

Audit Office of NSW Report on Supporting Students with a Disability

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The InSpEd submission focussed on the area of *Strengthen support: investing in teachers and other support staff*, which was one of four areas identified in the *NSW Department of Education Disability Strategy*. The broad issues that InSpEd asked the audit to consider were:

1. the need for appropriately qualified special educators to support students with disabilities in all settings; and
2. the importance of adequate training of special educators.

Appropriately Qualified Special Educators

- Teacher quality is the key driver of student outcomes.
- Standards inclusive of the competencies needed to support students with disability have been developed by InSpEd. These standards are based on current research into effective practices. Information about the standards can be found at <https://www.insped.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Standards-for-the-Certification-of-Special-Educators-May-2019-1.pdf>
- For students with disability, teacher quality encompasses teachers who have the range of skills outlined in the InSpEd standards.
- Every student in a specialist setting should have a fully qualified specialist teacher.
- Every mainstream school should have at least one qualified special educator who can:
 - consult and collaborate with teachers, school leaders families and other professionals in individual planning and implementation of effective practices;
 - provide in-class support for assessment, co-teaching, and the training and monitoring of teacher assistants;
 - support teachers and schools to meet the requirements of disability legislation and policies;
 - provide information to keep teachers and school leaders abreast of current developments in research that inform the education of students with disability; and
 - advise against the use of unproven, disproven, and potentially dangerous practices.
- Resources, such as professional learning courses and online resources such as the Inclusion Hub, currently provided by the NSW Department of Education, have a role to play in upskilling teachers; however, it is generally accepted that change in teacher practice is best achieved through coaching and feedback in classrooms. Such personal and in-class support can be provided by qualified special educators.

We suggest the audit committee should

- seek accurate figures on the:
 - number of qualified special educators employed in support roles and in special classes in mainstream schools and in special schools;
 - qualifications, experience and roles of those holding senior decision-making positions within Department of Education;
 - number of executive positions in units and special schools that are held by qualified special educators; and
 - number of behaviour specialists, assistant principals learning and support, inclusive education support teachers and other personnel who hold special education qualifications and are employed to support schools in the education of students with disabilities.

We suggest that the NSW Department of Education should:

- seek information on results from scholarships and deployment of graduates;
- ensure that special educators are adequately trained;
- investigate the standards used by NSW Department of Education to select special/inclusive education courses for scholarship recipients;
- consider whether a detailed audit of such courses be undertaken to ensure that graduates will have the necessary knowledge and skills required by special educators;
- consider the need for a substantial professional experience as part of university courses and/or mentorship and induction for new special educators: and
- work with NESA to develop standards for post-graduate special/inclusive education courses.