

**\*\*MEDIA RELEASE\*\***

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## Bullying and abuse of school students with disability at alarming levels

A national survey has found an alarming level of bullying of students with disability at school, including routine abuse and assaults.

The survey by Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), reveals that 52 per cent of the 1396 students and parents who responded to the survey reported that the student had been subject to bullying.

Responses to the survey show widespread victimisation of students with disability, including sexual assault, frequent restraint, sometimes in pens, and being placed in seclusion, locked in toilets and storerooms and frequently isolated from their classrooms.

The CEO of CYDA, Stephanie Gotlib, said the disturbing prevalence of bullying and assault on students with disability shames Australia and highlights the urgent need for realistic and equitable levels of support for students with disability in schools.

“It is horrifying that the instances of bullying and abuse of students are often inadequately addressed and can be disregarded as ‘just a fact of life’ in many schools.”

In April 2016 CYDA requested information about cases of abuse of students with disability through freedom of information legislation from each state and territory education department. CYDA asked for records of complaints, investigations and outcomes regarding incidents of a child protection nature against employees where the alleged victim has been identified as a child with a disability.

The responses from NSW reveals alarming instances of bullying and abuse and raises concerns about an adequate system response to these extremely disturbing incidents. This information clearly supports the cases laid out by students and families who responded to CYDA’s survey.

“Every day vulnerable students are bullied, hit, teased and taunted about their disability, sometimes by teachers, yet these experiences are often not adequately responded to,” Ms Gotlib said.

“We have a deeply troubling state of affairs when bullying of students with disability is excused and dismissed with rhetoric like ‘it’s natural to bully kids who are different and students with disability should get used to it’.”

“However, victims regularly come home traumatised, with bruises and other injuries and no action is taken,”

“We know from the positive responses we received in the survey that there are schools and teachers providing a positive, supportive environment for students with disability,”

“The survey results reveal a system in crisis continuing to fail to adequately educate students with disability. In our survey, more than two thirds of students and parents stated that funding to support students with disability in schools was inadequate. It underlines the need to implement a national plan to guide critical and urgent reform. This must include full implementation of the funding loading for students with disability to ensure schools are appropriately resourced to meet the learning needs of all students” said Ms Gotlib.

In January 2016 a Senate committee report was released highlighting the need for more funding, and recommending a national approach to ending the bullying of students with disability, as well as the development of a national strategy to improve the education of children and young people with disability. To date the Federal Government has still not responded to this Senate Inquiry.

CYDA will now officially request the NSW Ombudsman to examine these very serious allegations.

## **SNAPSHOT OF SURVEY RESULTS**

- 67% of respondents stated that students with disability do not receive adequate support at school
- Over half (52%) of students with disability have been bullied. This is significantly higher than the 27% of the total student population who report bullying
- 34% of students with disability have been excluded from a range of curricular and extracurricular activities at school. This includes activities such as camps, discos and formals
- Nearly one in five (19%) students with disability have experienced restraint at school, including physical, mechanical, chemical and psychosocial restraints
- 19% of students with disability have experienced seclusion at school
- 12% of students with disability attend school part time
- 8% of students with disability have been refused enrolment

1396 people responded to the survey and it is nationally representative.

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) is the national representative organisation for children and young people with disability aged 0 to 25.

**A summary of the survey results can be found at <http://www.cda.org.au/cyda-education-survey-2016>**

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