizes his place in school.
4. The poor systems and processes for accessing funding, particularly at an integration level has always meant no job security for Support Learning Officers. These poorly paid, hard working, diligent, valued staff do far more than their job description states. Their expertise is often lost due to a student leaving the school or being permanent work. In the fully inclusive school of 750 students there are no permanent SLSO staff. In the 12 weeks school holidays these staff do not get paid. There needs to be a permanency quota.

Institutional change is critical. The department of education needs to return to skilled qualified experienced support staff in permanent positions to assist schools in all of the above. These were removed and need to re-employed. Some of these highly skilled personnel need to be offered attractive opportunities to share their expertise.

I completely understand that there isn't an endless bucket of money. It is a false economy however not to offer the funding and programs that have proved successful for many students who without such will end up in the criminal justice system, mental health and for which the long term social costs could never be estimated. Significant levels of research and personal experience over many years

indicate education and early intervention are the best methods for reducing crime, poverty and health issues.

Case Study: Sally.

Sally is an aboriginal girl who arrived from central Australia with poor attendance and significant family issues. On her enrollment, together with her carers, Personalised learning support plans risk assessments behaviour plans were developed and communicated to staff. An enhanced enrollment was initiated for her to attend school for 3 hours for functional assessment developing relationships, and student/staff needs analysis. This required extensive time for meetings, planning and engagement activities with a multi-disciplinary team. After a short honeymoon period in which Sally had access to one-to-one music lessons, emotional release therapy, behaviour therapy, weekly counsellor support, access to withdrawal support centre daily, breakfast club and high support playground. These were a huge drain on resources and Sally attracts no extra integration funding. The school has over 100 students on its NCCD data of which 42 have diagnosed ASD. Recurrent RAM funding could never meet the needs of all these students. Like Sally, this school has attracted 12 students from SSP (Special support placement schools) with no attached funding.

The behaviours escalated significantly. when disclosures of sexual abuse became apparent. A complete collapse of her home living arrangements occurred, running away and living on the riverbank saw Police, DOCS, counsellor, Health teacher welfare, and carers all became involved. Significant teacher and stress throughout the school community resulted in staff requiring time off due to intensity, frequency and duration of behaviours that were hourly, violent and extremely abusive. The student is now placed in a refuge, has enrolled in a new school and the cycle will start again, with no funding or support. Her future prognosis is extremely poor. This child has done nothing wrong. She is a victim of circumstance, and our unwillingness as a system, through economic rationalism to care.

Barriers to improvements are economic rationalism, neoliberal agendas, a one size fits all approach to the inclusion of students with special needs, and a lack of care for our staff and communities.