



Submission to inquiry into the education of students in remote and complex environments

Submission by Children and Young People with Disability Australia, 28 February 2020

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) is the national representative organisation for children and young people with disability aged 0-25 years. CYDA has an extensive national membership of over 5,000 young people with disability, families and caregivers of children with disability, with the majority of our members being families.

CYDA's purpose is to advocate systemically at the national level for the rights and interests of all children and young people with disability living in Australia. To do this, we focus on the following:

- Listening and responding to the voices and experiences of children and young people with disability
- Advocating for children and young people with disability for equal opportunities, participation and inclusion in the Australian community
- Educating national public policy-makers and the broader community about the experiences of children and young people with disability
- Informing children and young people with disability, their families and caregivers about their citizenship rights and entitlements
- Celebrating the successes and achievements of children and young people with disability.

CYDA appreciates the opportunity to provide this brief submission to the House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training into the inquiry of education for students in remote and complex environments.

CYDA advocates strongly for the rights of children and young people with disability, including their right to an inclusive education, as articulated by the United Nations through the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 24), General comment 4. We know that the barriers facing children and young people with disability around Australia are significant, and experiences of discrimination and exclusion are common. For students living in remote and complex environments, these barriers and challenges are compounded.

Students with disability in Australia, including those in rural and remote environments experience significant disadvantage, not because of their disability, but because of disabling attitudes, a lack of inclusive education and experiences abuse and neglect.

CYDA conducted a National Education Survey between August and September 2019 to provide important information on the experience of children and young people with disability in their school education. There were 505 young people with disability and families and caregivers of children with disability who responded to the survey. The survey had

representation from all states and territories, all age groups and from metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Australia.

The results of the survey¹ show that students with disability are routinely excluded in their education, with many being segregated from 'mainstream' schools and classrooms, not attending school fulltime, refused enrolment and excluded from school activities.

Suspensions and expulsions are also familiar practices, showing the lack of understanding and support for students with disability.

While the majority of students receive some specific support at school because of their disability or learning difference, there are many families who are out-of-pocket for supports and equipment to enable the student to participate in education. Many students do not have a personalised individual education plan in place.

Families did not believe:

- students with disability received adequate support in their education
- that they were communicated with regularly about the student's learning progress
- that teachers had high expectations of the student, or
- that teachers had the required training to provide a supportive and enriching education environment.

We also found students with disability experience unacceptably high levels of abuse and violence at school, including bullying and restrictive practices such as restraint, seclusion or both of these.

Inclusive education for students with disability "is about everyone learning, growing and flourishing – together – in all our diversity. Inclusive education recognises the right of every child and young person – without exception – to be included in general education settings. It involves adapting the environment and teaching approaches to ensure genuine and valued full participation of all children and young people. It embraces human diversity and welcomes all as equal members of an educational community."²

Evidence consistently shows that an inclusive education has positive benefits for students with disability, as well as their non-disabled classmates, and other members of the school community.³ In order to improve outcomes for students with disabilities and provide a foundation for inclusion and wellbeing throughout their lives, it is critical to address key issues in our current education systems.

In rural and remote areas, limited access to appropriate services – both mainstream, and disability-specific – is a key barrier. CYDA has recently held consultations with families in Queensland and Western Australia and has heard directly of the challenges they face in accessing appropriate, supportive education.

¹ Children and Young People with Disability Australia (2019) *Time for a change, The state of play for inclusion of students with disability*, <https://www.cyda.org.au/inclusion-in-education>

² Children and Young People with Disability Australia (2019) What is inclusive education? Fact Sheet 1, <https://www.cyda.org.au/inclusion-in-education>

³ Cologan, K. 2019, *Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation*, for CYDA. <https://www.cyda.org.au/inclusion-in-education>

Students in remote and rural areas also attend school less frequently, are less likely to enrol in higher education and have less positive experiences at school.⁴ Recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that since 2010 the proportion of young people engaged in study or work is consistently lower in regional and remote Australia than in metropolitan areas.⁵

For students with disability in remote areas, participation in education can also be limited due to school and teachers' access to training opportunities around disability and inclusive education, as well as a lack of allied health staff to support students. For example, speech pathology or occupational therapy services are needed for some students with disability but these supports may be unavailable in remote or rural areas. A 2017 study confirmed that children living in very remote areas are twice as likely as those living in major cities to be developmentally vulnerable, and found that 32 per cent of children living in rural or remote NSW are unable to access the health services they need.⁶

Although there are currently various financial loadings to support students with disability and for schools in rural and remote areas, the daily experiences of students with disability are still far from ideal, with significant lack of support for students and many traumatic experiences. For example, CYDA's recent national education survey found that around 50 per cent of students with disability experience bullying at school, including from teachers. Another CYDA survey found that the majority of students did not receive appropriate support or information around planning for their futures and their careers.⁷

A key challenge in remote areas is the recruitment and retention of a high quality workforce. This is felt across communities, and also by students with disability, as teachers and school staff may not have adequate training around inclusive approaches, and there is a shortage of allied health workers and other service providers. The issues with the access to interface with the National Disability Insurance Scheme and education are more pronounced in rural and remote areas.

Although there are already policies across states and territories to encourage teachers to work in rural and remote communities, shortages persist. For example, New South Wales offers an incentive with a value of \$20,000 to \$30,000, dependent on the remoteness of the school for the teacher to move into these areas⁸ but these positions remain hard-to-fill roles. Additional strategies include training and recruiting the local workforce and allowing flexibility for teacher training or facilitating university placements in remote areas.⁹ CYDA considers an

⁴ Huo, S., Jackson, J., Lamb, S., Walstab, A. 2015, *Educational opportunity in Australia 2015: Who succeeds and who misses out.* <http://www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/fact-sheets/young-people-in-rural-and-remote-communities-frequently-missing-out/>

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2019, *Engagement in employment and/or education.* <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/6227.0Main%20Features10May%202019?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=6227.0&issue=May%202019&num=&view=> , webpage.

⁶ Royal Far West. 2017, *The Invisible Children: The state of country children's health and development in Australia* <http://www.royalfarwest.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Invisible-childrenweb.pdf>

⁷ CYDA. 2019, *Submission to the Education Council on The Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training.* <https://www.cyda.org.au/cdasubmissions>

⁸ New South Wales Department of Education. 2019. Benefits and Incentives. <https://teach.nsw.edu.au/find-teaching-jobs/choose-rural/benefits-and-incentives>

⁹ Ross, M. 2015. How can we recruit more teachers to work in rural schools? The health sector could have the answer. *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/how-can-we-recruit-more-teachers-to-work-in-rural-schools-the-health-sector-could-have-the-answer-50015>

important consideration in developing these strategies is ensuring teacher training includes comprehensive training on disability and inclusion.

Furthermore, work being undertaken by the National Disability Insurance Agency around thin markets and the provision of services in rural and remote areas should also be connected into this inquiry. The development and implementation of a strategy to address thin markets for disability supports and allied health services in remote areas is likely to support schools and boost participation of students with disability. These measures will require additional investment from governments across jurisdictions, as well as cross-collaboration with other systems like health and the NDIS.

The inequity in outcomes and inclusion for students with disability in education requires urgent attention across all Australian state and territory education systems. In our submission to the Disability Royal Commission¹⁰ we have made wide ranging recommendations to improve the outcomes for students with disability through ensuring inclusive education, preventing violence and abuse against students with disability and increasing transparency, accountability and complaints methods.

We also recommend consideration is given to the unique experiences of, and barriers facing, students with disabilities in rural and remote areas be considered the Committee's work. CYDA would be very happy to provide further information about our submission or the experiences of students with disability in remote settings should that be required.

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¹⁰ Children and Young People with Disability Australia (2019) Submission to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability: Education of children and young people with disability, <https://www.cyda.org.au/cdasubmissions>