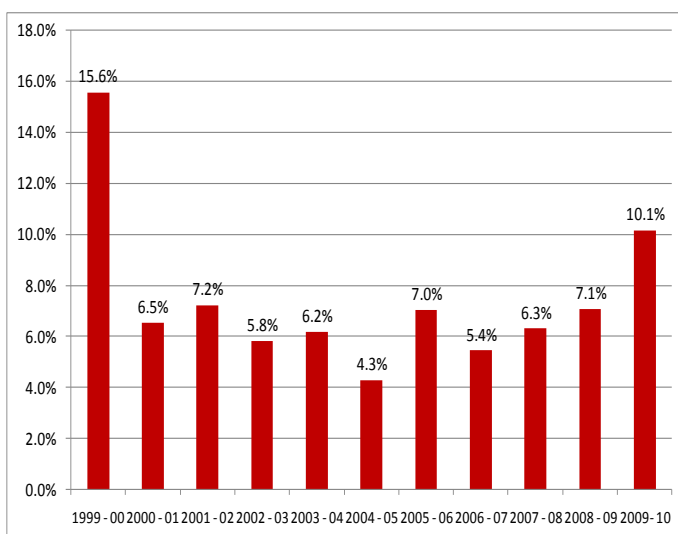


Students with Disabilities

More and more parents are enrolling their children with disabilities in independent schools.

In 2010 there were 12,172 students with disabilities enrolled in independent schools, more than double the number of students with disabilities enrolled in 2001.

Growth in enrolments of Students with Disabilities in Independent schools, 1999 - 2010



About 79 per cent of these students were enrolled in mainstream schools. Some 21 per cent were enrolled in special schools, which provide alternative educational settings for students with high-level needs. In 2010 there were 57 special schools in the independent sector.

Students with disabilities enrolled in independent schools do not receive the same level of additional funding as their counterparts in government schools. This lack of equity is of considerable concern to the independent schools sector.

Governments should provide adequate funding to meet the educational needs of students with disability, no matter which school they attend.

A special case for funding

Governments must recognise that students with disability represent a special case in schools funding.

Funding arrangements for students with disability in independent schools vary widely from state to state.

Parents have the right to choose a school of choice and schools, unless they can categorically prove undue hardship due to the enrolment of a student with a disability to enrol students regardless of the level of supplementary assistance that may be available.

The variation in state and territory funding arrangements and different definitions of disabilities are significant barriers to equitable support for students with disability.

However, the bulk of the additional costs of these students in independent schools must be met by the individual school community.

The cost of schooling of students with disability should be met by the whole of society through government expenditure.

Students with disabilities require additional support because of the nature of their disability, not because of the school they attend.

The introduction of portable funding for students with disability would be a welcome start to addressing resourcing problems, so that government funding for these students follows them no matter which school they attend.

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Social and legal responsibility

The obligations on schools to enrol and educate students with disability are governed by the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and its associated Education Standards, in addition to state and territory-based legislation.

As autonomous, independent entities, most independent schools cannot rely on support from a systemic school authority to provide additional resources to meet the needs of increasing numbers of students with special needs such as students with disabilities, students with social, behavioural or emotional issues or other educationally disadvantaged students and students who need special support.

Independent schools are not adequately resourced by governments to meet their legislated obligations, and the cost of meeting the special education needs of students with disability largely falls to individual families and school communities. For students with disability in government schools the cost of their education provision is met by the Australian community as a whole.

Students with disability in independent schools are eligible for significantly less public support for their special education needs than if they were educated in a government-owned school.

The funding differential is greater for students with high-level support needs who may require, for example, a full-time aide or Auslan interpreter. The gap in funding for these students can be over \$40,000 per student per year.

Students with disability in independent schools may also lose free access to a range of essential government services and resources such as physiotherapy, speech therapy and Braille texts.

Enrolment growth

Despite the issues around ensuring adequate funding support for high needs students in independent schools, the number of these students in independent schools is significant and continues to increase annually.

There is no lack of special needs students seeking to attend independent schools and no lack of will on the part of independent schools to enrol them.

Australia-wide the growth in enrolments of students with disabilities has been greatest in mainstream independent schools, which now account for some 79 per cent of students with disabilities in independent schools, including those with high to very high support needs.

It is also the case that in some states there has been significant growth in the number of students enrolled in independent special schools due to the number of independent special schools that have opened in the last 10 years.

Students with Disabilities in Independent schools, 2010

Students with disabilities	12,172
Special schools	57

Addressing educational disadvantage

The independent sector makes a large contribution to addressing educational disadvantage through its Special Schools and Special Assistance Schools which provide alternative education settings for students with high-level needs. Parents should be able to choose a non-mainstream educational environment if it is the best option for their child.

It is important to highlight the contribution of independent Special Assistance Schools which cater for students with severe social, emotional and behavioural issues. These schools serve young people who are disengaged from education and whose needs are not met by mainstream education. They are often referred from community services, juvenile justice and other schools both government and non-government. Special Assistance Schools have developed specially adapted programs and structures designed to re-engage students in education and prepare them for further training and employment.

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