

Students with disability

More and more parents are enrolling their children with disability in independent schools.

In 2007 there were 9,961 students with disability enrolled in independent schools, more than double the number of students with disability enrolled in 1997.

About 83 per cent of these students were enrolled in mainstream schools. Some 17 per cent were enrolled in special schools, which provide alternative educational settings for students with high-level needs.

Social and legal responsibility

The obligations on schools to enrol and educate students with disability are governed by the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and its associated Education Standards, in addition to state and territory-based legislation.

Independent schools are not adequately resourced by governments to meet their legislated obligations, and the cost of meeting the special education needs of students with disability largely falls to individual families and school communities. For students with disability in government schools the cost of their education provision is met by the Australian community as a whole.

Students with disability in independent schools are eligible for significantly less public support for their special education needs than if they were educated in a government-owned school.

The funding differential is greater for students with high-level support needs who may require, for example, a full-time aide or Auslan interpreter. The gap in funding for these students can be over \$40,000 per student per year.

Governments should provide adequate funding to meet the educational needs of students with disability, no matter which school they attend.

Students with disability in independent schools may also lose free access to a range of essential government services and resources such as physiotherapy, speech therapy and Braille texts.

A special case for funding

Funding arrangements for students with disability in independent schools vary widely from state to state.

The variation in state and territory funding arrangements and different definitions of disabilities are significant barriers to equitable support for students with disability.

Governments must recognise that students with disability represent a special case in schools funding.

Students with disability require additional support because of the nature of their disability, not because of the school they attend.

The cost of schooling of students with disability should be met by the whole of society through government expenditure.

The introduction of portable funding for students with disability would be a welcome start to addressing resourcing problems, so that government funding for these students follows them no matter which school they attend.