

QASEL RESPONSE TO the QUEENSLAND DISABILITY REVIEW



QUEENSLAND ASSOCIATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADERS Inc.

QASEL is the peak professional association for Special Educators in Queensland. The association leadership structure includes seven Executive members; the President, three Vice Presidents- one dedicated to be a Head of Special Education Services, a Secretary, a Treasurer and an immediate past President. The State Council meets face to face four times each year, together with QASEL Executive and Management Committee and is representative of members across the seven education Queensland regions, in rural, remote, regional and metropolitan locations.

QASEL welcomes the opportunity to respond through this written submission to each of the seven theme/discussion areas of the review discussion paper content (embedded in the responses below) and for QASEL members throughout the state to be involved in the consultation process of this review. We believe that it is of utmost importance that this review acknowledges what schools, school leaders, teachers and other school staff are to be commended for, in order to ensure the learning of students with disability. The second goal of the Melbourne Declaration will thus be achieved – *All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individual, and active and informed citizens.*¹

QASEL statement -INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

In Queensland State Education the students with disability represent almost 6% of the student population in state schools from Prep age to Year 12. There are 31,084 students verified through the Education Adjustment Program currently in 2016. There has been significant growth in students living with autism. From 2015 to 2016, there was a 8.6% growth in students identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). There are 13,900 students verified with Autism Spectrum Disorder (February 2016) in Queensland State Education. Students verified with ASD make up 44.7% of the total number of students verified with a disability or disabilities.

State mainstream primary, high and P-10/12 schools have students with disability enrolled and as members of that school community. Inclusive Education is Department of Education and Training policy. Inclusive practices are not consistent across Queensland schools. In state Special Schools students

1

http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf

are 'included' in their school and local community and the relationships are very often 'two way,' where many examples demonstrate significant outcomes for students in mainstream Special Education Programs (SEPs) and in mainstream without an SEP, alongside growth in student learning outcomes for students enrolled in Special Schools.

With regard to school leaders across mainstream schools, there is a diverse range of understandings and practices. Around inclusion there can be great examples of HOSSES (or equivalent role where numbers are lower) being a 'full' member of the school leadership team, through to being an 'excluded' -type role located physically 'at the back of the school', in a class or block with the school leader having little or no inclusion in school leadership decisions and processes.

QASEL believes that the Queensland Schools for Inclusive Leadership program, funded by the MSSWD National Partnership funding, was not successful across all 1236 schools in changing leadership attitudes and practices with regard to inclusive education.

QASEL recommendations-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

That the inclusive nature of special schools and special education programs -be clearly supported with DET resources and policies as per DET's current definition:

Inclusive education ensures that schools are supportive and engaging places for all school community members. It builds communities that value, celebrate and respond to diversity. It is underpinned by respectful relationships between learners and school community members. It is supported by collaborative relationships with parents and communities through communication, learning partnerships, participation and consultative decision-making.

Inclusive education means that every day in every classroom, every state school student is learning and achieving in a safe, supportive, inclusive and disciplined learning environment.²

That Special Education staff in mainstream schools i.e. Heads of Special Education must be supported to be included members of school leadership teams-all students with disability are OUR students.

That ALL state school staff ensure through their actions and support for students with disability, that ALL students feel that school is where EVERYONE can learn with high expectations from all staff, and be included as a member of that school community and therefore enjoy their schooling experiences.

That students with disability are recognised by all staff and students as valued members of the school community.

QASEL statement-POLICIES AND PRACTICES in PROVISION of EDUCATION for STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

QASEL acknowledges the high level importance of ALL Queensland school staff across all settings having an in depth knowledge and working understanding of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), the Disability Standards for Education (DSE), all Department of Education and Training (DET) policies and guidelines

² <http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/inclusive/index.html>

and be fully cognisant of the relevant policies and processes of the school environment in which they work as employees. Classroom teachers in mainstream schools are less aware and tend to use Special Education staff as 'owners' of students and do not necessarily see these students as belonging to their class or the school.

School leaders across Queensland take varying levels of responsibility for the training and awareness of classroom teachers and middle managers in their schools, regarding the DET policy of Inclusion and the above mentioned policies. There are also very disparate learning outcomes for students with disability, compounded by the lack of knowledge and ownership of ALL staff for these students and their 'avoidance' of their responsibilities as per the Melbourne Declaration- previously noted. *'All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individual, and active and informed citizens.'*³ QASEL notes that it is very common across our Queensland schools that teachers do NOT have clear and high expectations of students with disability to achieve.

QASEL recommendations- POLICIES AND PRACTICES in PROVISION of EDUCATION for STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

That ALL employees working with students with disability must have access to clear advice, training and professional learning to fully prepare them for their role, whether in a mainstream setting, SEP or special school.

That ALL teachers understand how to teach students with disability across the state, inclusive of rural and remote settings i.e. trained in Special Education or have DET supported access to an upskilling option e.g. similar to the STEM retraining model.

That ALL teachers understand the content and intent of the Australian Curriculum (AC) and be competent to teach students with disability, differentiating for individual students' needs.

That ALL teachers MUST be specifically trained by DET to be able to cater for individual student needs. High expectations of SWDs MUST be expected and teachers must be unrelenting in this.

That DET training occur (at system and school level) for teachers in aligning content of the AC to the specifically TAUGHT content followed by REPORTING relevant for that student at that level.

That ALL students with disability are taught and assessed on the appropriate level of the curriculum related to their individual needs and ability. Reporting to parents/carers should be on a five point scale that uses the descriptors of the year level being assessed, not the descriptors of the chronological year level of the student. For students with severe/profound intellectual or multiple

3

http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf

Young_Australians.pdf

Scoping Study for Special Schools DETE 23 August 2013 prepared by URBIS

Location Profiles for Special Schools Scoping Study DETE 23 August 2013

prepared by URBIS

disabilities the reporting should be on a five point scale that is descriptive not a measure i.e not A-E. N.B. Students with disability are exempt from an A-E scale in ACT, NT, NSW, SA and WA, rather a descriptive format is used.

That ALL schools across Queensland have access to the full range of curriculum resources from around Australia to support teachers in their planning for the learning of students with disability e.g. Victorian Essential Learning Standards (AusVELS) and Abilities Based Learning and Education Support (ABLES), Victorian DoE.

That ALL teachers and support staff ,as appropriate, be trained by DET in the Essential Skills for Classroom Management, Functional Behaviour Analysis, Positive Behaviour for Learning or similar embedded training, to support effective management of students with disability who exhibit challenging behaviour.

That ALL members of staff have clear guidance from DET with regard to the definition and use of restrictive practices. There are no clear definitions of restrictive practices in DET policy.

That DET provide policies and guidelines for ALL staff across the 1236 schools as to approved teacher (school leader supported) actions when restrictive practices need to be utilised.

That DET NDIS implementation policies are provided for the information and support of ALL staff.

That School/Student Transport provision and the provision of early intervention services to families through ECDPs remain with DET into the future, post the full NDIS rollout in 2020.

That Department of Communities (DOCs) and Disability Services Queensland (DSQ) and all support agencies, utilise a cost-effective, efficient, cohesive and 'wrap around' case management model in partnership with DET, for students with disability and their families. ('silos' and lack of communication are not supportive of best practice and the success of student and family outcomes).

QASEL statement- INFRASTRUCTURE, ENVIRONMENT and RESOURCING

South East Queensland is experiencing significant population growth with overseas and interstate migration and the development of significantly large housing estates in the outer urban suburbs and semi-rural areas.

Families are moving to these areas and considerable growth is occurring in state Special Schools as parents/carers of students with disability and more complex educational needs seek enrolments. QASEL's position and DET policies reflect a 'desirable' maximum enrolment total in a 'purpose -built' special school of around 120 students, in order to provide the level of education adjustments required for these high support needs students with disability. Currently there are three growing Special Schools in particular, that are more than double this desirable enrolment 'cap'. Their footprint of land and current facilities cannot grow on these sites and is not adequately catering for the provision of an array of programs for all enrolled students with disability.

This population growth is reflected in Special Education Programs (SEPs) in the South East corner also e.g. a SEP led by one Head of Special Education Services

(HOSES)-Band 7 in a P-12 college in the South East Region-enrolment 192 students with verified disability (at time of writing)-10% of the student enrolment.

There are some SEPs that are known as 'Cluster SEPs'. One cluster HOSES is allocated a number of small schools (numbers vary), within a reasonable geographic area, but sometimes this proximity is not possible to provide and therefore some HOSES have up to 800km travel in a week. These HOSES are expected to teach a portion of their week as are all HOSES (subject to school Principal decisions). Supportive school Principals will utilise funds e.g. 'Investing for Success' (I4S) to release HOSES fulltime off a teaching load. These cluster HOSES must work closely with each of their allocated small school principals, teachers and students, be the 'expert' on various DET and each school's policies and processes AND travel to and from these schools on a regular basis.

Demographic data collated and provided through various commissioned reports e.g. specifically for demographical locations of students with disability-URBIS reports of 2012, have forecast this significant growth. The DET Infrastructure branch utilises this and other sources of DET and demographic data to forward plan for the upcoming 3-5 year period for all schools, inclusive of SEPs and Special Schools.

Human Resourcing to cater for these students with disability in growth areas cannot keep pace. Significant growth means greater teaching and school leader demands. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are not providing Special Education courses, except in a few good examples-(USQ and Griffith) e.g. graduate diplomas and certificates, in response to student/teacher demands.

Student FTE numbers in Special Schools drive resourcing of FTE teacher and teacher aide numbers following Day 8 each school year. The reliance of Special Education Program staffing on the 'residual' (leftover) allocations from Special Schools is highly inequitable and problematic in the longer term.

QASEL recommendations- INFRASTRUCTURE, ENVIRONMENT and RESOURCING

That Special Schools like primary and secondary schools have their 'own' electronic staffing model in the previous school year, so as to allow Principals to plan (and employ) autonomously and effectively.

That Special Education programs have their 'own' electronic staffing model so as to allow Principals and HOSES to plan (and employ) autonomously and effectively.

That Prep age students with disability are resourced as for all students with disability not on quartile 1 of the EAP

That DET build three new Special Schools P-12 in the SE corner as a matter of urgency, in line with the URBIS report/s recommendations of 2012-one in the Upper Coomera/Southport corridor, one in Caloundra South and one in Caboolture West.

That DET Infrastructure forward planning should occur for the 'footprint' and planning for future special education facilities, including Special Education Programs and Special Schools.

That DET resource mainstream schools to support enhanced numbers of middle management positions in larger SEPs.

That DET resource Special Schools with very complex cohorts of students to support enhanced numbers of middle management positions, as per primary and secondary schools.

That 'Investing for Success' or similar needs based funding continue beyond 2017 to allow for flexibility to address students with disability 'true' needs across ALL schools.

That the specific needs of 'Cluster' HOSES and SEPs be more equitably and effectively addresses/resourced.

That Special School budgets be enhanced to support the significantly high costs of specific and specialised equipment to support students with disability accessing learning.

That the DET Allocation of State Education policy be strengthened to reflect actual needs of all students with disability, especially those transitioning out of secondary age provisions.

That State Schooling temporary enrolment policy be clear for schools regarding students with disability and their families.

QASEL FINAL STATEMENT:

Special Educators are receiving affirming messages from the Director-General at the conclusion of any professional learning during 2016 in particular, that Special Education Leaders can lead across all sectors of education, as they possess a unique set of capabilities.

The Central Office/DG message should be 'our' collective message- these practitioners, particularly Special Education Leaders can lead in any DET school/environment and HR practices should be reflective of this-e.g. if a special education person is an applicant for a leadership role, often panels will presume they will not 'know how' to lead in a primary or secondary environment. Messages/policy across whole of DET and particularly HR Central Office and Regional Office leaders should be consistent with the DG's messages.

Educators of students with disability must be equitably valued and recognised as DET leaders.

This Disability Review has affirmed for special educators and leaders in special education and across DET, that their work with students with disability is valued, particularly by students and their families and that this significant cohort of our state school students should be challenged to aspire to high expectations.

Educators of these students should seek high achievements for them and the DET should recognise that the 6% of students verified with disability represents a significant percentage of our total student population.

The Office of State School Operations and its' ADG, together with his colleagues and staff, have supported the work of schools and special educators, through policies and processes and the significant numbers

of students with disabilities and their families over recent times and to date.

However, ideally there is a strong case for a coordinating Central Office 'named' role e.g. Assistant Director General Disability Education, together with a small supporting team for that role, to ensure that students with disability together with their more able peers, are further supported, encouraged and enabled to reach for the stars!

Roselynn Anderson

President

Queensland Association of Special Education Leaders

October 2016



2 QASEL RESPONSE to the Queensland State School Resourcing Review
Deloitte Access Economics July 2016

