Secret data: Huge numbers of students with disability not getting funded support

Students with disability are missing out on funded support in schools, secret data from the Federal Government's own data collection process shows.

A Senate Inquiry into disability in schools in Sydney today will hear evidence from AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe that paints an alarming picture of a system which is not meeting the needs of students with disability.

Ms Haythorpe said that data from the Federal Government's own 2013 National Consistent Collection of Data on disability (NCCD), showed that 13.1 per cent of students had some kind of disability, compared with just 5 per cent who receive support at school.

"This data backs up what educators are telling us – there are thousands of students with disability not getting the funding they need to succeed at school," Ms Haythorpe said.

"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.

"Education Minister Christopher Pyne has already broken an election promise to extend funding to all students with disability who need it in 2015, as recommended by the Gonski Review.

"He needs to deliver this funding in 2016, as he told Parliament he would in June this year.

"Yet the issue is not even on the agenda at today's meeting of Education Ministers, even though time is running out to have the increased funding in place from the start of the 2016 school year.

"This report shows that 13.1 per cent of students have some form of disability, and that 88.2 per cent of these needed some form of adjustment at school.

"This number is far in excess of the 5 per cent of students who actually receive funded support at school for disability, and shows that the current funding system is failing many students who need it.

"It backs the findings of the Australian Bureau of Statistics in its 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, that 127,000 students with disability in mainstream schools were receiving no support or special arrangements at school.

"This is half the total number of students with disability, and includes 37,000 with a severe or profound disability.

"This report clearly states that the current funding system is only meant to be "short-term and is not related to the level of adjustment needed."

"It also confirms that the categories currently used by State Governments to determine which students with disability receive funding can be "quite narrow, potentially resulting in a number of students being ineligible for support, who would otherwise be eligible under broader definitions."

"We see students with disability, learning difficulties or mental health conditions being held back due to a lack of resources. This will have long-term consequences if it leads to students not being prepared for work and life after school.

"Final data collection is being completed this year, for use in 2016. Minister Pyne needs to tell us how this will be used to deliver an increase in support for students with disability and confirm this will be available from the start of the 2016 school year."

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