

2024



SECTION 3

VALUING AUTHENTIC DISABLED STUDENT VOICE

SA41 SUBMISSION

School Education Act 1999 (WA)

Section 3: Valuing Authentic Disabled Student Voice

Students spoke about the need to have more disabled voice present in education. Students discussed disabled voice on all levels, both within schools and Education Department wide. Students discussed the need and the desire to feel more heard in their own education, from the classroom to the system wide decisions being made by the Department of Education.

On a school level, students need to be consulted in their own education to ensure that their needs are being catered for and that their voices are being heard and considered. As it stands, the SE Act only discusses the importance of parents in education and decision making but doesn't actually acknowledge the student. Students with disability are the experts on their disability, their needs and the way their brains work, and that needs to be acknowledged, and their feedback needs to be taken into account and valued.

Students need to have an active role in their individualised education plans, and need to feel comfortable and heard, so that they are empowered to give honest feedback on what is and what isn't working for them. Schools need to be actively seeking the feedback of their students, as many students reported not feeling heard, or having their feedback ignored, discouraging them from providing more input.

Obligation to Communicate, Consult and Collaborate with Students & Parents

[referencing Question 8*]

The SE Act should be amended to include a clear duty of schools to consult with students and their parents. Section 3 of the SE Act, Objects of Act, already contains mention of the “involvement and participation of a child’s parents in the child’s education”, but this still only acknowledges the “importance” of the involvement and participation of parents, rather than any formal requirement to do so.

“to acknowledge the importance of the involvement and participation of a child’s parents in the child’s education;”

Source: Section 3: Objects of Act of the SE Act

It doesn't contain any obligation of schools to communicate, consult or collaborate with students with disability and their parents. While the phrase “child and child’s parents” should replace “child’s parents” in Section 3, this is still a minimal attempt at legislating the involvement of students and their families. The SE Act should contain an obligation for schools to communicate, consult and collaborate with students about their education, as well as with their families.

"Trust us, we're the experts on our own disabilities. We've lived our lives, no one knows themselves better than disabled kids do. Just asking kids what they need, and listening, and actually recognising that what they say matters. I believe that teachers should not necessarily view themselves as experts, but as collaborators with the kid, to help them to get to where they want to be in life. When it comes to disabled kids, the people who should get a say in how we live our lives is us. Nothing about us, without us. That applies even if a kid is 5, because they still have feelings, and their feelings still matter, and it is fundamental to any reform to make the community it effects [disabled students] feel listened to."

- [REDACTED] age 16

"The feedback that comes back from students should be taken really seriously and action should be taken quickly."

- [REDACTED] age 16

The Disabilities Advisory Panel and Other Advisory Groups

[referencing Question 11*]

Students expressed that disabled voice should be crucial in system-wide decisions. Disabled people should be regularly consulted on policy, and should be active members on boards, panels and advisory groups throughout the Department of Education, not necessarily just in groups that are disability focused.

As such, thinking around inclusion and how policy may affect or has affected students with disability should be part of the everyday operations of the Department of Education, not just a matter for the Disabilities Advisory Panel. Rather than having a Disabilities Advisory Panel that includes no quota for disabled membership under the SE Act, there should be a quota for disabled people on non-disability focused panels such as the Attendance Panel and the Discipline Advisory Panel. This would ensure that disability is being considered in all areas of education, and that the effect on disabled students of Department of Education policy is considered in every space. The people who should be sitting on these panels should be both people with lived experience of disability, and those with expertise in inclusive education.

Alternatively to a Disabilities Advisory Panel, there should be an Inclusive Education Advisory Panel, which focuses on making education accessible and inclusive of all students, not just disabled students, as inclusion benefits every student (see discussion in Section 1 of Part 1). The SE Act does not currently even outline the function of the Disabilities Advisory Panel, if an Inclusive Education Advisory Panel is implemented, it would be imperative that its functions be outlined clearly within the SE Act. Those functions should include providing advice in relation to inclusive education and reviewing decisions about reasonable adjustments.