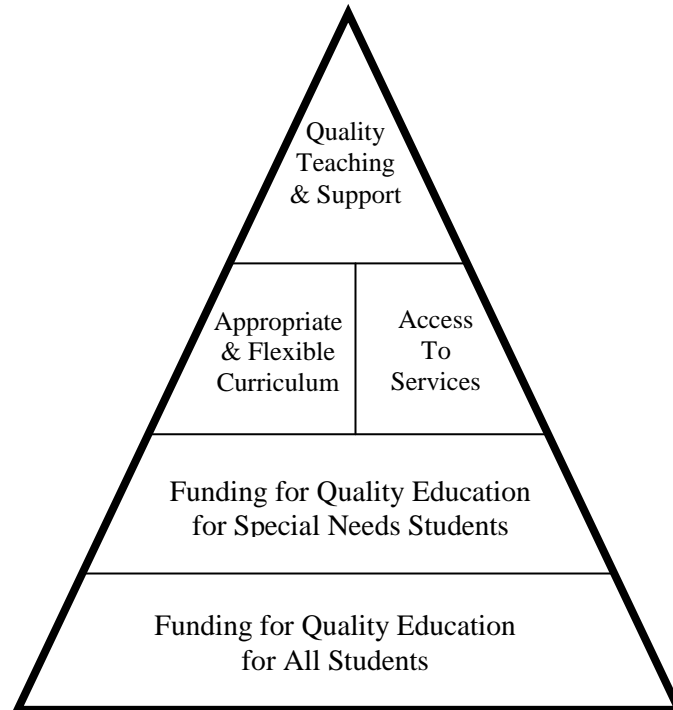


IEU Policy

Quality Education For Students with Disabilities and Special Needs



Preamble

Inclusion is more than finding a place for a student in a school – it is about determining appropriate and well resourced learning environments, support practices and access to services which will ensure quality education for students with disabilities and special needs.

To achieve this, Australia needs a comprehensive and consistent approach to funding the needs of students with disabilities and special needs.

Purpose

This policy will articulate the underlining principles for quality education for students with disabilities and special needs.

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the:

- *IEU Quality Teaching Framework (2010)* and
- *IEU School Funding Policy (2011)*

Principles

The IEU believes that quality education for students with disabilities and special needs is delivered through the following interconnecting set of principles:

- Quality Teaching and Support;
- Appropriate and Flexible Curriculum; and
- Access to Services.

Fundamental to the success of these elements is a comprehensive funding arrangement based on nationally consistent definitions, arrangements and processes.

Definition

For the purpose of this policy, “students with disabilities and special needs” refers to students who have a range of physical, mental, emotional, behavioural and/or learning needs and/or medical conditions that require the provision of additional services and support to ensure they receive appropriate quality education.

Principle 1 Quality Teaching and Support

The IEU supports policies and programs which provide systemic and systematic practical strategies for improving student participation, retention rates and improved learning outcomes for all students.

Intrinsic to these policies and programs, is the level of support and professional development available for teachers and support staff.

Inclusion programs place high demands on staff and there is tension in balancing the needs of inclusion students with the needs of the whole class, if appropriate levels of support are not in place. There are requirements for units of work to be modified, alternative assessment tasks developed and requirements for collaboration with other professionals and the family. Thus adequate preparation time release must be provided to teachers and integration aides.

The role of the integration aide in supporting students with special needs is vital to the successful inclusion of students with disabilities and special needs. Yet, too often, integration aides are overlooked in the provision of quality support to students. Integration aides are often employed on fixed term contracts due to funding shortages and are overlooked in a school professional development plan.

Quality on-going training and professional development is necessary. There is a need for enhanced access to ongoing professional development for both teachers and integration aides, including online training opportunities.

The IEU believes that:

- Each student with an intellectual and /or physical or emotional/conduct disability should have access to an integration aide with appropriate expertise in the area of disability in learning contexts;
- Time must be provided for teachers and integration aides to work together on curriculum planning and modification and to liaise with external agencies and parents when teaching students with disabilities/special needs;

- Class sizes must be decreased where students with developmental, physical or emotional disabilities are in the class to ensure equitable levels of educational provisions are available to all students in the class;
- The employment of specialist staff at a system and/or school level must be in addition to normal staff allocations and be sufficient to address the diverse needs of students;
- Continuity of employment must be provided to integration aides to ensure continuity of professional support;
- Appropriate classification structures which recognise the skills and knowledge levels of integration aides.
- Professional development for teachers and integration aides should be recognised and funded as an integral requirement to the teaching and learning needs of students with disabilities and special needs.
- Professional development should be based on a combination of the needs of the school's development plan, an assessment of the needs of the students and the professional needs determined by the individual teacher and the needs of integration aides.

Principle 2 Appropriate and Flexible Curriculum

It is important to ensure that students with disabilities and special needs have genuine access to the curriculum. Research recognises that many students with special education needs follow the same developmental progression as their peers but not necessarily at the same rate; some students progress differently in different learning areas or demonstrate skills in certain contexts.

The development of a comprehensive Individual Education Plan (IEP) is the most effective way to ensure students with disabilities and special needs are able to access the universal curriculum in a meaningful way. However, it is important that curriculum development provides supporting documents and resources that meet the full range of students with specific needs so that guidelines can be developed to include information on how an IEP can be developed.

The IEU believes that:

- The curriculum needs of students with disabilities and special needs must be built into curriculum, not bolted on as an afterthought;
- It is crucial that, in the development of curriculum policies, procedures and programs, equitable priority is given so that provision is made for the needs of students with disabilities and special needs and the schools in which they are enrolled; and
- Teachers and support staff require time and resource support in the development and delivery of IEP's in order to ensure quality.

Principle 3 Access to Services

Access to professional support services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and counselling is vital to the success of students with disabilities and special needs.

The expectation that teachers can meet every need of students with disability without the funded support of these other professionals is not only unreasonable but also negatively impacts on the learning potential of the student. However, there is a notable disparity in the provision of government services such as assessment, transport and therapy services between government and non-government schools.

This is particularly so in rural and remote regions due to the unavailability of these specialist services.

The IEU believes that professional support services such as speech therapy, physiotherapy and counselling must be fully funded so that they are readily accessible to all students with disabilities and special needs.

Principle 4 Funding for Quality Education for Special Needs Students

There are many disparities regarding resources and funding which occur between schools and across jurisdictions. Up until recently, "Disability" has been defined differently across all states and territories for the purpose of determining access to Commonwealth funding. The consequence

of this has been that, in some jurisdictions, students with special learning needs did not fall within the eligibility criteria for Commonwealth funding and thus were not supported.

There are short falls in the funding of non-government schools, compared to government schools, in relation to students with disabilities from both Federal and State/Territory recurrent and capital funding.

Work has been undertaken by the Australian Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Senior Officials Committee (AEESYOC) in the development and trialling of nationally consistent models which, when in place, should go some way in alleviating funding discrepancies.

However, there are other shortfalls in the funding of support for non-government schools in relation to students with disabilities. There is disparity in the provision of services to non government schools such as assessment, transport and therapy services.

Conditions which result in challenging behaviours have the most impact on schools and these appear to be on the rise. Students with multiple disabilities or special needs are often not sufficiently recognised. However, there is little recognition in the current funding arrangements that non-government schools are managing such students.

Despite acknowledgement of the increasing diversity and complexity of the needs of students with disability, there has been a diminution in support, in real terms, and at all levels; fiscal, pedagogical and human resources, to schools.

This disparity across the education sector results in non-government schools facing difficulties in providing the resources required to meet the needs of students with disabilities and special needs. This is particularly true for small schools with limited capacity to amortise cost. Students who enrol in schools that are unable to provide all the required resources are

disadvantaged compared with their peers at a better resourced school.

The level of funding for students with disabilities and special needs in non-government mainstream schools means that individual schools/systems are subsidising these costs from other sources.

Thus the underpinning philosophy of equity suffers because of the inadequate government funding processes and support mechanisms across the jurisdictions. This inevitably produces inequalities.

The IEU believes that the current funding mechanisms do not accurately provide for the number of students with disabilities or special needs to take account of the particular educational needs.

The IEU believes that the full costs of meeting the educational needs of students with disabilities, as defined and assessed, should be funded by federal and state governments regardless of whether the student attends a government or non-government school.

The IEU also believes that funding must also support transition, such as from early childhood into schooling, primary to secondary, secondary to further education and training.

The IEU acknowledges the positive recommendations of the Gonski report which provide for full funding of students with disability and special needs, regardless of where they are enrolled.

The IEU believes that a student centred funding approach must be developed in which:

- Students are assessed and categorised according to nationally consistent definitions of disability across jurisdictions;
- Based on assessment and categorisation, funds are allocated to each student regardless of sector in which the student is enrolled;
- There is consistency in treatment across jurisdictions;

- There is transparency in funding across jurisdictions;
- There is greater accountability in use of funds; and
- There is funding to cover various types of costs, infrastructure costs, service and support costs and staff resource costs.

Principle 5 Funding for Quality Education

Underpinning all principles for quality special needs education is the appropriate resourcing of schools to ensure quality education for all students.