

OFFICE OF NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS AND SERVICES

MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE: STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

15 August, 2014

Hon Jennifer Rankine
Minister for Education and Child Development
Level 9 31 Flinders Street
Adelaide SA 5000

Dear Minister Rankine

Re Premier's review and reform of South Australia's Boards and Committees

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to you about the Premier's intention to reform and review government Boards and Committees, and for your recognition of the work of the Committee.

You have asked for information which is additional to that provided for the recent review of the Office of Non-Government Schools and Services (ONGSS).

Prior to the establishment of the ONGSS, the Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities (MAC: SWD) had a direct reporting relationship to the Minister's office. I understand that the relationship will now be managed through the Department, should the Committee continue in its current or revised form.

South Australia is the only state or territory to have a ministerial group which recommends funding allocations for non-government organisations and provides advice to the minister about service support and education and care for children and students with disabilities.

You have asked for advice in specific areas, which I will address in this response.

1 Community engagement through the Committee

The Committee engages with the community through its members, and through them, has access to a wide network of stakeholders, particularly in the case of those members who are formally connected to other organisations. This means that any issue considered by the Committee uses informed knowledge about all care and education sectors, non-government organisations providing services to children and students with disability, and the lived experience of disability. The Committee can bring this experience to bear on cross sector responses to emerging issues in the field. Some of these, for example, have been the consistent management of transition, exemptions under the Same First Day policy, streamlining equipment provision across the sectors, and the development of child protection materials for parents of children and young people with disability.

Community engagement and participation, as well as stakeholder engagement and participation, have been a part of the Committee's operations for many years. This engagement has shaped the kind of projects and research the Committee presents to the Minister for approval. Formal consultation and engagement occurs around projects. Currently the reshaping of the service system through the NDIS is being well supported by



OFFICE OF NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS AND SERVICES

MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE: **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

data, the intentions of the non-government agencies about their changing service models and expert cross sector perspectives, provided through the Committee.

However, there are other ways in which this community engagement can occur and I am happy to discuss these with you. As part of its reflection, the Committee has considered improvements to its operations and its reach. It considered reducing the numbers on the Committee and establishing a stronger consumer voice. (October 2012). At that time government preferred the current configuration.

2 Impact on business or community confidence

The disability community has confidence in MAC: SWD and its operations. One indicator of this confidence is our recommendations for funding, as there has been no occasion when the integrity of the process has been questioned.

Many people over the years have given freely of their time and expertise to participate in the reference groups which determine the scope, process and operations of the research work. The Committee's projects often draw upon the expertise of people beyond the education and care sector, for example, the involvement of architects, landscape designers and facilities experts in the current project on effective building design for children and students with disabilities. The project is in response to concerns in the care and education sectors about the gap between the national standards, current practice and consumer needs in this area, as expressed to the Committee.

Members have indicated that, in their various work places, there is confidence in the committee's independence and broad representation.

The Committee's work has been presented nationally and in South Australia. The issues for children and young people with disabilities and their increased prevalence of mental illness is one example of the Committee setting an agenda which impacts on state and national considerations.

There is no other forum in South Australia which coordinates across the three sectors in the care and education of children and students in South Australia. Neither is there another unit where service delivery data is used to monitor service provision by sector, or across the sectors.

The output of the Committee is widely used. For example, Yarnin' it Up materials (focussed on auditory and verbal development for young Aboriginal children with hearing impairment) have been used in the Northern Territory and New South Wales, through the Catholic Education Commission, as well as across South Australia. The materials have been re-issued due to demand.

The website use data indicates the Committee has current relevance to the disability, community and academic sectors, with 10 425 hits recorded between January 2012 and September 2013. (Minuted October 2013.)

3 Risks for abolition

There is no doubt that the major service delivery for children and students with disabilities in education is delivered through the three education sectors and through the child care and pre-school sectors. At the level of direct service delivery to individual or groups of children and students, it is these sectors that provide services, augmented by the non – government service providers and other programs funded through MAC:SWD.



OFFICE OF NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS AND SERVICES

MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE: STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

In that context, one risk is the loss of independent verification of services provided to care and education by the non-government agencies and the reality that recommendations for funding are based on evidence and managed under independent scrutiny.

The loss of a source of independent advice to you, when there are contested issues for government to consider is the other most obvious risk to you. Examples of the sort of advice provide in the past have been, for example, best practice in the provision of education for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder, when changes to this provision were under consideration, or the efficacy of dual cochlear implant program advocated by the Cora Barclay Centre, or developing materials based on parents' experience of their children's sexual abuse.

4 Advantage/s of retaining the committee

One area where value is added through the work of the Committee is in the areas of developing consistent practice across the sectors when common issues are identified. The most recent example of this is the work done for the NDIS. Consistent principles of funding have been established between the NDIA, MAC: SWD and funding options for the services provided by non-government agencies have been developed, in the context of services provided by the care and education sectors. As this program is targeted at 0-13 year olds, access to valid data, and expertise about the implications of options for service delivery have had a significant effect on the roll out of the launch.

The Committee provides an independent voice to you about the care and education of children and students with disabilities.

The Committee is able to provide you with high quality information, based on consensus views of both practitioners and consumers. The Committee links parents, students, disabilities, education and health.

Research that has been undertaken by the Committee is topical, relevant and leads to resources which can influence policy, for example, Kids Matter and provide support of parents, children and staff, for example, Effective Education for Children with Challenging Behaviours.

The group expertise is also applied to monitoring ongoing issues, for example, students with disabilities and the SACE and the Australian Curriculum.

The Committee has also been able to rationalise some services, for example, the Poonindie Early Childhood services have been absorbed into DECD services in Port Lincoln and the Seaton Early Years service was brought under professional supervision and integrated into a wider community setting, instead of being a stand alone service with no connection to other services and no scrutiny of its operations.

5 Committee function, finances and operations

The MAC:SWD has three main functions: to

- Ensure the equitable, transparent and accountable distribution of Commonwealth and State funding to eligible organisations, which support the care and education of children and students with disabilities in early childhood education and care services and schools across the three education sectors
- Support the capacity of non-government organisations to provide services to children and students with disability in early childhood education and care services and schools across the three education sectors



OFFICE OF NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS AND SERVICES

MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE: STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

- Undertake research and/or projects and provide advise on matters concerning the care and education of children and students with disabilities, as requested by the Minister for Education and Child Development.

MAC:SWD has a Standing Committee and a Funding Committee. All members attend the Standing Committee. This Committee has oversight of the operations of the Funding Committee, and all the work of the Secretariat. The Funding Committee has only members who have no conflict of interest in the funding recommendations to the Minister for distribution to the non-government agencies.

The Committee has 16 members, all approved by the Minister.

All appointments are for two years from January 2014.

The Minister has six nominees on the Committee. They are the Chair and Deputy Chair (nominated as a parent of a child with disability to the Committee), a representative from the tertiary sector, a second parent of a child or young person with a disability, nominated through Carers (SA), a representative for Aboriginal children with disabilities, and a student with disability.

The other members of the Committee are nominated by stakeholder organisations. They are National Disability Services; Australian Association of Special Education SA Chapter; the Australian Education Union; the Independent Education Union; Disability Services, Department for Community and Social Inclusion; Early Childhood Australia (SA Branch); sector nominees from Association of Independent Schools SA; Catholic Education SA and two nominees from the Department for Education and Child Development, Early Years and Schooling Sector.

The MAC:SWD administers \$7 411 596.

Of that, \$7 115 586 is allocated to services providers. The service providers are

Novita Children's Services, Down Syndrome South Australia, Cora Barclay Centre, Autism SA, Can: Do4Kids, Guide Dogs SA & NT, Miriam High Needs Special School (Port Augusta), Inclusive Directions, Seaton Early Development Program, the Families SA tutoring program for children with disabilities under the guardianship of the Minister, Crisis Support funding for three sectors, and the Access Assistant program, delivered to students in the three sectors, through the Women and Children's Health Network.

The operations of the MAC:SWD are 4% of the total funds and are disbursed on

- sitting fees for the members and chairperson (\$28 700),
- secretariat staff (ASO7 @ 0.8, ASO6 1.5 FTE, administrative officer 0.6) which total \$237 300
- operating budget (including resource development (\$30 000).

Minutes are kept of all Standing Committee meetings and Funding Committee meetings are approved through the Standing Committee.

6 Subcommittees

The Funding Committee members are one representative from each of the Education sectors, the chair and deputy chair and the tertiary representative of the Committee. The Office of Non-Government Schools and Services senior finance and administrative officer attends the meetings. Members are not remunerated for their participation in this group. At these meetings, organisations are assessed for financial viability, service provision is verified, the funding formula is applied and recommendation for allocations are developed,



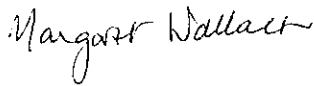
OFFICE OF NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS AND SERVICES

MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE: **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

and any changes to the formula. This subcommittee has reviewed the funding formula to better align it with education and care sectors' preferences for service provision. As well as general consultancy being funded, direct service provision to a child is weighted, as is service delivery in regional and remote South Australia.

The members understand government's desire to increase community engagement and participation. I look forward to discussing these matters with you.

Yours sincerely



Margaret Wallace
Chairperson
**MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE:
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

