



## Syndromes Without A Name (SWAN) Australia

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Committee Secretary  
Senate Education and Employment Committees  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

19 August 2015

To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to write a submission in regards to **“Current levels of access and attainment for students with disability in the school system, and the impact on students and families associated with inadequate levels of support.”**

I am writing to you as a parent representative from Syndromes Without A Name (SWAN) – Australia, as well as a parent of a child with a disability and an undiagnosed genetic condition who attends a special school.

The main area of your terms of reference I would like to address is:

***H/ What should be done to better support students with disabilities in schools.***

From my discussions with other parents who have children with disabilities, I understand that lack of resources, in particular insufficient funding, is one of the biggest obstacles that we face. We need to provide our children with the best learning environment possible, so that they may reach their full potential.

How a school spends its students' funding can be influenced by a well known diagnoses (e.g. Autism, Down Syndromes). For SWAN children, this means they often fall through the gaps as they “don't tick a box” as their conditions are complex and often mystifying.

Special school and special development school placements are allocated through an IQ test, which I strongly disagree with. Children are often asked to complete these tests outside their familiar environment and under the examination of a consultant they do not know. IQ tests assess limited aspects of intelligence and do not give credit to practical skills or other skills. To have a specific figure cut off score i.e. 70 for a special school and 50 for a special developmental school with no flexibility is ridiculous. Funding should be allocated on a needs basis and one which will allow a student to be well supported so they have every chance to excel.

You hear of children who have an intellectual disability one year who can attend a special school only to lose their funding if they score an IQ of 70 or above after the funding testing round in grade 6. This causes huge anxiety to children, parents/carers and teachers who want the best for their students. Imagine if your child with a disability is in the best learning environment for them, only to be told after an IQ test that they can no longer attend their school. Every child with a disability should have the right to attend a school which will cater best for their needs.

For children who require additional support, to be forced into a situation where they are not supported is detrimental to everyone around them, fellow students, teachers and parents. To be in an environment that doesn't support a child with a disability may lead to problems such as mental health issues and even law breaking possibilities. If you force children into an environment in which they struggle to learn, they will be disengaged. You may save money immediately but not in the future.

The current system of funding children with disabilities is inadequate. Schools need to be guided by a panel of experts, such as educators, speech therapists, occupational therapists, paediatricians and of course the child's best experts; parents and/or carers.

Many SWAN families have children who attend special schools and special developmental schools. One of the reasons I personally chose a special school over a mainstream school was for their small class sizes.

The majority of special schools and special developmental schools have to choose between having smaller class sizes or employing more therapists and education support staff and this disappoints me as a parent. It should not be a decision schools have to make. By limiting resources, you are narrowing a child's potential to learn. All special schools and special development schools should be able to employ a full time speech therapist, occupational therapist and physiotherapist if they require them and it should have nothing to do with class size or children's funding.

Lunchtimes are also an issue for a number of families, where a lot of students struggle. When you only have limited funding attached to a student, you need to use the funding in the best way you can to help the student learn. Often a child may need assistance in the classroom to focus and learn but it is in the playground that they may struggle socially and even get bullied. We sometimes forget that it is in the playground that skills such as negotiation, playing, comradeship and communication are often best learnt. Sometimes what we don't see can affect our children the most. It shouldn't be a choice of where to spend the funding, it should be a case of how we can support our children best.

When you have a child with a disability, their options are already limited; let's not compromise their future any further by failing to offer them the best learning environment possible. We should be aiming to create pathways which increase their capacity and potential to work and contribute to society.

Life is difficult enough when you have a child with a disability, please don't make it harder. Our students need optimum support and resources to enable them to learn. Please give them the support they deserve and offer more financial assistance to schools, which have children with disabilities, so the schools can then do their best to support students.

I would be happy to contribute further by way of discussion on this issue.

Kind regards

**Heather Renton**  
**President**  
**Syndromes Without A Name (SWAN) Australia**