

Summary of feedback on Stage 1 of the Review of Educational Services for Students with Disabilities in Government Schools.

The Discussion Paper of Stage 1 of the Review of Educational Services for Students with Disabilities in Government Schools was the culmination of work undertaken in 2001. The Discussion Paper outlined seven principles and indicators for improved service delivery for students with disabilities that were developed as a result of the wide ranging consultations and submissions from key stakeholder groups. It also outlined six recommendations for facilitating progress during the next phase of the review. Feedback was sought from any interested party on the principles and indicators outlined in the Discussion Paper. To facilitate this process a response form was enclosed with the discussion document.

More than three hundred responses were received from a range of stakeholder groups, submitted by both individuals and as collective replies. Of the responses received on the standard feedback forms, approximately 45% were from parents, 17% from school administrators, 15% from teachers and the remaining 23% from other respondents that including responses from other agencies, education/disability service professionals and community members.

Acceptance of Principles

The majority of individuals and groups who responded to the request for feedback were in favour of the seven principles and the indicators of the principles. Only 11.7% of responses indicated some degree of disagreement to the question:

“Are these the best principles to describe quality education for students with disabilities in Western Australian government schools?”

The general feeling was that the seven principles provide a good foundation for the service provision for students with special educational needs in Government schools. Many respondents expressed optimism that the models of service delivery that would be developed incorporating these principles would bring major benefits to all students.

“We believe that these principles have been well researched and are excellent to say the least. They also reflect world trends. If all schools adopt and implement these 7 principles then inclusion and integration will be very successful.”

Other responses, while endorsing the principles and indicators, were more guarded about the next stages of the process, reserving judgement until the models of service delivery are developed, resourced and implemented.

There was an acknowledgement from many respondents that the resources required to enact the principles would be a major challenge. The following comment typifies the views that many people expressed.

“The principles themselves are most appropriate as are each of the descriptors but the implementation and effective resourcing at the school level is the area where I believe the focus needs to be directed.”

A concern for some respondents was that the resourcing of the services based on these principles might be to the detriment of current facilities and services. The need to provide an adequate range of facilities and options was strongly expressed within the responses.

Acceptance of the indicators describing the principles

The indicators that would be visible if each principle was being practiced were developed. Response was sought on whether these indicators were the best ones to describe the various principles. In the feedback form, each principle and its associated indicators was examined separately.

The indicators for all seven principles received positive endorsement across all respondent groups. While there were a few suggestions for some minor modification to some of the indicators, these suggested changes did not significantly alter the intent of the indicators. Some respondents called for the wording of the indicators to be more specific, feeling that they were too global to be used as a practical measure of the successful operation of the principles.

The indicators for Principles Two and Four, while still receiving positive endorsement, were not accepted to the same degree as the indicators for the other principles. It was a lower rate of endorsement from some parents that led to the lower overall ratings in these two areas, as the other respondent groups had relatively even acceptance across all seven principles. The reason some parents were concerned with the indicators associated with these two principles was a desire to see the maintenance of specialist facilities to meet the needs of their students.

Issues and themes emerging from the feedback.

Within the various groups responding to the feedback opportunity, some specific themes and issues emerged. As previously mentioned, the resourcing issues associated with the provision of quality services for students with special needs was raised by all respondent groups. The comment,

“No issue with the principles. The difficulty is always with the resourcing for the implementation.”

represents the views of many respondents. The degree to which successful improvement in the services provided to students with special needs is dependent on appropriate levels and use of resources was highlighted by many respondents.

The responses from parents indicated that a choice of facilities was important to many parents. In their feedback, some respondents expressed the strong desire that the services for their children would be available in a local school environment with the appropriate levels of support. Other parents expressed a high degree of

satisfaction with the current range of facilities and indicated a strong desire for the current range of facilities and services to be maintained or enhanced. Another issue that was expressed by many parents was the need for appropriate training for school administrators and teachers to enable successful implementation of services that truly reflected the seven principles. Another theme that emerged frequently in many of the responses was the strong desire, and perceived necessity, of parents being involved in all levels of the decision making regarding the education of their children.

Amongst school administrators the major characteristic themes, apart from the universal resourcing concern, was for adequate and appropriate training for staff to enable them to provide the quality programs for all students in their classes. School administrators expressed a concern that many teachers in regular school situations were not trained or experienced in providing for the needs of students with special needs. Along with the need for training was the expressed need for sufficient and appropriate support mechanisms for teachers who were educating students with special educational needs in an inclusive environment.

For classroom teachers, the major concern was that the needs of all students are met and that the educational needs of the other students in the class should not be compromised in providing for the needs of students with special needs. This was seen largely as a matter of providing the appropriate level of resources, rather than allowing a situation where scarce resources might be diverted to meet the needs of a particular group of students. Teachers also echoed other groups in recognising the importance of appropriate training in order to provide a quality education for students with special needs.

The issues raised by the remaining respondents largely reinforced the issues voiced by other groups, with some slightly different emphasis. The right of parents to be active partners in the decision making regarding their children was expressed by several respondents. The need for some form of advocacy service, along with a review mechanism for localised decision-making, was seen as necessary to enable parents to participate as empowered partners in the collaborative decision making processes for their children. Many of the responses from this group of respondents stated their belief in the advantages of inclusion, though some respondents did raise the issue of the cost effectiveness of providing services and support to students when spread across a large number of schools.

A final issue to emerge from the feedback responses was the particular needs of country students. There was strong feeling from many respondents, city and country, that the resourcing issues for country students may need to be viewed differently to city students. The necessity of local knowledge and assessment of the individual situation and supports needed was a recurring theme through many responses.