Birmingham must deliver extra disability funding not cuts

The AEU has called on new Education Minister Simon Birmingham to meet the Federal Government's commitment to properly fund all students with disability, not cut funding.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said that any cuts to funding for disability in schools would be a betrayal of some of Australia's most vulnerable students.

"Minister Birmingham has told Senate Estimates that some States or sectors could be worse off under the Federal Government's proposed changes to disability funding for schools in 2016," Ms Haythorpe said.

"This is completely at odds with the Federal Government's promise that from 2016 'every child in Australia with disability will be able to receive the correct loading, as they should, to match their disability'.

"We already have huge underfunding of disability in schools and further cuts would leave thousands more children without the resources they need to benefit from school and make the most of their ability.

"Schools who struggle to find the resources for their students with disability will be shocked to hear that the Federal Government is considering making cuts to this area.

"In-class support, equipment, individual learning plans and increased professional development for teachers can make massive difference for students – but all of these things take time and money that many schools don't have.

"ABS data says that half of the students with disability in mainstream schools get no support. That is 127,400 students not getting the resources they need, including 37,000 students with severe or profound disability.

"The Federal Government's own data collection in 2013 showed that 13.1 per cent of students had some kind of disability, compared with just 5 per cent who receive funded support at school.

"Our surveys of principals have found that 84 per cent say they shift funds from other parts of their budget to educate students with disability.

"All this data confirms we have chronic underfunding of disability in schools and we need more resources, not cuts.

"To ignore this huge unmet need and instead talk about stripping money from States and Territories for disability is absolutely outrageous.

"Minister Birmingham needs to address this issue as soon as possible and work with the States to ensure that the promised funding makes its way to schools from 2016."

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