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**Submission made by  
Julia Farr Association**

**Review of Funding for Schooling**

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## **1.0 PURPOSE**

The purpose of this submission is to help ensure that the perspectives and experiences of people living with disability are considered in the Review of Funding for Schooling, so that future funding arrangements ensure that students living with disability get a fair go in education, in line with Australia's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

## **2.0 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

- R1 Adoption of the 9 funding objectives set out in the Monash University 2007 report authored by Moore and Savige.
- R2 Increasing the overall level of funding available for students living with disability.
- R3 Implementation of Individualised (Self-directed) Funding.
- R4 That funding arrangements be adjusted to ensure the removal of system disincentives so that students living with disability have an authentic choice of schools.
- R5 That there be regular reviews of funding for schools (every 2 to 3 years), especially in relation to the application and impact of monies intended to assist specific students living with disability to access a successful education;
- R6 That parents and recipient students are properly included as collaborators in the decisions that school makes about how best to spend those monies allocated to assist specific students living with disability to access a successful education.
- R7 That increased funding be allocated to individual students living with disability for particular learning supports, so that they can access a successful education in their local mainstream classroom/school;
- R8 That additional funding for students living with disability should be equitable irrespective of the sector in which they are enrolled.
- R9 That funding be increased for students living with disability to enable them to access necessary supports to achieve equitable education outcomes.
- R10 That specific measures be taken to heighten the accountability of schools and teachers for the educational outcomes of students living with disability.
- R11 That effective measures to be developed for regularly assessing school performance in the educational progress of students living with disability.

R12 That specific measures be taken to enhance collaboration between teachers, families and the wider community, in support of a successful mainstream education for students living with disability.

R13 That specific measures be taken to ensure that teachers have reasonable time to work collaboratively with other parties in support of a successful mainstream education for students living with disability.

### **3.0 INTRODUCTION**

The Julia Farr Association makes this submission to the Australian Government, in particular to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations in the context of the consultation process.

The Julia Farr Association and its predecessor organisations have been involved with the disability community for over 130 years. The Julia Farr Association is an independent, non-government entity based in South Australia that fosters innovation, shares useful information, and promotes policy and practice that supports people living with disability to access the good things in life. We are not a conventional service provider – we deliver research, evaluation and information services that are anchored upon the perspectives and experiences of people living with disability, family members and other supporters. As such, we feel we are ideally positioned to offer comment and analysis.

The last five years has seen a steady increase in the number of students living with disability in both the government and non-government sector, with the government education sector providing education services to a higher proportion of students living with disability. The steady nature of this growth suggests that this trend will continue<sup>1</sup>. The Julia Farr Association believes that the present consultation process facilitating the debate about ideas and issues related to the provision of funding to schools provides a timely and potent opportunity to highlight the current inequities experienced by students living with disability.

The ‘Parents Forum’ hosted by Julia Farr Association provides an opportunity for parents of children from who are aged between 5-18 living with disability to access and share information about ideas and opportunities relating to their children getting a ‘fair go’ and where they can identify pathways towards helpful change. The ‘Parents Forum’ considers it critical to identify arrangements that will achieve a funding system which is transparent, fair, financially sustainable and effective in promoting excellent educational outcomes for all students living with disability.

There is a growing national emphasis on upholding the choice, dignity and rights of people living with disability to be culturally present in the community, to participate as active citizens, and to successfully pursue educational goals throughout life. In keeping with this,

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<sup>1</sup> Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs SCETYA, (2010). Needs of act students with a disability. Report 5, Accessed March, 2010: <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/downloads/reports/7th%20ETYA%2005%20disability%20student.pdf>.

the provision of accessible, inclusive education is fundamental to the development of an inclusive community for people living with disability<sup>2</sup>.

In 2008 the Australian Government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which asserts measures be put in place to ensure that people living with disability can fully participate and be included within society<sup>3</sup>. There is also a strong commitment to address the barriers that are faced by Australians living with disability and to promote social inclusion reflected throughout the National Disability Strategy<sup>4</sup>.

The Disability Standards for Education 2005 clarify the obligations of education and training service providers, and the rights of people living with disability under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)<sup>5</sup>. These standards set out the obligation to treat all students, including those living with disability, with dignity so that they enjoy the benefits of education and training in a supportive environment which values and encourages participation. The present consultation provides an opportunity to focus on the link between resources and a truly inclusive school environment which enables all students to achieve optimal educational outcomes in preparation for life beyond schooling.

#### **4.0 CONTEXT FOR THE REVIEW OF FUNDING IN SCHOOLING**

The number of student living with disability has been increasing in Australia. Disability enrolments in government and non-government sectors indicate a steady growth in the number of students in over the last five years.

The highest proportion of students living with disability have enrolled in the government education system. In 2010, 1,869 students enrolled in government schools were classified as having special needs<sup>6</sup>. This growth has been accompanied by an increasing number of students living with disability who are enrolled in Independent and Catholic education schools. The increase is particularly significant in the Independent School sector, having more than doubled over the last five years<sup>6</sup>.

Patterns of disability are somewhat different in childhood and adolescence. The percentage of the population with severe or profound limitation, and disability more generally, is relatively high among children of school age and lower in adolescence and early adult. A 'severe or profound core activity limitation' includes those young people who

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<sup>2</sup> Social Inclusion board (2010) Activating Citizenship As Social Inclusion Approach for Disability in South Australia, accessed March, 2011: <http://www.socialinclusion.sa.gov.au/files/Activating%20Citizenship%20-%20Social%20Inclusion%20Board%20-%20July%202010.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> UN Convention on the rights of Persons with disabilities (2006), accessed March, 2010: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>

<sup>4</sup> National Disability Strategy (2011) accessed March, 2011: <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/disability/progserv/govtint/Pages/nds.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> Disability Discrimination Act 1992 at Attorney General's Department, Canberra accessed March, 2010: [www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol\\_act/dda1992264/](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/dda1992264/)

<sup>6</sup> Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs SCETYA, (2010). Needs of act students with a disability. Report 5, accessed March, 2010: <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/downloads/reports/7th%20ETYA%2005%20disability%20student.pdf>

(sometimes or always) need help with at least one of the core activities of daily living: mobility, self-care and communication<sup>7</sup>.

## 5.0 KEY PRINCIPLES

The Julia Farr Association asserts the following:

**Every student living with disability should have the authentic choice to access a successful education at their local neighbourhood school.**

This can be the only measure for success in terms of the Australian education system's compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Every recommendation made in this submission is in this context.

## 6.0 EMERGING ISSUES IN THE REVIEW OF FUNDING FOR SCHOOLING

### 6.1 Funding for schooling

In 2007 Monash University conducted research to investigate the feasibility of portable funding for students living with disability. This research highlighted a substantial case for a greater degree of reform to current funding arrangements for students living with disability<sup>8</sup>. States and territories maintain that an unintended consequence of current funding arrangements was the segregation and stigmatisation of students living with disability. Foremost of the disadvantages identified was an inadequate level of funding. The call was made for a more inclusive approach. The Julia Farr Association endorses the objectives identified by the research that were considered to be important in informing changes to current funding arrangements. The objectives include:

- Funding arrangements should tie the funds provided to accurate indicators of actual costs, so that no student living with disability or provider is disadvantaged by under-funding;
- Funding should be based on nationally agreed definition of disability and educational needs;
- Funding arrangements should facilitate increased efficiency in the use of all resources to enable the widest possible benefits to be achieved;
- Funding arrangements should provide parity of funding across all education sectors;
- Funding arrangements should promote inclusivity, to minimise the stigmatisation and segregation of students living with disability and to promote their access to mainstream curricula;
- Funding arrangements should promote a sense of empowerment among parents of students living with disability in decision-making about the education of their child;

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7 Australian Institute of health and welfare (2009) The geography of disability and economic disadvantage in the Australian capital cities Cat. No.DIS 54.Canberra AIHW, accessed March, 2010: [www.aihw.gov.au/](http://www.aihw.gov.au/)

8 Moore and Savige, (2007) Investigating the Feasibility of Portable Funding for Students with Disabilities, accessed March, 2011: [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school\\_education/publications\\_resources/profiles/Investigating\\_Feasibility\\_Portable\\_Funding\\_Students.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/publications_resources/profiles/Investigating_Feasibility_Portable_Funding_Students.htm)

- Funding arrangements should promote the building of capacity within education sectors to meet the needs of all students living with disability effectively;
- Funding arrangements should have a strong focus on student outcomes;
- Funding arrangements should promote certainty among students living with disability that they will continue to receive the same or better levels of support if they move to a different school, sector or state.

The Julia Farr Association recommends the introduction of Individualised (Self-Directed) Funding as a means of addressing current inequities experienced by students living with disability. Individualised (Self-Directed) Funding is public funding that is “allocated to the individual based on his/her unique strengths and needs, and placed under the control of the individual to enable them to live in the community as a full citizen”<sup>9</sup>. The introduction of Individualised (Self-Directed) Funding for students is a choice that has been successfully operating for people living with disability in Canada, England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, New Zealand, USA, and is government policy in two states of Australia<sup>10</sup>. This would enable students and their families to identify the nature of support that would provide the most beneficial assistance towards their study endeavour. Individualised (Self-Directed) Funding would also provide parents with the opportunity to arrange and administer their child’s personal support so that it is tailored to the student’s circumstances and goals. The introduction of Individualised (Self-Directed) Funding would enable parents to plan for their child’s education and to purchase equipment or support that is individually tailored to their child’s needs<sup>11</sup>.

The Julia Farr Association supports an Individualised (Self-Directed) Funding model as a means of increasing individual and parental control in decisions about education and addressing current inequity experienced by students living with disability and their families. Consequently we recommend:

- R1** Adoption of the 9 funding objectives set out in the Monash University 2007 report authored by Moore and Savige;
- R2** Increasing the overall level of funding available for students living with disability;
- R3** Implementation of Individualised (Self-Directed) Funding.

## 6.2 Current incentives to limit enrolment of students living with disability

Generally, the current school funding arrangements provide an incentive for private schools to limit their enrolment of students living with disability. The New South Wales Legislative Council (2010), in a submission to the enquiry into the provision of education to students with disability or special needs, highlighted the point that the ratio of private

<sup>9</sup> Dowson and Salisbury, (1999), Individualized Funding: Emerging Policy Issues, viewed 20<sup>th</sup> October 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Community Resources Unit, (2009), accessed March 2011:

<http://www.cru.org.au/projects/selfdirectedsupport/SelfDirectedFunding1.doc>

<sup>11</sup> Parents Forum, (2010) Julia Farr Association-Purple Orange Adelaide, South Australia

school funding to government school funding determines the additional indirect funding available for students with disability in private schools. The amount of indirect funding available varies according to the ratio of enrolments of students living with disability in private schools to government schools. The closer the proportion of students living with disability in private schools to that in government schools, the less additional indirect funding is available to private schools. A very low enrolment ratio relative to funding ratio results in private schools having additional funding for students living with disability which is much higher than any additional funding available in government schools. This link between government funding of private schools and government schools acts as a very powerful incentive for private schools to limit their enrolments of students living with disability<sup>12</sup>.

According to the South Australian Social Inclusion Board, some children living with disability are denied access to schools whether they be mainstream or specialist because of their disability<sup>13</sup>. The current school funding arrangements are contributing to this situation by providing disincentives for private schools to enrol students living with disability. It is important to support the right of students living with disability to access a quality education and to recognise the parents' right to choose the educational setting they believe is best suited to their children<sup>14</sup> and without being thwarted by system disincentives.

The Julia Farr Association believes that current funding arrangements for schools contribute to the inequity that is currently experienced by students living with disability and their families by limiting their choice of an education option. Consequently we recommend:

- R4** That funding arrangements be adjusted to ensure the removal of system disincentives so that students living with disability have an authentic choice of schools.

### **6.3 Improved accountability for funding for students living with disability**

The Australian government has made a clear commitment to provide more transparency of school and student performance in Australia, and to ensure that this information is accessible to parents and the community<sup>15</sup>. Parents connected with the Julia Farr Association are requesting improved accountability from schools with respect to how they spend funding that is designated to students living with disability. Specifically, the Julia Farr Association Parents Forum has given personal accounts of where student-specific funding has been spent on particular school resources and where the student living with disability (the intended recipient) has been excluded from those resources. It

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12 NSW Legislative Council, (2010) government funding for students with disabilities In NSW Private Schools, accessed March, 2011: [www.saveourschools.com.au/file\\_download/38](http://www.saveourschools.com.au/file_download/38)

13 Social Inclusion board (2010) Activating Citizenship As Social Inclusion Approach for Disability in South Australia, accessed March, 2011: <http://www.socialinclusion.sa.gov.au/files/Activating%20Citizenship%20-%20Social%20Inclusion%20Board%20-%20July%202010.pdf>

14 United Nations (2006) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

15 Rudd and Gillard, (2008) Quality Education: The Case for an Education Revolution in Our Schools, accessed March, 2011: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/Resources/Pages/QualityEducation-ThecaseforanEducationRevolutioninourSchools.aspx>

is of prime importance that there is authentic accountability for monies aimed at supporting students living with disability and such accountability should be applied at all levels of the education system. The Julia Farr Association believes this should include, for example, a mutual decision-making structure where parents and teachers collaborate on decisions about how student-specific funding will be spent.

Therefore the Julia Farr Association recommends:

- R5** That there be regular reviews of funding for schools (every 2 to 3 years), especially in relation to the application and impact of monies intended to assist specific students living with disability to access a successful education;
- R6** That parents and recipient students are properly included as collaborators in the decisions that school makes about how best to spend those monies allocated to assist specific students living with disability to access a successful education.

#### **6.4 Targeted and needs-based funding**

It is important that schools understand and embrace their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992), the corresponding Disability Standards for Education 2005, and the United Nations Convention on The Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These documents set out a framework of obligations on schools to provide equity of opportunity to students living with disability. The National Disability Strategy calls on the government to embrace the challenges of educating all children to achieve their full potential. Following on from this, it is critical to reduce barriers for students living with disability accessing mainstream education. Increased funding is needed to provide access to therapy, equipment and specialised support that can assist a student to attend mainstream education opportunities.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities sets out expectations of choice and inclusion that, for example, means that students living with disability receive the support they need to get an effective mainstream education”<sup>16</sup>.

Australia’s education system will not be compliant with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities until every student living with disability has the authentic choice to access a successful education at their local neighbourhood school.

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<sup>16</sup> Article 24 Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>, viewed 8<sup>th</sup> March 2011

Accordingly, the Julia Farr Association recommends:

- R7** That increased funding be allocated to individual students living with disability for particular learning supports, so that they can access a successful education in their local mainstream classroom/school;
- R8** That additional funding for students living with disability should be equitable irrespective of the sector in which they are enrolled<sup>12</sup>.

## 6.5 Equity of Educational Outcomes

Equity of educational outcomes relies upon a number of principles being applied to students living with disability in education services.

The Julia Farr Association believes that funding and support services must be underpinned by:

- A national definition for disability funding purposes;
- Parity across all educational sectors;
- Staff who have the responsibility of working with students living with disability (this includes all 'mainstream' teachers because it is always possible that now or in the future they will have one or two students living with disability in their class) must be equipped with relevant knowledge and skill;
- Allocation of funding in line with meeting the obligations of the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and the Disability Education Standards (2005) e.g. specialist technology requirements and equipment for individual students.

The Shaddock review of special education identified an educational achievement gap in Australian schools. The committee concluded that educational achievement was influenced by the capacity of some students to engage with learning and consequently achieve their full potential. The capacity to engage with learning was considered to be a consequence of ability and the level of individual and public resources available to the student<sup>17</sup>. This review highlighted the importance of resources as significantly determining the time and attention that could be given to the development and delivery of learning processes. It also identified that some families intending to maximise the educational outcomes for their child bore the cost of accessing support and services outside of the school e.g. tutoring. The Julia Farr Association emphasises the inappropriateness of families bearing such cost when many are not economically placed to do this.

The Julia Farr Association recommends:

- R9** That funding be increased for students living with disability to enable them to access necessary supports to achieve equitable education outcomes.

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<sup>17</sup> Anthony Shaddock, Nancy MacDonal, Julie Hook, Loretta Giorcelli & Michael Arthur-Kelly, (2009), *Disability, Diversity and Tides that Lift All Boats: Review of Special Education in the ACT*, Service Initiatives, 30 October 2009.

## 6.6 Lack of objective measures of educational achievement for students living with disability

Many students living with disability do not participate in standard measurement tests such as NAPLAN and as a result data relating to these students cannot be disaggregated. Consequently, assessing educational outcomes for students living with disability is problematic. The Disability and Community Services Commissioner suggested that more objective measures would clarify the extent of the gap in educational outcomes for students living with disability<sup>18</sup>. This is a critically important issue. The monitoring of educational outcomes for students living with disability and how this relates to the effectiveness of the teaching methods used would enable better planning e.g. more effective individual learning plans (ILPs). In turn, schools would be more accountable for the educational outcomes for all their students<sup>21</sup>.

Shaddock et al (2009), in reviewing special education, suggested that there should be a focus on benchmarking processes and outcomes against established leading practice, e.g. access and reporting on:

1. Methods for managing and deploying resources to support all students;
2. The manner in which the system/school implements leading practice such as early intervention, student performance monitoring, and partnerships with parents<sup>20</sup>.

Accountability for educational outcomes is a critical issue for students living with disability, given the history of exclusion and diminished opportunities for people living with disability. The Julia Farr Association supports the rights of students and parents to know how they/their child is progressing educationally and therefore recommends:

**R10** That specific measures be taken to heighten the accountability of schools and teachers for the educational outcomes of students living with disability;

**R11** That effective measures to be developed for regularly assessing school performance in the educational progress of students living with disability.

## 6.7 Community and family engagement

The Julia Farr Association strongly advocates the importance of community and family engagement as critical to improving educational outcomes for students living with disability.

Much research surrounds the importance of the role that parents and families play in improving the outcomes for children living with disability in education. If parents and families are engaged in children's learning then it is more likely that their children will perform better at school and in the transition from school<sup>19</sup>. Family engagement is

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<sup>18</sup> Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs SCETYA, (2010). Needs of act students with a disability. Report 5, accessed March, 2010: <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/downloads/reports/7th%20ETYA%2005%20disability%20student.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Association for children with a disability, (2010); Shaddock, (2007); Howland et al., (2008); Weiss & Stephen, (2009); Dettmer, Dyck, & Thurston, (1999)

increasingly recognised as a key factor in raising the achievement of minority groups of students and eliminating the achievement gap between them and more advanced students. Shaddock et al (2009) identified that parents and carers, and community partners are a critical factor for success in the achievement of educational outcomes for students living with disability. However, such partnerships can only occur if teachers are allocated reasonable time to attend to this important matter. There is repeated evidence that teachers failed to work collaboratively due to lack of time<sup>20</sup>.

**R12** That specific measures be taken to enhance collaboration between teachers, families and the wider community, in support of a successful mainstream education for students living with disability.

**R13** That specific measures be taken to ensure that teachers have reasonable time to work collaboratively with other parties in support of a successful mainstream education for students living with disability.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

The Julia Farr Association believes it is important for schools to reflect the ethos of the major policy trends in the disability environment. An education has a significant impact on the lives of people living with disability in that it equips them with the knowledge and skill to enable them to participate in employment and the community. Consequently we believe that the educational setting should seek to address any barriers to learning and maximise opportunities to participate in education in a meaningful way.

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<sup>20</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, (2002); Meyer, (2001); NSW enquiry into public education, (2002)