



Schools Workforce Productivity Commission Draft Research Report

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Executive Summary

The Productivity Commission's Schools Workforce draft research report (the Report) provides a comprehensive overview of schools workforce issues. It provides well-informed recommendations for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the schools workforce with the overall aim of improving educational outcomes for all Australian school students.

Children with Disability Australia (CDA) supports the Report's finding that high priority "must" be given to workforce policy aimed at reducing educational disadvantage especially for students from "low socioeconomic backgrounds, students living in rural or remote areas, Indigenous students, and/or students with disability or other special needs" (draft finding 9.1).

CDA also welcomes the draft recommendation 10.1 of the Report that the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) should initiate and oversight "a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of the programs and policies to help ameliorate educational disadvantage; including assessments related to teacher training and professional development. This recommendation is essential for ensuring that all reform initiatives impacting on educational outcomes for students with disability are effective in achieving their goals. It must however ensure that evaluations of policies and programs include appropriate measures of educational outcomes for all students with disability.

It is also the view of CDA that whilst the Report acknowledges that students with disability experience educational disadvantage that the extent of this disadvantage is understated in the Report.

Children with Disability Australia

CDA is the national peak body that represents children and young people with disability and their families. The organisation is primarily funded through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and is a not for profit, community based organisation. Additional funding is also received from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). CDA has a national membership of 5000 with the majority being families.

Vision

CDA's vision is that children and young people with disability living in Australia are afforded every opportunity to thrive, achieve their potential and that their rights and interests as individuals, members of a family and their community are met.

CDA's Role

CDA has the mandate to advocate for children and young people with disability living in Australia and undertakes the following to achieve its purpose:

1. **Education** of national public policy-makers and the broader community about the needs of children and young people with disability.
2. **Advocacy** on behalf of children and young people with disability to ensure the best possible support and services are available from government and the community.
3. **Inform** children and young people with disability, families and care givers about their rights and entitlements to services and support.
4. **Celebrate** the successes and achievements of children and young people with disability.

Guiding principles

Children the priority: the rights and interests of children and young people with disability are CDA's highest priority consistent with Australia's obligations under the UN Conventions, Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Right to childhood: children and young people with disability are children first and foremost and have a right to all aspects of childhood that children without disability are afforded.

Right to participation: children and young people with disability have the right to participate, in whatever capacity, in the decisions that impact on their lives.

Inclusion: children and young people with all types of disability, from all cultural and religious backgrounds and all geographic locations are supported by the work of CDA.

Recognition: for the contributions made by families and care givers to support the rights and interests of children and young people with disability.

Partnerships: CDA works collaboratively with relevant government, non-government and private sector agencies to promote the rights and interests of children and young people with disability.

Transparency: CDA is accountable, effective and ethical as the national peak body charged with the mandate of advocating for children and young people with disability.

Introduction

The present Australian education system does not adequately meet the needs of students with disability and education remains one of the most significant issues of concern for children with disability and their families. This is reflected in the significant gap between educational outcomes for student with disability and those without (see below). This disparity occurs despite an extremely comprehensive legislative and policy context relevant to the education of students with disability.

The inadequacies of the education system for students with disability and the need for reform have been documented over a number of years. Various reports commissioned by the Australian Government highlight the issue. These include but are not limited to the following:

- “Education of students with disabilities” (2002) Commonwealth of Australia, Senate Inquiry
- “Investigating the Feasibility of Portable Funding for Students with Disabilities” (2007) Monash University.
- “Making Progress” (2008) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- “Shut Out” (2009) National People with Disabilities and Carers Council

Education is one of the most significant challenges facing children and young people with disability and their families. Frequently families report that, through their education experiences, their children are subject to limited opportunities; low expectations; exclusion; bullying; discrimination; assault and violation of human rights.

Current national reform initiatives including the National Disability Strategy, the Review of Funding for Schooling, the Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005 and More Support for Students with Disabilities provide an ideal opportunity to reform the current education system for students with disability.

The Schools Workforce inquiry is an integral part of this reform agenda. Access to high quality teachers and committed school leaders is known to be one of the most important factors in determining the best outcome for all students regardless of their circumstances or abilities.

CDA has a passionate commitment to advocate for the provision of high quality education for children and young people with disability. Every child with disability should be provided with an education where they have the opportunity to realise their full potential and to be greatly enriched and extended through the process.

CDA welcomes this opportunity to provide a submission to the Productivity Commission’s Schools Workforce draft research report. The comments and recommendations provided in this submission are primarily focused on issues of particular relevance to students with disability.

Feedback

General Comments

CDA welcomes the Productivity Commission's Schools Workforce draft research report (the Report). The Report provides a comprehensive overview of schools workforce issues and has identified significant areas that require development. It provides well-informed recommendations for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the schools workforce with the overall aim of improving educational outcomes for all Australian school students.

The Report finds that high priority "must" be given to workforce policy aimed at reducing educational disadvantage especially for students from "low socioeconomic backgrounds, students living in rural or remote areas, Indigenous students, and/or students with disability or other special needs" (draft finding 9.1). CDA strongly supports this finding as the Australian education system is failing to meet the needs of students with disability and a review of the system to identify the most effective and efficient way to meet the needs of students with disability is long overdue.

Hence CDA also welcomes the recommendation of the Report that the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) should initiate and oversight "a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of the programs and policies to help ameliorate educational disadvantage" (draft recommendation 10.1) including assessments related to teacher training and professional development.

The current reform landscape provides a significant opportunity to address the educational disadvantage experienced by students with disability. Draft recommendation 10.1 is seen as essential for ensuring that all reform initiatives impacting on educational outcomes for students with disability are effective in achieving their goals. It must however ensure that evaluations of policies and programs include appropriate measures of educational outcomes for all students with disability (see below).

Policy Evaluation and Research

Section 10 of the Report discusses the urgent need for more robust evaluation of the effectiveness of schools workforce policies and programs including those aimed at addressing educational disadvantage. Examples of current initiatives generating information and data that will assist in the evaluation of policies and programs are discussed. The Report also identifies that there are still gaps where better research would be helpful.

A significant data and research gap currently exists in relation to accurate data on educational progress and outcomes for students with disability. This is because there are currently no national systems in place for regular and transparent performance monitoring for evaluating educational outcomes for students with disability.

Many students have individual educational plans but these contain goals that are established, implemented and evaluated by schools. There is a prevailing concern that there is limited or no objective input into this process.

There are also concerns regarding the position of students with disability within the MySchool system (www.myschool.com.au). The NAPLAN assessment is not an appropriate measure of educational progress for some students with disability so it is unclear of the value and relevance of this accountability system for this cohort of students.

The other concern is that schools are inappropriately gaining exemptions from NAPLAN for students with disability because of a concern that they will negatively affect total school performance.

This gap in research and data must be addressed in order to get meaningful information from evaluations of the effectiveness of policies and programs on educational outcomes for students with disability.

Recommendation

The paucity of meaningful data on educational outcomes for students with disability and lack of appropriate systems for measuring educational progress should be included in Section 10 of the Report.

Workforce Training and Professional Development

Strengthening teachers' understanding of disadvantaged students' learning needs is discussed on page 183 of the Report. The incorporation of specialist components in teacher training courses and providing opportunities to undertake practical training is discussed, and the Report considers the feasibility of expanding this approach.

CDA would like to note that there is an expectation that the newly developed National Professional Standards for Teachers will ensure that all teachers will have some specialist training "about legislative requirements and teaching strategies which support participation and learning of students with disability" (AITSL 2011). This will be a pre-requisite for registration or certification for all teachers. Providers of pre-service training courses will also need to ensure their graduates have this training in order for them to receive accreditation.

It is the understanding of CDA that course providers will be able to develop their own programs or methods for incorporating these training requirements into their courses. Consequently the quality and extent of training may vary from course to course and a nationally consistent course model would be more ideal.

The Report discusses considering the "trailing and evaluation of what type of practicum experiences, pre-service training and professional development opportunities can best contribute towards teacher effectiveness in the context of reducing educational disadvantage" (pg 184). This approach would be ideal for identifying pre-service and professional development training programs that produce the most effective teachers for improving educational outcomes for students with disability.

Recommendation

Trialling and evaluation of pre-service and professional development training courses in disability to develop effective national courses in relation to meeting the National Professional Standards for Teachers should be included as an example on page 183 of the Report.

Educational Disadvantage and Students with Disability

Chapter 9 of the Report focuses on schools workforce and other policy issues related to reducing educational disadvantage in the Australian education system and improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged students. Students from "low socioeconomic backgrounds, students in rural and remote locations, Indigenous students and students with disabilities or other special needs" (pg 159) are identified as being most likely to experience disadvantage.

The Report provides examples of the disparities in educational outcomes between different groups of students as an indication of the extent of educational disadvantage in Australia. The significant gap between educational outcomes of students with disability and those without disability are not included. CDA is of the view that these statistics should be included in the Report.

Statistical data (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004) show that in 2003:

- 29.6 per cent of people aged 15 to 64 years with reported disability had completed Year 12 compared to 49.3 per cent of people without a disability.
- 2.7 per cent of people with a disability had completed a bachelor degree or higher compared to 19.7 per cent of people without a disability.
- 53 per cent of people with a disability participated in the labour force compared to 81 per cent of people without a disability.
- 8.6 per cent of people with disability were unemployed compared to 5 per cent of people without disability

More recent data (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010) indicates that whilst educational outcomes for students without disability have improved, similar levels of improvements in educational outcomes for students with disability have not been achieved. For example, in 2003, 49.3% of people aged 15-64 without disability had completed year 12. In 2009 55% of this same cohort had completed year 12. In contrast, in 2003, 24% of people aged 15-64 with a profound or severe disability had completed year 12 whilst in 2009 only 25% of this same cohort had completed year 12.

Recommendation

Statistics on the disparity in educational outcomes between students with disability and those without disability should be included on pg 161 in the Report.

Proportion of Students with Disability in Australian Schools

To highlight how many Australian students are potentially affected by educational disadvantage, the Report provides estimates of the proportions of different groups of disadvantaged students in the Australian School population.

The figures provided on pg 162 in the Report on the proportion of students with disability in Australian Schools are taken from the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP) Report on Government Services 2010. These indicate that students with disability constitute nearly 5% of the Australian student population.

It should be noted that the SCRGSP figures only relate to funded students with disabilities in schools. Currently each state and territory has their own system for identifying eligibility for funding support within their jurisdiction. Many students with disability and additional learning needs who need support do not qualify for this funding. This makes it difficult to quantify the true number of students with disability in Australian schools and consequently the level of need. Figures from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (submission 42) suggest that the number of students with disability and additional learning needs is actually more like 15-20% of the Australian student population.

It is also worth noting that a national definition of students with disability is currently being developed by the Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). Once implemented it is anticipated that this will provide a more transparent and accurate means of quantifying the numbers of students with disability in Australian schools. This data could also be used to assist with better defining the educational needs of students with disability in Australia and contribute to improved provision of education for students with disability.

Recommendation

The Report should clarify that the SCRGSP data on the proportion of students with disability in Australian schools provided on page 162 only represents funded students with disability and that this figure underestimates the true number of students with disability in the Australian student population.

Other

The Report lists examples of desirable skills for school workers attending to the learning needs of disadvantaged students (Chapter 9 pg 167). Two of the examples given were:

1. The capacity for school workers to “address the needs of children with a physical or intellectual disability”.
2. The capacity for school workers to “meet the needs of gifted and talented students by, for example, recognising the scope for acceleration and modifications to curriculum”.

The first example proposes that students with disability or intellectual disability should have their needs “addressed”. This language is reflective of a welfare model of disability when it positions people with disability as recipients of actions or services rather than using a rights based model of disability to frame actions.

The difference in these models is highlighted when you compare the first example to the second which relates to “meeting” the needs of gifted and talented students.

Recommendation

Ensure that wording in the Report in relation to students with disability is reflective of a rights based model of disability

Summary Of Recommendations

1. The paucity of meaningful data on educational outcomes for students with disability and lack of appropriate systems for measuring educational progress should be included in Section 10 of the Report.
2. Trialling and evaluation of pre-service and professional development training courses in disability to develop effective national courses in relation to meeting the National Professional Standards for Teachers should be included as an example on page 183 of the Report.
3. Statistics on the disparity in educational outcomes between students with disability and those without disability should be included on pg 161 in the Report.
4. The Report should clarify that the SCRGSP data on the proportion of students with disability in Australian schools provided on page 162 only represents funded students with disability and that this figure underestimates the true number of students with disability in the Australian student population.
5. Ensure that wording in the Report in relation to students with disability is reflective of a rights based model of disability

References

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