



Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs: Questions on notice.

What is the impact of changes to the school leaving age?

AISNSW fully supports the recently passed legislation that extends the years of compulsory schooling in NSW. There is a strong evidence base, both Australian and international, which demonstrates a high correlation between a student's level of education and their prospects in labour market participation together with significant social benefits.

Whilst there is a range of options and opportunities available to students once they have completed Year 10 it is anticipated that most students with a disability will now opt to stay at school and continue into Year 11 in a secure learning environment. This will be particularly the case for those students with disabilities which relate to learning and social interaction as traditionally many of these students have been vulnerable to poor schooling outcomes which have lead to them leaving prior to the final years of schooling. These students often left school at an earlier age to access other services.

A critical factor in maintaining these students at school post Year 10, is engaging them in an appropriate curriculum. This requires collaborative decision making with the student, their families, a range of school staff and other agencies in order to develop and implement an individual plan focussing on academic achievement, social development and post school options. This necessitates targeted support services and in some instances, intensive case management, and the extension and maintenance of effective relationships with other providers such as TAFE, employer organisations and community groups.

It is likely that many students with disabilities will require on the ground adult support to access courses such as TAFE delivered VET, the work and community placements associated with many Stage 6 courses including VET and a range of Life Skills courses as well as support to meet the travel requirements to participate in these areas of the curriculum.

Independent schools in NSW are committed to responding with flexibility and innovation to address the needs of students with disabilities remaining at school beyond the completion of Year 10. However, without additional government funding to support students with disabilities in direct response to the changes to the school leaving age, a further cost burden will be placed on schools and school communities to provide the effective support services that will maximise the students opportunities for success. Further pressure will also be placed on the resources made available through Australian Government Targeted Funding programs.

There are 301 students with disabilities (according to NSW Department of Education and Training's definition of disability) currently in Year 10 in NSW independent schools. It is expected that all of these students will enter into Year 11 in 2011 and remain at school at least until such time as they turn 17.



How many counsellors are throughout Independent Schools in NSW?

Independent schools are not part of an education system and are independently responsible for staffing and resource allocation. Therefore, AISNSW does not have access to specific data concerning the number of counsellors in schools.

Based on current data obtained from inquiries and our awareness of the schools within the sector, it is estimated that there are approximately 137 fulltime equivalent counsellors in the independent schools sector, employed in schools enrolling approximately 146,000 students from Kindergarten to Year 12. This is informed representative data only, not actual data for the sector, and must not be considered definitive.

The majority of independent schools in NSW do not employ a school counsellor at all. Of those schools that do employ counsellors these positions are typically fractured or part-time positions. It is generally only the largest independent schools that have sufficient funds available to employ full-time counsellors.

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