

Media release: Students with disability to increase by 50% within a decade

September 03, 2020

A confidential NSW Department of Education disability strategy obtained under FOI laws has revealed inadequacies in planning for the state's students with disabilities.

The confidential document obtained under FOI laws reveals:

- There were 150,000 students with disability in NSW public schools in 2017 - 1 in 5 students - and around 20,000 more than previously claimed by the Department.
- The Department knows it is failing to deliver excellence for students with disability and that principals and teachers are inadequately supported to meet the growing complexity of student needs.
- Departmental figures and ABS projections suggest the number of students with disability requiring funded support may increase by 50% by 2027.
- Educating these children will require up to 11,000 additional specialist staff at a time where there are increasing shortages and an ageing workforce. This is on top of the extra 14,000 to 19,000 teachers required to meet overall student growth.
- The number of support and special school classrooms may need to double, costing up to \$3b more. At least six new Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs) would need to be built a year - a program of building not factored into current plans.
- The strategy suggests one option for reducing the number of extra classes it creates is to shift children from special schools to support classes and those in support classes into mainstream classrooms.
- Another option was to increase class sizes.



NSW Teachers Federation Deputy President, Henry Rajendra, said the confidential strategy was alarming and exposed the government's public version of the disability strategy, released last year, as woefully inadequate.

"The number of students with disability in mainstream classes has already increased by 500 per cent since 2002," he said.

"In particular, schools report far higher numbers of students with autism and mental health issues.

"Now we learn that tens of thousands more students with disability are expected to enrol. The scale of the investment required in additional teachers, new classrooms, training and support staff is immense.

“One of the reasons we commissioned the independent Gallop inquiry was to ensure that we have a clear idea of how we need to support and pay teachers to ensure we can end the current shortages and meet the unprecedented growth in student numbers over the next two decades,” Mr Rajendra said.

In today’s [Sydney Morning Herald](#) Professor Ian Hickie, said: “The expectation is that teachers and normal classrooms will have capacity to respond...Without a lot of help, they won’t.”

Professor Ian Hickie will appear before the Gallop inquiry this afternoon (3 September) at 1.30pm.