



The Hon Julie Bishop MP
Minister for Education, Science and Training
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women's Issues

MEDIA RELEASE

9 May 2006

BUD 08/06

Students with Disabilities – Investigation of Flexible Funding

A major new initiative to investigate flexible funding arrangements for the schooling of students with disabilities was announced today by the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Julie Bishop MP.

The Government has committed \$5.8 million in 2006-07 and 2007-08 to look at ways of improving the learning outcomes of students with disabilities through improving the portability of their funding and support for parental choice.

The initiative will commission research and analysis of Australian and international funding arrangements, including voucher funding, to support greater flexibility and identify key factors that influence school choice for parents, both in government and non-government schools. In a further stage, the initiative will pilot models that maximise portability of funding and will develop a national approach.

“The Australian Government is keen to support these students, their families and schools, with a funding system which achieves maximum benefit for students with disabilities, supports the capacity of schools to deliver quality programmes and gives parents greater choice in selecting the school that best meets their child's need,” Minister Bishop said.

“An important challenge for our current funding arrangements for students with disabilities is supporting families and students who, for a variety of reasons, transfer between schools. Concerns about the level of support for students with disabilities in non-government schools are part of this challenge. There is room for a national examination of these issues.”

Currently, significant funding for students with disabilities and learning difficulties is provided under the General Recurrent Grants (GRG) Programme and the Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs (LNSLN) Programme. Over the 2005-08 quadrennium, the LNSLN Programme will provide an estimated \$2 billion specifically to support the most educationally disadvantaged students, including students with disabilities.

“This initiative will be an important step in exploring ways that further increase access and participation of students with disabilities in our schools,” Minister Bishop said.

For further information on GRG and LNSLN please go to http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/programmes_funding/general_funding/ (follow the links to Funding & grants for schools and then General Recurrent Grants and Language, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs Programme).

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Supporting Information

Why is this important?

- Students with disabilities attending Australian schools require a diverse range of support mechanisms. In recognition of this, the Australian Government provides mainstream education funding in addition to targeted funding for supporting students with disabilities.
- This initiative is important because it will examine current funding arrangements for students with disabilities, examine international models, pilot possible ways to maximise portability of the additional funding provided by the Australian Government and develop a preferred national model. This initiative will be an important step in understanding parental views on these matters and exploring ways that further increase access and participation of students with disabilities in Australian schools.

Who will benefit?

- Supporting students with disabilities and their transfer from one educational setting to another is an important issue for all sectors and systems. Parents, teachers and education authorities will benefit from the findings of this initiative as it will examine current funding arrangements for students with disabilities and ways to better support the needs of students with disabilities in Australian schools.
- Valuable information will be provided about how current funding processes work for students with disabilities who transfer and how they can be better supported as they move from one educational setting to another.

What funding is the Government committing to the initiative?

- The Australian Government is committing funding of up to \$5.8 million.

What have we done in the past?

- Improving the learning outcomes of educationally disadvantaged school students, including students with disabilities, is a major Australian Government priority. The Australian Government is also committed to a funding system which achieves maximum benefit for all educationally disadvantaged students, including students with disabilities.
- Over the 2005-08 quadrennium, the Australian Government will provide an estimated \$2.0 billion to support the most educationally disadvantaged students, including students with disabilities and learning difficulties. This includes additional funding for students with disabilities. State and Territory governments and education authorities are responsible for managing the Programme and have the flexibility to allocate funds to students and schools assessed as having the greatest need, while ensuring principles of equity, effectiveness and efficiency.
- In the broader context, a significant amount of work is already being undertaken by MCEETYA in relation to the improvement of outcomes for students with a disability.

When will the initiative conclude?

- It is expected that the work will be undertaken over 2006-07 and 2007-08.