Independent Update

Issue 11, 2015

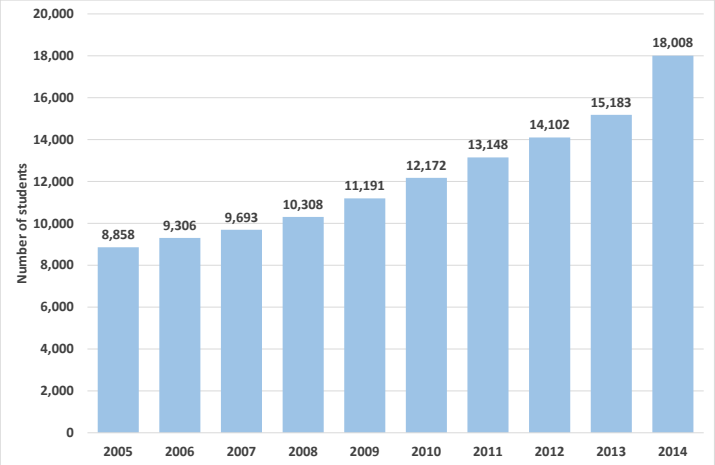
Independent Schools Council of Australia

Students with Disability

More and more parents are enrolling their children with disability in Independent schools.

In 2014 there were 18,008 students with disability enrolled in Independent schools, including Independent Catholic schools, more than double the number of students with disability enrolled in 2005.

Students with disability in Independent schools (2005-2014)



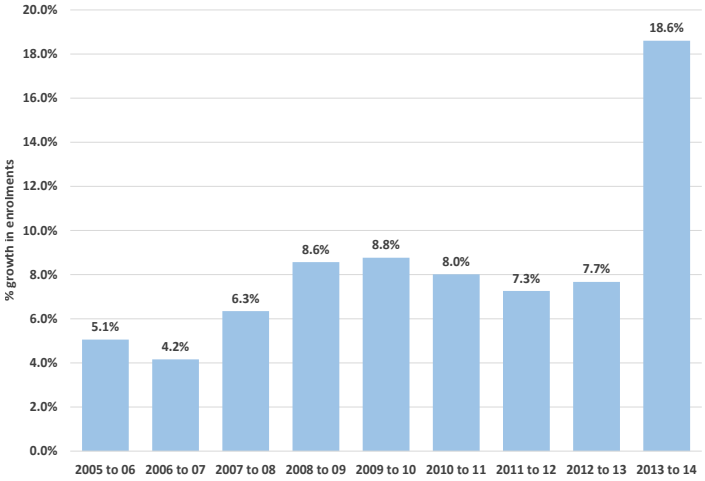
Despite the unsatisfactory level of funding support for high needs students in Independent schools, the number of these student in Independent schools is significant and continues to increase annually.

Australia-wide the growth in enrolments of students with disability has been greatest in mainstream Independent schools, which now account for some 80 per cent of students with disability in Independent schools, including those with high to very high support needs.

There is no shortage of students with disability seeking to attend Independent schools and no lack of will on the part of Independent schools to enrol them.

There has also been significant growth in the number of students enrolled in Independent special schools due to the number of such schools opening in the last 20 years. Twenty-four new Independent special schools or campuses of existing schools opened during this time.

Growth in enrolment of students with disabilities in Independent schools (2005-2014)



Other Independent schools, such as urban and regional boarding schools, also have large numbers of Indigenous students. Many Independent boarding schools provide scholarships to support access to education for Indigenous students or are involved in community based programs to provide scholarships to these students.

Students with disability in Independent schools (2014)

Students with disability	**18,008**
Special schools	**72**

Funding for students with disability

Students with disability enrolled in Independent schools do not receive the same level of additional funding as their counterparts in government schools.

In theory, under the new Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) funding model, all students with disability are entitled to the same loading amount. However in reality, the new model does not achieve this and the transition arrangements are extremely complex.

1. Due to transition arrangements the majority of Independent schools are only receiving a small proportion of their additional funding entitlement under the SRS model.
2. The interim loading does not differentiate between levels of disability.
3. Schools need to wait until the end of the school year to receive funding for any additional students with disability.
4. The provision of loadings directly to Independent schools has removed the capacity within the sector to provide cross-sectoral support.

While the transition is in place across all sectors, in the government and Catholic sectors, systemic allocative mechanisms mean that funding can be targeted at students anywhere in the system. This is not the case in Independent schools where government funding is provided directly to the individual school. This inequity is of considerable concern to the Independent school sector.

Governments should provide adequate funding to meet the educational needs of all students with disability, no matter which school they attend.

Social and legal responsibility

The obligations on schools to enrol and educate students with disability are governed by the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and its' associated Education Standards, in addition to state and territory-based legislation.

Parents have the right to select a school of their choice. Schools must enrol students regardless of the level of supplementary assistance that may be available, unless they can categorically prove undue hardship due to the enrolment of a student with a disability.

As autonomous entities, most Independent schools cannot rely on support from a systemic school authority to provide additional resources to meet the needs of increasing numbers of students with special needs. Independent schools educate many students with disability, as well as students with social, behavioural or emotional issues or other educationally disadvantaged students and students who need special support.

Where Independent schools are not adequately resourced by governments to meet their legislated obligations, the cost of meeting the special education needs of students with disability largely falls to individual families and school communities.

The funding differential is greater for students with high-level support needs who may require, for example, a full-time aide or Auslan interpreter. Students with disability in Independent schools may also be denied access to a range of essential government services and resources such as physiotherapy, speech therapy, transport and Braille texts that are available to students in government schools.

Future Funding Arrangements

Work is currently underway on the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) of students with disability. This new collection is based on the definitions of disability in the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and it is hoped that this data collection will eventually provide the foundation for a new tiered 'students with disability' loading for incorporation into the SRS funding model. The full cohort data collection will not be available until 2016.

Addressing educational disadvantage

The Independent sector makes a large contribution to addressing educational disadvantage through its special schools and Special Assistance Schools which provide alternative education settings for students with high-level needs. Parents should be able to choose a non-mainstream educational environment if they consider it is the best option for their child.

Independent Special Assistance Schools which cater for students with severe social, emotional and behavioural issues make a significant contribution to schooling in Australia. These schools serve young people who are disengaged from education and whose needs are not met by mainstream education. They are often referred from community services, juvenile justice and other schools both government and non-government. Special Assistance Schools have developed specially adapted programs and structures designed to re- engage students in education and prepare them for further training and employment.

Students with disability require additional support because of the nature of their disability, not because of the school they attend.