Principals survey confirms growing crisis in disability funding



New AEU research has found that 17.7 per cent of students in public schools have a disability or learning difficulty which requires funded support, and that 77 per cent of principals say their budgets lack the resources to provide it.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said more than half of students with disability who needed funded support weren't getting it and the Federal Government needed to keep its election promise to deliver Gonski funding for all students with disability.

The AEU's *2016 State of Our Schools* survey of public school principals found that 17.7 per cent of students required assistance in class, up from 15.3 per cent in 2015.

87 per cent of principals reported having to shift funding from other parts of their school budget to assist students with disability, up from 84 per cent in 2015.

"This survey highlights the huge and growing number of students with disability who are not getting the funded support they need at school," Ms Haythorpe said

"It is consistent with the Federal Government's own data collection which shows that 13.6% of all students need funded support at school but only 6.2% are getting it. This amounts to over 270,000 students."

"We cannot continue with a situation where more than half of the students who need funded support at school aren't getting it. These students are missing out on the help they need to benefit fully from their education.

"Public school budgets are already tight and principals should not have to pull funds from other areas of their budgets to support students with disability. But that is what is happening in 87 per cent of our schools.

"We need the government to keep its promise that all students will get funded support based on their disability.

The Federal Government promised to increase resources to students with disability at the 2013 election, to ensure that all students who required support, received it. This was consistent with the recommendations of the Gonski Review which identified huge unmet need in disability.

The promise was repeated by the Education Minister Christopher Pyne in June last year when he said that from 2016:

“Every child in Australia with disability will be able to receive the correct loading, as they should, to match their disability’

“This is a matter of urgency. Every year that we delay is another cohort of students with disability who don’t get the support at school they need to equip them for work and life,” Ms Haythorpe said.

“Principals say their chief needs are: in-class assistance for classroom teachers (84 per cent) followed by specialist support, such as speech or behavioural therapists (60%) followed by professional development for teachers (52%).”

“All of these measures can make a huge difference for students with disability, but require investing resources into our school system. It is not enough simply to rely on the passion and dedication of teachers.

“Proper funding for disability in schools is long overdue. This is more evidence that the crisis in disability is getting worse and we need the Federal Government to act.”

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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