

Members of the Education Council;
Robert Randall
CEO
ACARA

Dear Council Members and Mr Randall

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the consultation process around the collection and publication of data as it relates to students with disability.

Down Syndrome Australia supports the need for improved data collection relating to the education of students with disability. However, we would be extremely concerned at the collection and publication of any data showing “the level of adjustment” required for students with disability and comparisons across disability types. Whilst data of this type may be useful for a handful of key decision makers when it comes to allocating resources, it is our strong belief that the view of many educators and schools communities is that “adjustment” equates to burden. We have very real concerns that the publication of data like this by school or school type in such a blunt format as a website would lead to further denial of access for students with disability from the general school population.

It is also our strong view that any discussion about the concept of adjustment as a purely economic term fails to acknowledge the significant benefits to the entire school and wider community of inclusive education. The purpose of inclusive education is to ensure that ALL students gain access to knowledge, skills, and information that will prepare them to contribute to our society’s communities and workplaces.

The depth and breadth of poor education experiences reported to organisations like DSA is immense. It is critical to recognise that the difficulty in obtaining adequate funding to support students with disability plays a major role in these poor experiences. Further, within the present education system there is a systemic culture of low expectations in relation to students with disability. Unfortunately, students with disability are still not afforded the status of a learner in some schools.

A great deal can be accomplished in inclusive education by good curriculum design – the principles of universal design for learning, for example. It may well be the case that many adjustments are not needed in many schools - that universal good practice will

deliver good inclusive education, which will in turn help ensure consistency and more useful and informative data in the long run.

More than one member of the DSA board has felt pressured to withdraw their child from their local school as the school principal implied that the child was “too expensive” for that school to educate in very recent times.

The profound disadvantage confronting children and young people with disability in education has been highlighted in national, state and territory inquiries in recent times, DSA urges ACARA and the Members of the Education Council to consider the evidence given at the Senate Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disability and the findings of the Senate Committee’s final report.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our concerns with Members of the Council in more detail should that be possible. We would also like to place on record our thanks to the team at ACARA for the time they have taken to bring this consultation to our attention and for making themselves available to meet with our national Education Working Group.

Yours sincerely



Ruth Webber
CEO

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