

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to the petition lodged on 29 April 2003 with the Queensland Legislative Assembly by Mr Ray Hopper MP, Member for Darling Downs, on behalf of Mrs Katrina Anderson concerning the support to students with educational needs in schools in Toowoomba and surrounding districts.

All state schools are serviced by Support Teachers (Learning Difficulties). Student needs are determined through the Appraisal process. In Toowoomba there are sixteen Support Teachers (Learning Difficulties) working in the primary area and eight teachers working with secondary students.

Education Queensland also employs Guidance Officers, Speech Language Pathologists, Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists to support children with special needs, and provide classroom support for them, their teachers and parents.

A process of ascertainment is used to determine their level of educational need and the resources that are required to meet these needs for all students with disabilities.

In Toowoomba District, there are two special schools with 24 teachers, 12 special education units with 54 teachers, and five special education classes with eight teachers. Six advisory visiting teachers provide services to students with disabilities in the schools without special education facilities. The advisory visiting teachers also provide services to students with disabilities in private schools. Student numbers and progress are constantly monitored.

School based employees, including teachers, are entitled to leave provisions under industrial awards. These include gazetted public holidays. Access to weekends for school based employees is consistent with most other working arrangements and allows students time with families. Student Free Days are utilised for professional development, planning, review of student achievement, and program development. The activities in which teachers are engaged on these five days directly benefit students. Student vacations are gazetted holidays, approved as per the *Education (General Provisions) Regulation 1989*.

Schools are staffed in accordance with teacher-student ratios based on class size targets. An allocative model determines teacher-student ratios: 1:25 for Years 1-3, and 1:30 for Years 4-7. A survey conducted by Education Queensland of every state school in Queensland showed that 93.5 percent of primary school classes are on or better than the class size target agreed with the Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU). For students with disabilities, ascertainment is used to provide additional teachers and teacher aides, with more resources provided for higher levels of ascertainment.

The adequate training of teacher aides is being addressed. Their contribution to classroom support for students with special needs is invaluable.

I encourage Mr Hopper or petitioners to contact Mr Paul Grealy, Manager Education Services, Toowoomba District Office on telephone (07) 4616 9150, should they wish to discuss this matter further.

Thank you for bringing this petition to my attention.

Yours sincerely

Anna Bligh MP
Minister for Education

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