Abbott must keep his promise to fund disability in schools



New research by the AEU has found that eight-out-of-ten principals do not have the resources they need to educate growing numbers of students with disability, and that their learning is suffering as a result.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said the research showed the Abbott Government needed to make good on its broken promise to introduce real needs-based funding for students with disability, as recommended by the Gonski Review, through a ‘disability loading’.

“There are over 100,000 students with disability whose schools receive no support funding - one-third of the total number of students with disability - and many others who get less than they need,” Ms Haythorpe said.

“We have an urgent crisis in funding for students with disability, and a Government which has walked away from its promise to fix it.

“Extra funding for disability should have been flowing to schools this year, but the Abbott Government has failed to keep its election promise to properly fund disability education from 2015.

Ms Haythorpe is visiting Canberra today, together with Children with Disability Australia and a delegation of parents and children with disability, to tell politicians why disability education needs to be properly funded.

“We cannot wait any longer, every year that funding is denied is another year that children with disability slip further behind,” Ms Haythorpe said.

“If children with disability are denied a quality education by an under-funded schools system this will affect every part of the rest of their lives. It will make it harder for them to go on to further education, to get a job and fully participate in society.”

Results from the AEU’s 2015 State of Our Schools Survey have found that the shortage of funds for students with disability is a major issue for public school principals. The survey questioned over 3,300 teachers and principals between late February and mid-March.

Ms Haythorpe said that 79 per cent of principals surveyed said they did not have enough funding for the needs of children with disability at their school.

“An extraordinary 84 per cent of principals say they have had to divert funds from other parts of school budgets because the

resources are not there for students with disability," Ms Haythorpe said.

"It is a major concern that 39 per cent of principals said that more than 10 per cent of students at their schools had a disability which required assistance in the classroom, with 16 per cent of principals saying the number was over 20 per cent."

"These numbers are far higher than the 5 per cent of students currently funded.

"Rates of disability were higher for principals of low-SES schools, confirming that students with disability are more likely to attend disadvantaged schools, placing further stress on those schools budgets.

"When principals were asked what they needed; 82 per cent said assistance for teachers in the classroom, 56 per cent said specialist support and 56 per cent said funding for professional development for teachers.

"There are thousands of dedicated educators working to provide children with disability with a good education but they need the resources to back up their efforts.

"We need in-class support, trained professionals like occupational therapists and speech therapists, as well as ensuring that all teachers are trained in how to teach students with disability and that professional development is available.

"Students with disability have a right to learn and we have a responsibility as a nation to give them an education."

"The Gonski Review recognised this huge unmet need and recommended urgent work so that a disability loading covering the full cost of educating all students with disability could be established as soon as possible. Both major parties committed at the 2013 election to implementing this loading.

"Before the 2013 election, the Coalition promised to move in 2015 from a temporary loading that reflected existing, inadequate funding for students with disability to a needs-based measure that covered all students with disability in schools for the first time.

"The Abbott Government has broken this promise and has done nothing to address the huge number of students with disability that schools receive no funding for.

"We need to see action in this year's Federal Budget, so that schools can receive the extra funding they need for children with disability from 2016."

"Properly funding education for children with disability will cost money, but it is an investment in ensuring they can fully participate in our society, and can contribute to our economy."

The Coalition said on August 23, 2013 that:

"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."

The Coalition's 2013 education policy stated:

"The Coalition will match the Commonwealth funding committed by Labor to extend support for students with disabilities for twelve months, while a new 'loading' formula is developed for these students. We will continue the data collection process that has started with the States and Territories so that future funding for students with a disability can be based on each student's level of need. Current funding arrangements for students with a disability and learning difficulty are unfair and inequitable. Students with disabilities deserve better support so they can access the schools and education programmes that best suit their needs."

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