

Position Statement, AASE NSW Chapter

Qualifications for teachers in special education and support positions

A key priority for AASE NSW is the appointment of teachers with a special education qualification to positions in special schools and classes and as learning and support teachers in regular schools.

This provision is consistently supported by recent NSW reports. The NSW Government's 2019 *'Disability Strategy – A Living Document'* acknowledges: "The evidence is clear. Quality teaching is the single most determinant of a good education".

Introduction

It is generally accepted that effective practices have been developed for the education of students with disability but that there is a research-to-practice gap in the implementation of these practices in schools. One of the likely reasons for the gap is the significant shortage of appropriately qualified special educators.

The NSW Government's 2019 *'Disability Strategy – A Living Document'* proposes a 50% increase in the number of people undertaking special education training by 2022. AASE supports this proposal and actively promotes the need for the quality and content of all special education courses to be based on sound research and evidence-based practices.

Training in special education should be delivered by professionals who themselves have both special education qualifications and experience.

The 2016 NSW Auditor-General's Report on *Supporting Students with Disability in NSW Public Schools* identified as a concern the fact that NSW Department of Education does not require learning and support teachers to have special education qualifications.

The 2017 NSW Parliamentary Inquiry (2017) into the *Education of students with a disability or special needs* included a specific recommendation (36) that the NSW Department of Education work towards having all Learning and Support Teachers with appropriate special education qualifications to support the range of disabilities and special need presenting in schools. The NSW Government response to the report supported that recommendation.

Definition

AASE NSW proposes that all teachers employed in special education or support positions in NSW schools hold a qualification in special education requiring at least one year full time study in special education.

Key Points

There is an emerging research base that demonstrates that students with special needs have better outcomes when they are taught by qualified special educators. Certainly, better outcomes would be expected as there is general acceptance that teachers with a sound preparation have better student outcomes than less well-prepared teachers.

The NSW Government's 2019 *'Disability Strategy – A Living Document'* proposes that "all staff will have access to core training ... (and) where they need it, staff will have access to more advanced training...." AASE will liaise closely with the Government to ensure that all professional learning is premised on evidence-based research and practices, and is prepared, delivered and monitored by professionals with special education qualifications and experience.

Recommendations

Although it will take time to build a pool of qualified special educators and school leaders, AASE believes the following actions by the NSW Government would address the issue

- Development of standards for special educators to complement the existing AITSL standards
- Development of standards for university courses preparing special educators
- Support for currently employed teachers to complete a special education qualification
- That special education qualifications or enrolment in a special education course be a requirement for teachers in special education and support positions
- Ensure the above requirements apply to all school education sectors.

References

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