

28 September 2015

Ms Leslie Guy
Secretary of the Committee
Select Committee on Access to the South Australian Education
System for Students with a Disability
Parliament House
ADELAIDE SA 5000

By email (leslie.guy@parliament.sa.gov.au) & by post

Dear Ms Guy

Select Committee on Access to the South Australian Education System for Students with a Disability

The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *Select Committee on Access to the South Australian Education System for Students with a Disability*. The AISSA represents the interests of 97 South Australian Independent schools with an enrolment in excess of 46,350. The sector has experienced significant growth in the number of students with disabilities, rising from 1,208 in 2005 to 1,827 in 2014, and also an increase in the diversity of disabilities within the student population.¹

South Australian Independent schools offer parents the choice of education in schools underpinned by a wide range of religious (including Anglican, Baptist, Christadelphian, Uniting Church, Lutheran, Non-denominational Christian, Islamic, Jewish and Greek Orthodox) and educational (including Montessori and Waldorf Steiner) philosophies. The sector also includes a number of secular schools and a special school which offers specialist education and support to children with intellectual and multiple disabilities. South Australian Independent schools educate students from across the social, economic and cultural spectrum, including significant numbers of students experiencing educational disadvantage.

Independent schools and early childhood services are accountable to parents, the community and to different levels of government. Independent schools are also accountable on a number of State and Commonwealth legislative levels, including the *Children's Protection Act 1993* (SA), *Education and Early Childhood Services (Registration and Standards) Act 2011* (SA), *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* (SA) and the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) and through legal obligations such as duty of care.

¹ Note: This figure does not include all students with medically related or learning disabilities who are covered under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* but do not fit the Commonwealth and State education definitional categories of 'disability' for the purposes of funding.

There are a number of factors that can limit their (member schools) capability to further increase the number of students with disabilities, and also to provide the necessary support for existing students with disabilities, most notably equitable access to government funding. This is particularly the case in relation to meeting the needs of students with severe and multiple and complex disabilities.

It is likely that the new arrangements, commonly referred to as the Gonski funding model, which in South Australia governs both the distribution of State and Commonwealth recurrent funding would, if fully implemented, go some way to addressing the issues faced by schools in relation to access to adequate funding support for students with disabilities.

The model was designed to be implemented over a six year period. However, the Australian Government has indicated that it will only fund the first four years of the model, rather than the full six years, and will index funding on the basis of CPI and adjustments for enrolment growth thereafter. This decision has particular negative consequences for South Australia, in comparison to other States and Territories, due to the transition profile agreed to by the State and Commonwealth Governments which provided the vast amount of the additional funding in the final two years.

The AISSA is calling on the Australian Government to reverse its decision and to commit to funding the full six years of the Gonski model.

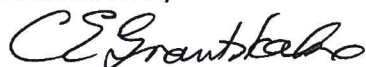
The AISSA has welcomed the commitment by the current State Government that it will fund the full six years of the Gonski funding model. The AISSA also acknowledges the role of the South Australian State Government in providing funding support for the AISSA Allied Health Specialist Support Services Program. This program is a valuable resource for schools, particularly in rural and regional areas where access to Allied Health support services can be limited.

The AISSA Allied Health Specialist Support Services Program provides additional specialist services, including Speech Pathologists, Psychologists, Occupational Therapists and other professionals, to schools to support students with identified special needs. The intention of the program is to build the capacity of school staff to cater more effectively for students with special needs especially to those students who have been identified as 'at risk' in developing their educational potential. Schools with an Early Learning Centre or kindergarten are also assisted with the early identification of children with special needs and are supported to implement early intervention strategies. The specialists also assist teachers to support students transitioning into school or into different stages of schooling.

To date, 72 schools, including three Early Learning Centres, have requested Allied Health funding. The majority of the requests have been for a psychologist to work in schools to build staff capacity to support students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and/or challenging behaviours. Other requests include strategies to support students with cognitive delays and varying developmental delays. Additionally assistance has been sought to build staff capacity to implement strategies and recommendations by Occupational Therapists and Speech Pathologists in relation to students with sensory and speech difficulties.

The Allied Health Specialist Support Services agreement has been extended by the Minister for Education, the Hon Susan Close, until December 2016. The AISSA would welcome a further extension of this funding agreement to continue the work of this important program.

Yours sincerely



Carolyn Grantskalns
Chief Executive