

## SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

The Independent Education Union of Australia has a strong commitment to equity and access strategies for all students, including students with special needs. The IEUA supports policies and programs which provide systemic and systematic practical strategies for improving student participation, retention rates and improved learning outcomes for all students.

However, IEUA members continue to express their real concern at not being able to properly meet their obligations and commitments to students with special needs. Integration programs place high demands on education staff and there is tension in balancing the needs of the integration student with the needs of the whole class if appropriate levels of support are not in place.

The resources and funding arrangements for students with disabilities in non government schools are not adequate and there is concern that schools are therefore vulnerable to being in breach of legislative requirements.

The IEUA believes that the **full** costs of meeting the educational needs of students with disabilities, as defined and assessed, should be funded by federal and state governments regardless of whether the student attends a government or non government school. The per capita funding for students whose parents decide to send their child to a non government school should be reduced by the school fee.

The IEUA believes that the current funding mechanisms are not fine enough measures to accurately account for the number of students in a school with disabilities nor to take account of the particular educational needs of these students and their related costs. This needs to be addressed urgently in relation to the funding of students with disabilities in non government schools.

The IEUA notes the following disparities which can occur between schools and across jurisdictions to the detriment of students with special needs:

- 'disability' is defined differently across all states and territories for the purposes of determining access to Commonwealth funding. The consequence of this is that in some states, students with learning disabilities do not fall within the eligibility criteria for Commonwealth funding.
- There is a shortfall in the funding of non government schools, compared to government schools, in relation to students with disabilities from both Federal and State recurrent and capital funding.
- There is disparity in the provision of government services such as assessment, transport and therapy services between government and non government schools. This causes real hardship for the families of these students and for the teachers and support staff charged with the responsibility of providing quality education to meet their learning needs.

**The IEUA believes there is an urgent need to develop a nationally consistent set of definitions as to what constitutes disability for the purposes of funding.**

To ensure that schools have the capacity to meet the educational needs of all students, the IEUA urges the development of a framework of teaching and learning resource standards for high quality teaching and learning conditions for students with disabilities with regard to:

- the appropriate levels of specialist teaching and support staff
- class sizes which allow optimum teaching and learning for integrated classes
- time release for curriculum and program modification and planning, and liaising with parents and external agencies and
- access to appropriate and relevant professional development for teachers and support staff