Productivity commission report more evidence of huge unmet need in disability education

Latest figures from the Productivity Commission confirm that at least 100,000 students with disability are not getting support in schools, the Australian Education Union said today.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said the lack of support was a crisis and that the Abbott Government needed to act urgently to keep its promise to lift support for students with disability.

The figures, from the PC's Report on Government Services, showed that 190,887 students with disability received funding support in Australian schools in 2013, representing 5.3 per cent of total students.

"We have seen a slight rise in the proportion of students getting disability support, but there is still a huge level of urgent need which remains unmet," Ms Haythorpe said.

"In 2009, the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that there were 292,000 students with disability in Australia. That means at least 100,000 are not getting any kind of funding support, and the figure is likely to be higher when population growth is taken into account.

"The proportion of students being funded for disability actually dropped in SA, WA and the Northern Territory.

"There are also huge variations in the proportion of students being funded in different States, an issue caused by a lack of common definitions of disability.

"Students are unable to access the education they need due to a lack of resources, such as support staff in schools. Equal treatment for Australians with disability must start with an education that lets them reach their potential. Anything less is a national disgrace which will have huge social costs in the future.

"We must not let students with disability miss out on basic skills simply because their schools are underfunded.

"The Abbott Government made an election promise in 2013 to increase the 'disability loading' paid to schools educating students with disability from 2015. However no money was put aside in last year's budget and a meeting of State and Territory Education Ministers in November last year confirmed this will not happen until 2016 at the earliest.

Education Minister Christopher Pyne said in 2013: "We have long argued that the current funding arrangements for students with disability and learning difficulty are unfair and inequitable. If elected to Government the Coalition will continue the data collection work that has commenced, which will be used to deliver more funding for people with disability through the 'disability loading' in 2015".

"We will know on Budget Night this year whether the Abbott Government is serious about supporting students with disability or whether it will disappoint them again.

The PC report also confirmed that government funding per student for private schools rose more than three times faster than for public schools between 2008-09 and 2012-13, with public schools rising by 4.1% and private schools by 15.5%. This represents an increase of $1181 per private school student compared to $621 per government school student.

"This is more proof that the pre-Gonski funding system was skewed in favour of private schools," Ms Haythorpe said.

"Funding for schools should be based on student need, and we need the full six years of Gonski funding to ensure all schools reach minimum resource standards.

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