

Family Advocacy**Contact:** Cecile Sullivan Elder**Title:** Executive Officer**Phone:** (02) 9869 0866**Email:** cecile@family-advocacy.com**Website:** www.family-advocacy.com**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

NSW government sending mixed messages on education to schools and students with disability.

Time is running out for advocacy agency voices to be heard.

Family Advocacy is deeply concerned that the government of New South Wales is not doing its best by students with disability. The government's response to a 2017 Parliamentary Inquiry into the education of students with a disability or special needs in New South Wales is at worst misguided and at best disappointing.

The NSW Department of Education has made recommendations in its final response. The government has signaled its support for all of the recommendations. However, according to Family Advocacy Executive Officer, Cecile Sullivan Elder, "The government is sending mixed messages to schools, families and students with disability about inclusive education in New South Wales."

In its official response to the Department of Education recommendations, the government claims, "The Education Act 1990 provides for all students to seek enrolment at their local public school." At the same time, the government has endorsed the recommendation that "Support class establishments will increase in 2018 at a greater rate than general enrolment growth, consistent with trends in previous years." From the perspective of Family Advocacy, these two positions taken by the government are mutually exclusive. According to Sullivan-Elder, "The NSW government's response will see a widening of the gap between inclusive education and segregated education for students with disability, which is of critical concern."

Research over the last 40 years shows clearly that children with disability do better on all measures when educated together with their peers in the regular classroom, rather than disability specific settings, such as special or support units. In addition, children who do not experience disability have also been found to benefit academically from inclusive education with equal or better outcomes compared to children participating in non-inclusive settings. Despite this overwhelming evidence, the NSW government has recommended that support classes and special schools will continue to be on the increase.

Feedback from families across NSW regarding the government's response demonstrates an overwhelming lack of confidence in the Department of Education's ability to resolve many of the significant issues raised through the 2016 Parliamentary Inquiry.

Family Advocacy is calling on the NSW government to form a steering committee to provide advice on how to best address the concerns surrounding education for students with disability. Sullivan-Elder claims, "This is an opportunity for the government to project certitude and meaningful leadership on a critically important issue that affects society significantly in the short and long-term."

NSW State government is set to cut funding for the vital work of advocacy organisations like Family Advocacy in June 2018. Time for our voices to be heard on behalf of some of the most vulnerable people in the community is fast running out.

Further background information:

www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=2416#tab-governmentresponses

Family Advocacy works with families to promote and defend the rights and interests of people with developmental disability. **Contact Cecile Sullivan Elder for further comment [02 9869 0866 or cecille@family-advocacy.com].**