



Australian Education Union - ACT Branch

Submission to the Special Education Review

The Australian Education Union – ACT Branch (AEU) is the peak professional and industrial organisation for over 3000 teachers and school support staff in ACT public schools and TAFE.

The AEU welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on *Service to Students with Disabilities in ACT Public Schools: A Discussion Paper about Issues and Options*.

While the AEU understands the Terms of Reference for the Special Education Review, it is disappointing that consideration of future options for the provision of special education services in ACT public schools is to be 'within the existing budget provision'. Serious and genuine consideration of how best to meet the needs of students in ACT public schools cannot take place whilst there is such a limitation placed on the review process at its outset.

The AEU will put forward its vision for a sustainable, high quality ACT public education system for the future, with particular attention paid to special education services. The AEU acknowledges that the level of investment required in these proposals is substantial. For decades successive governments, both Federal and ACT, have failed to grasp the essential needs of the public education system and the singular importance of it to the ongoing health of our nation. There is a need to rectify the inaction of the past and it may well take longer than one term of government to achieve these significant changes.

The vast majority of proposals contained in this submission are sourced from two key AEU documents which have been endorsed by the membership:

- *AEU Union Collective Agreement Claim 2009*
- *AEU Budget Submission 2008-2009 – Supporting Students with Special Needs*

The AEU Claim has been presented to the ACT Government and the Department of Education and Training (DET) and is currently being considered as part of negotiations for the next DET Teaching Staff Enterprise Agreement. The Claim highlights the key stress points which must be addressed if public education is to continue to be able to deliver high quality outcomes for its diverse range of students, and thereby maintain a cohesive society where there is equal opportunity for all. The Claim seeks to address

three key issues – recruitment and retention of high quality teachers; reduction in teacher workload and ensuring a sustainable work-life balance; and increased support for the diverse needs of students - each of which are relevant to members in Special Schools, Learning Support Units (LSUs), Learning Support Centres (LSCs), Autism Intervention Units (AIUs), Early Intervention Units (EIUs) and other special education settings. The AEU requests that the Special Education Review team consider the full AEU Claim.

The Special Education Review team has posed the question: “What is desirable for the future provision of special education services in the ACT public education system?”

The AEU recommends the following:

Student Centred Appraisal of Need -

- That the Student-Centred Appraisal of Need (SCAN) process be reviewed and improved to take into account not only an individual student’s needs but the combination of needs of students in any one class. SCAN has not been reviewed since its introduction in 2003.
- That the SCAN process be reviewed and improved to ensure it assesses all factors that relate to supporting a student including, but not limited to, educational needs (such as separate literacy and numeracy criteria), physical disability, physical size of the student (implications for lifting, restraint etc), medical needs, social/emotional needs, behavioural needs and factors relating to the physical setting. Further, that the SCAN process accurately assesses the level of need in each criteria and the level of support and resources required.
- That the SCAN criteria, moderation process, method of calculation (algorithm) and resultant points allocation be completely transparent to all DET staff and parents.
- That the professional judgement of Principals and teachers be respected when they request an interim SCAN or appeal the outcome of a particular SCAN.

See below, under the heading *All Public Schools (including Special Schools,)* for further proposals regarding School Based Management funds and resources.

Class Sizes -

- Class sizes in all special education settings be capped in accordance with the *AEU Union Collective Agreement Claim 2009* – in particular Section 8.5(c) and (d) which relate to Special Education settings:

Class sizes must:

8.5(c) in special education settings be changed, in such a way as to ensure that there is no reduction in current resource levels, to the following maximum class sizes:

- *Autism units:*
 - *High needs students:* 1 teacher and 1 Learning Support Assistant (LSA) to every 4 students.
 - *Moderate needs students:* 1 teacher and 1 LSA to every 6 students.
- *Learning Support Units:* 1 teacher and 1 LSA to every 6 students.

- Learning Support Centres (Primary): 1 teacher and 1 LSA to every 8 students.
 - Learning Support Centres (Secondary): 1 teacher and 1 LSA to every 8 students.
 - Support Class Language: 1 teacher and 1 LSA to every 8 students.
 - Support Class Hearing: 1 teacher and 1 LSA to every 8 students.
 - Special Schools:
 - High need students as identified by an appraisal (SCAN) process: 1 teacher and 1 LSA to every 4 students.
 - Moderate need students as identified by an appraisal (SCAN) process: 1 teacher and 1 LSA to every 6 students.
 - Early Childhood classes within Special Schools: 1 teacher and LSA to every 6 students.
 - Early Childhood Centres: 1 teacher and 1 LSA to every 6 students.
 - Early Intervention Units (including Language Pre-School): 1 teacher and 1 LSA to every 8 students.
 - Autism Intervention Units: 1 teacher and 1 LSA to every 4 students.
- (d) A definition of “high needs/moderate needs” students must be negotiated and the staffing points generated to fully support the class sizes identified by the agreed definitions.

Recruitment and Retention of High Quality Teachers –

- DET to establish a long term recruitment and retention strategy. This strategy should include ways to predict future teacher shortage areas and an action plan to proactively fill these gaps.
- DET to endeavour to fill all teaching positions in Special Education settings (ie. special schools, LSUs, LSCs, AUs, AIUs, EIUs, Support Classes [Hearing and Language], ECCs, etc.) with Special Education qualified teachers.
- DET to recruit qualified Special Education teachers from across the country, and where possible, make early offers to outstanding final year graduates at the beginning of the academic year (prior to other jurisdictions/systems making an early offer).
- Governments/DET to promote teaching as a profession and encourage under-graduates and secondary students to consider teaching in public education, especially in current and potential areas of shortage, for example Special Education, School Counselling.
- That DET continue to liaise with universities to provide appropriate courses for School Counsellors and ensure these positions are filled by qualified teacher-counsellors wherever possible.
- DET and the ACT Minister to lobby the Federal Government to ensure its current review into Teacher Education include Special Education courses. Annual AEU Surveys of Beginning Teachers consistently find that a significant proportion (around 70%) of graduates feel their training did not provide an adequate grounding to teach particular groups of students, such as students with disabilities, students from non-English speaking backgrounds and students from dysfunctional backgrounds.
- That the Special Education Allowance be increased.

- The AEU claim seeks to negotiate a new teacher salary/promotional structure based on its professional pay model; a change to the Mobility provisions based on the proposal endorsed by members; better in-school support for beginning teachers; improved processes to enable contract teachers to gain permanent employment; an increase in the Teacher and Principal Professional Learning Funds; additional Curriculum Support officers; an allowance for teachers who achieve an additional qualification; and improvements in casual relief teachers' salaries and conditions.

Support provided by other Professionals –

- That DET and Therapy ACT jointly develop an action plan to improve the recruitment and retention of therapists (including physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, music therapists and psychologists) to address the needs of all special needs students and their families.
- That DET and Therapy ACT jointly develop a strategy with the aim of achieving a more integrated, coordinated, efficient provision of service to schools.
- That Therapy ACT (Education Support Services) and the associated funding be transferred to DET and that this service be managed by DET.
- That each Special School have 'wrap-around' service provision on site. These services would include a school-based full-time Nursing Health Professional, Therapists (physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy etc.) and a full-time School Counsellor.

Professional Development -

- DET continue to liaise closely with Universities and the Canberra Institute of Technology to ensure that there are a range of undergraduate and post-graduate courses in Special Education for DET employees.
- DET continue to support current employees (teachers and LSAs) to undertake studies in Special Education.
- That DET consult with staff in special schools, special settings and mainstream settings with a view to ensuring that regular, high quality professional development (including Occupational Health and Safety training) is provided to teachers and LSAs. Further, that DET coordinate a Special Education learning community (network) so that any relevant professional development, mentoring and networking opportunities are offered to all DET employees who wish to access it.
- DET to employ a pool of permanent relief teachers for each school cluster to assist in addressing the relief teacher shortage.
- Improve casual relief teachers' salaries and conditions to attract more high quality relief teachers to the ACT and therefore enable permanent teachers to attend Professional Development.

Facilities/Infrastructure -

- That DET immediately undertake an audit of the infrastructure needs of all special needs students (including those integrated into mainstream schools) and the current facilities available for such students (including all special education settings and mainstream). Such an audit should include the current and anticipated number of students in ACT public schools with special needs; appraise the needs of current students, indicate the level of support these students require and whether the current facilities are meeting this need.
- DET establish a long-term plan to consider the increasing number of students with special needs in the ACT public education system and the anticipated facilities required to provide high quality infrastructure into the future.

Reduced Workload and Creation of a Work-Life Balance -

Special Schools:

- Face-to-face teaching hours of teachers, School Leader Cs (SLC) and School Leader Bs (SLB) in Special Schools currently exceed the maximum allowable under the DET Teaching Staff Union Collective Agreement. The AEU supports the current DET investigation into this issue.
- School Leaders in Special Schools are currently supervising a higher ratio of LSAs as compared to their colleagues in mainstream settings. Teachers in Special Schools provide mentoring and support to LSAs in a higher ratio than their colleagues in mainstream settings. The resultant additional workload for School Leaders and Teachers in Special Schools needs to be addressed.
- Creation of a full-time Pastoral Care SLC position in each secondary Special School, on the same basis at mainstream secondary schools.

All Public Schools (including Special Schools) -

School Based Management funding is to be increased to allow for each school:

- To employ at least 1 full time Information Technology (IT) specialist at competitive salary rates, with additional positions to be created as per an agreed formula, based on student numbers.
- To employ at least 2 additional full time administrative support personnel, with additional positions to be created as per an agreed formula, based on student numbers.
- To employ at least 1 additional LSA.

As well as:

- The implementation of appropriate OH&S ACT Public Sector standards, including air conditioning, ergonomic furniture and IT hardware with technical support;
- Facilities that support the needs of every student, including those within Special Schools, LSUs and LSCs.
- A new Teaching Executive structure provision must be negotiated which sees a substantial increase in promotional positions in each school, to provide flexibility and meet the specific school needs.

- All duties which are not related to teaching/educational leadership must be identified and allocated to alternative staff within the school or system.
- The teaching hours within the secondary sector must be restored to 18 hours per week and reduced to 18 hours per week in the preschool and primary sectors.
- The AEU Claim seeks to ensure that any extra-curricular activities carried out by teachers is by negotiation; improved working conditions for Vocational Education and Training teachers; streamline school-based compliance measures; ensure consultation occurs in regard to proposed new initiatives/projects/strategies (including comprehensive scoping, potential impact and resources)*; preschool assistants remain in preschools (not in their linked primary school); all schools be provided with staffing points to release each teacher for at least 3 days per semester for compiling, writing and moderating reports.

***Streamlining current DET policies, new initiatives -**

There is a need for DET to align its vast range of strategies, plans, frameworks, policies and procedures (including those which focus on students with special needs) so that they are streamlined and there is a clear, systemic approach to continual improvement in educational provision and student outcomes over a reasonable timeframe. There is also a need to reduce the number of new programs/initiatives being introduced so that schools can implement and assess the effectiveness of current initiatives. The implementation of any new initiative must be well-justified and accompanied by adequate professional development, support and resources.

Meeting the Diverse Needs of Students –

A significant number of students with special needs (some with a diagnosis, some without) attend a mainstream setting; many students with a disability attend a special education setting. It is the professional responsibility of teachers to implement a range of inclusive teaching practices to meet the needs of each student. However, to do so effectively requires appropriate resourcing, support and professional development, both at the school and systemic levels. Some students need additional support and resources in order to ensure equity of outcomes. One size does not fit all, therefore the public education system requires a broader range of alternative educational programs and settings in order to meet the needs of all students. The AEU recommends:

- For the Preschool sector, an increase in specialist support staff to the following levels:
 - 4.5 full-time equivalent Counsellors for the Preschool sector;
 - 3 full-time Early Intervention Support teachers (and retain 1 full-time equivalent Early Intervention Executive Officer);
 - 3 full-time ESL teachers;
 - 3 full-time Behaviour Management Support teachers; and
 - 1 full-time Social Worker to support families and provide links to allied government and community support services.

This proposal is in recognition of the vital importance of early intervention and is to enable comparable delivery of services for pre-school students (including students with special needs) as for other levels of schooling.

- A new agreed teacher and specialist support staffing formula that is based on the student needs/complexities in each school, not merely on student numbers.
- A centralised funding model should be created that directs resources to schools on a needs basis for students with identified needs in the areas, such as behaviour management, mental health, speech therapy and/or occupational therapy.
- For all teaching positions which require a dual qualification (eg School Counsellors/Teacher Librarians):
 - They must be reclassified at a pay rate equivalent to the proposed Expert Teacher and included in the school site allowance.
 - DET must meet the full costs of any compulsory professional registration (eg Psychologist Board) and the associated required professional development.
 - Funds from the Teacher Professional Learning Fund are to be used to meet the full costs of upgrading any approved teacher who wishes to gain the additional dual qualification.
- A substantially increased range of educationally appropriate alternative programs and settings must be agreed upon and funded within the next 3 years.
- Greater resources, including 10 extra specialist staff, must be provided to Central Office to properly support schools to implement effective student management processes.
- The Classroom Management and Instructional Strategies Course (currently funded by the AEU) must be fully funded to support ongoing professional development for teachers and support staff.

Submitted online: <http://www.actspecialreview.com/make-a-response>

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