

SUBMISSION TO THE DSE REVIEW – MS TAMARA CUNNETT

By way of introduction, I am a person with a disability who is also working in the inclusive education space within the NT public sector. I also sit on the Disability Reference Group for NT public sector employees. I have recently undertaken the online training for the Disability Standards in Education, which are compulsory in my workplace, so I have some thoughts on that as well as the standards themselves. That said, I make this submission as a private citizen, albeit with my manager's blessing.

"Inclusion" vs "Targeted to Disability"

One thing which comes through strongly in contemporary research, and a repeated theme in what I hear from agencies through the Australian Network on Disability, is the need to tackle "inclusion" more broadly. People with a disability don't want special treatment. Wherever possible, we'd like to see flexible systems which include everybody, so that our disability status is a non-issue. I was thrilled to see the DSE training touch on this, in the section on "Universal Design", however I don't believe this is given enough weight or detail. The training links to a document called, "The Principles of Universal Design". These seem more tailored to the design of "objects" rather than systems. I think we need to support educators to understand this concept more fully and in a context-specific way (as the rest of the DSE training does). Incorporating that universal concept of inclusion more fully in the DSE would be fantastic. It would also help us address the needs of more students, including Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students. Flexibility & greater inclusion benefit everyone.

Education Staff with a Disability

To apply the DDA to students, it helps to apply it just as thoroughly to staffing. If we are to support students with a disability, having staff with a disability who have a deep understanding of the issues – as both educators and policy-makers - can only be a good thing. It also serves to reinforce the message of inclusion, if students & families can see staff with disabilities at all levels of their education system, including reasonable adjustments in action. So perhaps the DSE could look at supporting the recruitment and retention of education staff with a disability too.

Encouragement to Disclose

One area which perhaps could stand a bit more attention is encouraging students with a disability (and their families) to disclose that information. It is essential at both a policy and a service level to capture this information. So what more can we be doing to make it safe to disclose this information? (Again – this comes up a lot in the context of supporting staff with a disability).

Thanks for allowing me the opportunity to make this submission.

Regards,

[Redacted]

22/7/20

Tamara Cunnett

[Redacted]