Latest government figures more evidence of massive underfunding of disability in schools

New government figures show that more than half of all students with disability are missing out on the funded support they need at school, the AEU said today.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said the 2016 Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on Disability (NCCD) figures confirmed the crisis in disability education in Australia.

“This annual census shows 469,000 students have a disability or learning difficulty but schools are only receiving funding to support 200,000 students with disability,” said Ms Haythorpe

“That is over a quarter of a million children with disability that schools are not funded to support. The question now is what action will Education Minister Simon Birmingham take to deal with this chronic underfunding?

“The Coalition promised to fund schools to support all students with disability from 2015 and it hasn’t happened. Now with a $3 billion cut to Gonski funding kids across the country are going to continue to miss out.

“Senator Birmingham won’t even tell us how many students will be funded for disability under his plan next year. We cannot continue with a system that leaves behind some of our most vulnerable students and fails to give them the help they need to reach their potential.”

This is the second year that the NCCD has gathered data on disability from every school in Australia.

- The 2016 NCCD data shows that 12.4% of students have an ‘extensive, substantial or supplementary’ disability which requires funded support at school. This is similar to the 12.5% figure in the 2015 data.
- This means that over 469,000 students require funded support at school for a disability or learning difficulty.
- The Productivity Commission’s 2017 report on government services showed just 200,168 students were receiving funded support at school in 2015.
- Public schools report 13.1% of students have a disability and require funded support.

“There are thousands of educators who are going above and beyond to help students with disability and we need to back their efforts with proper training and resources.

“One-to-one support in class, individual learning plans and specialist support from speech therapists or occupational therapists can make a huge difference for a child with disability but these things require funding, and that is what is currently lacking."

New data from the AEU's 2017 *State of Our Schools* survey shows that 87% of principals reported having to shift funding from other parts of their school budget to assist students with disability. It also found that:

- 96% of principals report having students with disability at their school, and 76% say they don't have the resources to meet their needs.
- Disadvantaged schools have higher rates of disability: 42% of principals of low-SES schools report at least 16% of students have a disability compared to 11% of high-SES schools.
- 84% of principals say they need more assistance for teachers in the classroom, 60% say they need more specialist support, and 48% say they need more funding for professional development.

"How much more evidence does the Federal Government need before it acts?

"The lack of action on disability is a national shame. 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," said Ms Haythorpe.

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