

**The Hon. PENNY SHARPE (10:15:56):** I make a short contribution on the tabling of the important *Progress Report: Improving outcomes for students with disability 2019*. The report is an example of Legislative Council committees working at their best. The committees have taken an interest in the education of students with disability and special needs for a long time. The first report came out in 2010. The report in 2017 picked up on that work. The report tabled today is a result of the recommendations from that committee. I congratulate all the members and staff who worked on that committee for a long period on continuing to take an interest in kids with disability and ensuring that not only are they getting the best education that they can but also that they are included in the educational experience of every student.

Last night I was pleased to attend the Family Advocacy showcase event on inclusion education. I highly recommend MPs getting hold of the information that was provided there. Family Advocacy's campaign—Same Classroom. Same Opportunity—is very simple and is reflected in what the report is trying to achieve. The campaign means that every student, no matter what their classroom, should be given the same opportunity as every other student. It was inspirational to see the work that is being done by the very professional teachers in New South Wales schools. They are trying to ensure that every child in their classroom is able to participate to their fullest. They see that as fundamentally part of their work, not extra work.

In the event last night there was also a lot of discussion about the improvements that are made to all students as they learn and live in an environment where everyone is truly included. I congratulate Family Advocacy on its work. I congratulate Alan and his teachers at Turramurra High School for the incredible work that they have done. The 15-minute video is well worth the time to see what can be done when people open their minds and put on their thinking caps to ensure that kids are included.

The report is an important first step but there is much more to do. I cannot let the report simply go through without acknowledging that there are still real problems in our schools in ensuring that all kids are included. There are real barriers to students being able to enrol. Parents are rocking up to a school to enrol their child, as is their right at the local school, and are being told that they cannot be helped and that they will have to find somewhere else. In 2019 that is completely and utterly unacceptable. There still are problems about the physical surrounds and equipment within our schools to allow students to get there in the first place. They cannot get up a block of stairs and need to make adjustments. Schools are using that as an excuse. We know that it costs a lot of money. The Government is making investment in improving the physical accessibility of our schools but more needs to be done. If we are true to the commitment, then every child in every classroom must have the same opportunity. We need universal access to our schools and they must have all of the equipment they need so that every student can attend.

I also raise the issue of suspensions. This has been in the news recently and the Minister acknowledged it in her contribution. We cannot ignore the fact that kids with disabilities make up 20 per cent of the school population but 40 per cent of those suspended. Between 2015 and 2018 there were 15,435 suspensions, of which 4,000 were for physical violence, 10,000 for continued disobedience and 4,220 for persistent or serious misbehaviours. These are kids with disability who need extra support. I also acknowledge that every child needs to be safe in their classroom. If there are issues those need to be managed but suspensions are not the way for kids with disabilities.

The idea that 10,000 kids with disability are being suspended for continued disobedience worries me greatly. The fact that at around 6,800 students aged just six or seven years are being suspended from school also worries me greatly. With the transition to the NDIS a whole world of opportunity has been opening up for people with disability to get the support that they need. Many problems still remain for the crossover, particularly distinguishing between what State provisions are and what individual provisions are, and the way in which we can ensure that gaps do not open up when it comes to support services, particularly inclusion services.

I cannot let this debate end without mentioning the Ability Links NSW program, which is about to cease being funded in New South Wales. Ability Links NSW ensured people with disabilities could play sports in the local sporting team, participate in the local youth centre and be part of the local

community. A program funded through both State and the Federal governments, which supports thousands of people and has won Premier's awards, is about to come to an end because everybody says that it is all over to the NDIS now. That is of great disappointment to me.

I make the point that the report is very important but, as required under the Disability Inclusion Act, there is a plan within the Department of Education for disability inclusion. Yes, that exists and it is running out in 2020 and will have to be revisited. It is unclear to me how those two plans speak to each other. One of the things that happens in government is that a department has a plan and then when a new issue comes along they make a new plan. Next thing we have four different plans that do not talk to each other. I worry this will happen yet again and the teachers who are trying to deliver quality education will be required to refer to three different plans, rather than a single commitment around inclusion. That is something that needs to be ironed out as we go through this process into the future.

The second last point I make is that I welcome the focus this year on trauma-informed support for kids in the classroom. That has to include children in out-of-home-care and young people with disability are overrepresented in this group. We currently have a significant issue with young people being relinquished by their parents to the care of the State and a bureaucratic fight between the Federal and State governments when it comes to disability funding. That is unacceptable and is impacting greatly on these young people's ability to access education. It is all pretty simple: every person deserves and has a right to an education in New South Wales. Every student should have every opportunity in every classroom in every school. We should not rest until that is achieved. I thank the Government for providing this report and the parliamentary work that continues every day to provide oversight of this important part of the delivery of services in New South Wales.