

# Minister refuses to speak with parents!

Minister Gillard refuses to speak with parents of those who can't speak for themselves  
Kingsdene Parent Group - Media Release,  
9 November, 2009

**Disadvantage is not the same as disability so the Education Revolution means some students will continue to be more socially included than others.**

Unlike Brendan Nelson when he was Federal Education Minister, Ms Julia Gillard has refused to meet with parents of students with disabilities in relation to the closure of their children's school.

In August Ms Gillard met with and listened to students who could put their concerns to her personally and directly about proposed changes to youth allowance adversely affecting their ability to attend University. Yet a request to meet the Minister from parents of students who cannot speak for themselves because of their severe intellectual disabilities has been refused with no reason offered. said Vanessa Browne parent of a student at Kingsdene Special School.

This brings into question the Rudd governments high-sounding rhetoric on people with disabilities and social inclusion said Ms Browne

Since the 1820s children with disabilities were educated in charity-operated special schools, government is a Johnny-come-lately in giving educational opportunity to students with disabilities to learn about the world, gain skills and wherever possible to eventually gain employment and pay taxes like everyone else. In NSW over 20% of all students with severe disabilities are still educated in charity-operated schools.

Now Kingsdene is closing and the viability of a number of these schools is precarious because the students are not funded in the same way as their peers in government schools; they are funded on a fiction of socio-economic disadvantage rather than the fact of their disability.

Equity not charity should be the basis of any funding mechanism for students with disabilities irrespective of the educational setting. said Bernadette Moloney.

Vanessa Browne said: For decades all governments have penny-pinched on the education of students with disabilities in all sectors and shamelessly toyed with some of the most disabled students in the country who are educated in small charity-operated special schools. It is time to end the cheapskate sectoral funding games and equitably fund, irrespective of the school system, students with disabilities on the basis of their educational needs having regard to their disability. Kingsdene has been pushed

over the brink and its closure will invariably add greater financial stress to an already stretched public education sector because the students at Kingsdene have significant and severe disabilities. The public education sector ill afford more closures.

We call on the Rudd government to find the moral courage lacked by all previous governments to grant specific targeted funds to non-government special schools so they remain viable and in doing so close the equity gap for students whose disabilities do not recognise sectoral divides.

Media Contact: Vanessa Browne 0403762111 and Bernadette Moloney 04096602000.

**LISA Comment:** Families with a member living in a supported accommodation group home know only too well how they are restricted by bureaucracy from representing their family member who has no meaningful communications and who is unable by reason of their disability to make reasonable judgements in respect of all or any matters concerning their personal circumstances and/or estate.

Community Visitors in Victoria visit group homes where the residents have no meaningful communications. They prepare their inspection report based only on the input from service provider staff. They have no obligation to contact parents, and don't! Indeed, they are restricted from doing so by the Public Advocate!

The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) boasts there are very few Plenary Guardians ("legal parents of those over 18 years of age") in Victoria, as they assertively argue "need" in section 22(1)(c) of the Guardianship and Administration Act.

VCAT will, and always do, argue that a person with no meaningful communications, and who is unable by reason of their disability to make reasonable judgements in respect of all or any matters concerning their personal circumstances and/or estate, does not need a whole of life guardian - a Plenary Guardian.

Yet, the Disability Act 2006 says, "Disability services should acknowledge the important role families have in supporting persons with a disability" - Section 5(3)(i).

The parents of Kingsdene Special School students are legal, common law, parents! Just how far will bureaucracy to isolate very vulnerable people from their most caring advocates - their parents/families? And, "Why do they?"

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