



Better and Fairer Schools Bill 2024 Inquiry

The Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators Association (WAESPAA) is pleased to acknowledge the release of the consultation draft for the Regional Education Strategy. We recognise the four pillars of the strategy as being the areas required to drive the essential changes needed in schools. WAESPAA appreciates the opportunity to respond to the consultation draft.

WAESPAA represents education support settings across the state, including primary and secondary education support schools, education support centres, endorsed education support programs, inclusive learning programs, and Specialised Learning Programs. We understand the critical importance of providing programs and pathways that meet all students' needs and help them become successful adults. Unfortunately, in many educational settings, there is often a lack of specialist support. Where specialist settings exist, they are frequently overwhelmed by the sheer number of students wishing to enrol.

Students with disabilities, imputed disabilities, or neurodiversity are often overlooked and lack access to the necessary supports to ensure a successful pathway through school and into the workplace.

This situation arises due to several factors:

- Limited access to allied health professionals, such as Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.
- Difficulty in obtaining diagnoses due to the unavailability of Paediatricians.
- Schools with staff who lack specialist training in inclusion and in supporting students with disabilities, imputed disabilities, or neurodiversity.
- Insufficient infrastructure to allow for equitable access for students with a disability.
- Shortage of available staff.
- Lack of evidence-based pedagogy available to support schools.
- Lack of system data to track the achievements of students with a disability.

Please note that when we refer to students with disabilities in this response, this includes students with neurodiversity and imputed disabilities under the National Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD). When combined with their regional or remote location or low socio-economic environment, the impact of disadvantage is multiplied. For example, a student with a disability living in regional Western Australia is more likely to experience significant disadvantage than one living in the South or North Metropolitan area.

WAESPAA Position to the inquiry.

WAESPAA advocated for full funding for WA public School students needs to be 100% of the SRS. We feel that it should not allow for a state or territory to reduce their contribution by 4%.





By fully funding WA public schools it would mean that some of the inequity for students with a disability is addressed. It would allow for greater support for students who have increasing complex presentation and to support teachers and school leaders to meet these needs.

WAESPAA advocates for:

- Increased transparency in the allocation of the NCCD funding
 - NCCD funding or education adjustments funding based on the NCCD does not currently get to the majority of education support settings in WA.
- Reinstatement of the More Support for Students with Disability (MSSD)
 - The MSSD program would help address the increasing need of schools to develop inclusive practices and to increase teacher capacity to meet the needs of students with a disability.
- Increase schools' ability to attract and retain staff in education support settings.
 - Currently education support settings are facing significant shortages of staff and are not the preferred school setting for staff due to the complexity of students. Full funding would enable schools to reduce class sizes and recruit specialist staff to develop individual support services.
- Collection of achievement data for Students with a Disability
 - SSTUWA states WA student performance on national and international tests has not shown any consistent improvement over the last decade. WAESPAA advocates that these tests do not capture the achievement of students with a disability and fully funding WA Schools would help to address this discrepancy.
- Introduction of Targeted Disability Initiatives
 - Improve the quality of education and support for students with a disability by enabling schools to implement evidence-based practices and programs. This will help to improve student outcomes and help to reduce aggression and violence of students.
- Introduction of clear and transparent mechanisms of funding for students with disability
 - This would ensure that the funding is provided directly to students it should go to rather than being diverted to other sources. Currently in WA there is no mechanism to account for the disability resourcing funding that goes to schools to support students with a disability.

In conclusion WAESPAA strongly advocates that full funding to WA public schools. The failure to do so will threaten the ability of schools to meet the increasing complexity of needs within our student population.

Submitted by

Deborah Taylor

President Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators Association.

**Western Australian Education Support Principals
& Administrators' Association Inc.**

C/- Disability and Inclusion, Statewide Services
33 Giles Avenue, Padbury 6020

P: 0411822326 | E: Deborah.Taylor2@education.wa.edu.au

