

INTEGRATION OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS INTO MAINSTREAM SETTINGS

Introduction

The aim of this policy is to assist members in Sub-Branches when implementing the integration of Students with Special Needs into mainstream settings. For the purposes of this policy, a Student with Special Needs is defined as one having sensory, physical, psychological, intellectual, language or learning impairment or severe behaviour issue and who has been assessed by a School Counsellor according to set criteria. The AEU considers that there are advantages for students, educational staff and the general community in educating Students with Special Needs in mainstream settings, where appropriate. However, the needs of such students are complex and any placement in an integrated setting must have guaranteed educational services and resources to meet the needs of the students, as determined by an Integration Panel.

The AEU maintains that there needs to be a broad range of options available to ensure the most appropriate placement of Students with Special Needs and that placement is based on optimal educational outcomes for all students. In order to achieve this range of options, the Union firmly believes that it is the responsibility of the ACT Government to adequately fund and resource all students no matter what type of setting they are placed in. It is also the ACT Government's responsibility to provide support and professional development for teachers involved in integrating Students with Special Needs. The process of initiating, implementing and maintaining integration, if it is to be successful, requires the involvement of teachers, parents and students and there must be joint consultation and decision making processes when considering all aspects of placement.

This policy outlines the procedures for members to follow when integrating Students with Special Needs. This policy emphasises the requirement for professional support and development for mainstream teachers integrating Students with Special Needs. It also assures the teacher's role in the decision making process, in particular their part in determining the level of resourcing required to integrate Students with Special Needs.

The Integration Panel

1. Each student will have an Integration Panel which must meet prior to student placement. The panel should comprise:
 - (a) principal or delegate
 - (b) counsellor
 - (c) sending teacher (introductory meeting)
 - (d) class teacher (receiving class)
 - (e) AEU representative (this may be (c) or (d))
 - (f) parent and/or parent advocate.

The Integration Panel may be the Department's Review Panel (Special Needs Panel) for students with a nominated AEU representative (who may be one of the Review Panel members).

2. The Integration Panel is to ensure that adequate resources are available and are flexible enough to increase and decrease as required. Existing resource points should transfer with the student (eg STA points). The panel's primary function is to oversee the integration process.
3. The primary responsibility of the AEU representative is to monitor the process and safeguard the teacher's rights. The role of the AEU representative is to ensure that staff have access to appropriate professional development. This is in order to provide the best possible support for the student and to protect the OH&S rights of the teacher and the rights of other students. The AEU representative should report to the Union Office if problems are encountered.
4. The Integration Panel will determine whether the placement of Students with Special Needs into a mainstream setting will provide the student with the most advantageous educational and social outcomes. The following criteria should be considered when determining the placement of Students with Special Needs:
 - (a) educational needs
 - (b) mobility

- (c) physical needs
 - (d) medical needs
 - (e) independence
 - (f) social interaction and emotional needs
 - (g) behavioural needs
 - (h) facilities of the mainstream setting
5. The Integration Panel will review the placement of Students with Special Needs in the school by the end of Term 3 each year or more often if required. The assessment process could sit alongside a Student Centred Appraisal of Need process.

The Process of Integration

The following issues shall be resolved prior to the enrolment and the integration of any Students with Special Needs into a mainstream class:

1. Identification of the students' educational needs, on a needs profile.
2. The level of teacher assistance required for Students with Special Needs be determined on the basis of a needs profile with a view to implementation of the Individual Learning Plan.
3. Health, therapy and paramedical services and equipment required according to student need.
4. School buildings, facilities and organisation to be modified according to student needs.
5. Adequate integration support be made available to classroom teachers.
6. Teachers involved in the integration of Students with Special Needs may require an increase in release time for lesson preparation and liaison. Resources must be available to meet this need.
7. The integration of Students with Special Needs to be monitored and evaluated by the Department to ascertain budgetary and educational implications.
8. The AEU request the Department to establish and develop a central pool of specialist equipment to be allocated to schools on application, for the duration of a specific student's needs.
9. The industrial conditions of any member shall not be lessened by the implementation of an integration program.

Resourcing Integration

Integration of Students with Special Needs into mainstream classes requires the provision of adequate and appropriate resources. Each student shall attract sufficient resources to provide for an appropriate mix of the following:

- professional development for staff involved;
- additional resources for extra preparation and liaison time;
- additional points to alter student/teacher ratio within the student's class;
- additional teacher assistant points to support mainstream teachers with Students with Special Needs with relief provided for STA when on leave;
- additional equipment and facilities.

Professional Development for Staff Involved in Integration Programs

The AEU recognises that the training of teachers is the responsibility of the Department. It strongly urges the Department to adequately resource the PD of teachers involved in Integration Programs to ensure the success of those programs by offering the best possible support for the student and staff involved. PD must be increased and other ways of supporting students and staff be investigated and set into place.