

# Senate inquiry into students with disability

21 August 2015

## Introduction

Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission as part of the Senate Education and Employment References Committee's inquiry into the 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.

CSPA represents the interests of parents with children and young people in Australian Catholic schools. Catholic schools educate more than 750,000 students in more than 1,700 schools across Australia. Formed in 2013 by state and territory Catholic school parent associations, CSPA provides a distinctive voice for Catholic school parents at a national level. The Australian Bishops' Conference (ACBC) and the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) recognize CSPA as the official representative of Catholic School parents.

## Students with Disability

In 2014, CSPA represented the parents of 33,655 students with disability in Catholic schools across Australia. This number of students with disability is an increase of over 50% since 2007.\* Catholic schools are welcoming more and more students with disability.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (the Act) and the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (the Standards), Australian schools—including Catholic schools—have specific enrolment obligations and must meet various student access requirements. These legislative requirements in meeting the needs of and supporting students with disability can create, understandably, emotional and difficult situations for the parents or carers of the child.

\*Source: National Catholic Education Commission, *2013 Annual Report*

## Funding

There is currently a significant difference between the funding of students with disability in the government system and the funding attracted by students with disability already in the Catholic education system. This difference is a result of transition arrangements of the model introduced in 2014, which calculate funding for students with disability at 186% of the base level funding for a student in a school. Because students in Catholic schools currently attract a lower base amount than those students in a government school, funding for students with disability in a Catholic school receive a lower amount. This shortfall will affect the resources available for all students with disability in Catholic schools. For this reason, CSPA argues that **funding for student with disability should be sector-blind. The same level of funding should follow a student with disability, irrespective of which school she or he may attend.**

Whilst a funding model for students with disability is still being determined, **CSPA would advocate for an extension of the More Support for Students with Disability (MSSD) programme.**

The MSSD programme provided an opportunity for significant professional learning for teachers focussed on the needs of students with disability. These learnings enabled much greater collaboration between schools and allied health professionals which is a crucial element for parents with a student with disability. It has also helped with the preparations and collections for the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD). CSPA sees that there is an ongoing need for this type of direct funding to further support students.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the funding differential in the past a large and significant number of parents with a child with a disability chose a Catholic school. The size of this cohort choosing a Catholic school, despite the lesser funding, is growing dramatically each year. CSPA believes very strongly that parents of children with a disability should not have the potential educational growth and life development of such young people compromised by any inequality of funding when compared to that of a similar young person attending a school in another educational sector.

