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HOME EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, Inc.

HEA statement: Working with home educated children and young people with disability and additional needs.

Home educated children and young people experience disability and additional needs on both a permanent and transient basis. Experiences range from intellectual impairments, physical impairments, communication disorders, sensory impairments, autism spectrum disorder, mental health issues, behaviour and conduct disorders, literacy and numeracy disability and difficulties, chronic medical conditions and issues related to being gifted and talented. Many of these disabilities and difficulties are comorbid and children experience them on a continuum. Often these children and young people are being home educated because parents' experiences indicate that schools are unable to accommodate the complex needs of their children.

Due to the prevalence of disability and additional needs amongst home educated children and young people¹ it is imperative that educational regulatory bodies and assigned persons demonstrate, in policies and interactions with home educators and their children, a willingness and ability to adjust policies and practice to account for children's diverse needs as well as having expertise in working with children and young people with disability or additional needs.

There are three areas that should be considered in order to cater for and support children and young people with disability and additional needs: 1) the registration process should be flexible, 2) those dealing with applications for registration for home schooling must have expertise and knowledge of the education of children and young people with disability and additional needs, 3) all educational regulatory bodies and assigned persons should actively remove barriers to participation, engagement and achievement for children and young people with disability and additional needs.

The inflexibility of registration processes in relation to disabilities and additional needs has been reported to be a persistent problem by parents. In the experience of the HEA, there is the potential for educational regulatory bodies and assigned persons to believe that it is not required to make any accommodations for students because of disability or

¹An HEA survey was conducted in July 2014 of the home education community with results indicating that a high proportion of home educating families, 46% of responses, are managing a child with a disability or additional need. Of that 46%, a significant majority (89%) found that home education assisted in the management of the disability and additional need.



additional needs. The HEA believes that given the vulnerable nature and complex needs of many home educated children, a sensitive, well-informed and flexible approach is needed. Many children have been deeply traumatised by their negative experiences with schooling. Many children have formed the opinion through their school experience that they are abnormal, do not fit in and are incapable of social and academic success. Many have also been severely bullied and have symptoms of trauma, evidencing anxiety, depression and self-harming behaviours.

Families have reported experiencing difficulties with educational regulatory bodies and assigned persons due to a lack of knowledge and expertise in the education of children and young people with disability and additional needs. This essentially discounts the impact that a child's or young person's disability and/or additional needs may have on their learning and does not allow for adjustment of expectations in relation to learning.

The HEA considers that as educational authorities tasked with the registration of children and young people for home schooling, all educational regulatory bodies are bound by the Disability Standards for Education 2005 and their responsibility goes beyond the provision of syllabus and curriculum material, to ensuring all barriers to accessing education are removed for students with disabilities.

It is the HEA's view that educational regulatory bodies and assigned persons attending to children with disabilities should have extensive knowledge of both the Disabilities Discrimination Act 1992 and the Disability Standards for Education 2005, the latter of which states the following objects;

The objects of these Standards are:

- (a) to eliminate, as far as possible, discrimination against persons on the ground of disability in the area of education and training; and
- (b) to ensure, as far as practicable, that persons with disabilities have the same rights to equality before the law in the area of education and training as the rest of the community; and
- (c) to promote recognition and acceptance within the community of the principle that persons with disabilities have the same fundamental rights as the rest of the community.

With these objects in mind, the HEA believes that it is essential that all of those involved in the registration of home education recognise and understand the right of children and young people with disability and additional needs to participate and achieve in home education. The process of registration should take into account the individual emotional, social and academic needs and in doing so remove any potential barriers to accessing home education. This may require adjustment of the registration process and requirements, adjustment of the content material, the process in which the child engages with the content and the means by which the child demonstrates his/her learning of this content. It may also require additional time to complete stages or acceleration in learning areas and additional support services and resources.

In terms of additional services and resources it is also noted that currently there are limited provisions for supporting home educated students with disability and additional needs, essentially denying them access to services that would allow them to participate on the same basis as all other students. Examples are access to literacy programs, assistive technology, diagnostic services and other appropriate support services. Given that according to relevant Education Acts, all educational bodies are tasked with the role of the educational authority, this is clearly an area that needs addressing so that all children with disability are able to access education on the same basis as children without disability. The HEA also recommends the informing of families with children and young people with disability and additional needs of services that they may access for financial support such as Medicare Carers' allowance and payment, Assistance for Isolated Children and Centrelink payments.

The HEA remains committed to working with all educational bodies and assigned persons in order to foster positive and constructive relationships with the express aim of supporting all home educated children and young people.

Resources

Provided here are links to relevant policies and further reading that may assist in knowledge and understanding of the needs of children and young people with disability and additional needs.

Disability Discrimination Act 1992
<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A04426>

Disability Standards for Education 2005
<https://www.education.gov.au/disability-standards-education>

SHUT OUT: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia
<https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/publications-articles/policy-research/shut-out-the-experience-of-people-with-disabilities-and-their-families-in-australia>

Planning for Personalised Learning and Support: A National Resource Based on the Disability Standards for Education 2005
<https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/planningforpersonalisedlearningandsupportnationalresource.pdf>

Access to real learning: the impact of policy, funding and culture on students with disability

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/students_with_disability/Report

