

Your workplace contacts

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Madelain Frazer Lakeside school

Madelain Frazer has a simple but direct reply to what can sometimes be a complex question: Why did you join Federation?

“To fight for what the kids need,” the Federation Representative and Women’s Contact at Lakeside School said, “and to make teaching better.”

Ms Frazer, in her first year in both roles at the Newcastle SSP (School for Specific Purposes), said her activism has increased since she first “stumbled” onto the power of the collective.

“I actually stumbled across the union at Lakeside only because every other school I had taught at I was a casual or I had short-term blocks,” she said. “I didn’t feel that sense of togetherness that we have at Lakeside and then from there the union. [The union] is what keeps us together and supports us. Why not be part of that and contribute?”

She said working in an SSP meant members had to be aware of the resources available to these schools in the system, and Federation had the support mechanisms to provide such information.

“A lot of my friends are in mainstream environments and they don’t come across the challenges we do,” Ms Frazer said.

“I signed with Federation at a Beginning Teachers course and had conversations with [Membership and Training Officer] Guy [McDermott] about what sort of resources there were for special ed, which is a semiunknown zone for some areas in the Department.

“At Lakeside they’re doing some really good work changing the views and what we can provide for the kids.”

With on-the-ground experience in the sphere, Ms Frazer said a key issue for SSPs needed to be addressed by the Department: a rethink of the way class sizes are set and resourced.

Specialist support classes in both regular and special schools have fewer students. The actual class size is dependent upon the type of class and, in some cases, the additional learning and support needs of the student (the factor of need). She explained the composition of specialist support classes and the factor of need students attract when placed in support classes or SSPs. In the case of a student with a severe intellectual disability (IS), that student will be given a factor of need of 1.66. This number contributes to the overall maximum class size that the student is enrolled in. An IS class, for example, has a maximum enrolment of 6.0.



“For us, we want those kids to be catered for... there’s more kids coming into special ed, we want more facilities and more access to the resources they need; more staff on the ground to support these kids.”

The school’s former Federation Representative suggested Ms Frazer take over the role as something that will “help me understand more about the union and what it does for us particularly being in an SSP”.