



DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY *wa*

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

Reporting of Students with Disability Data on My School website

June 2016

Developmental Disability WA is the peak body in Western Australia for people with intellectual disability and their families. For 30 years our organisation has been advocating for the rights and needs of people with intellectual and other developmental disability, their families and the people who support them. Our work has been instrumental in raising awareness of the unmet need for support for people with disability and their families, and DDWA was a major contributor to the work on the national campaigns which after many years have ultimately led to the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

DDWA is the Western Australian representative of Inclusion Australia, formerly National Council for Intellectual Disability which has been a voice for people with intellectual disability for around 60 years. DDWA is also a member of the national body Disability Advocacy Network Australia, with our Chief Executive Officer having been DANA's chair since 2014.

Our membership which has grown over 300% in the past 4 year period includes over 2000 individuals and family members as well as support groups, service provider organisations and professionals working in both government and non-government agencies. Our reach across Western Australia extends well beyond our membership as we are connected to community in the regions and growing numbers of supporters and others in the metropolitan area who have an interest in the rights and needs of people with intellectual disability and their families.

We are pleased to count amongst our membership many parents of primary school, high school and vocational and tertiary level students, as well as teachers, education assistants, principals, deputy principals, education professionals and specialist professionals who work in a range of education settings, all of whom have helped to inform our work in recent years.

Our model of systemic advocacy has three interlinking elements: 1: supporting people with developmental disability and their families to have a strong voice 2: partnering with others to develop more connected and inclusive communities, and 3. influencing government and other decision makers.

DDWA advocates for and together with individuals and families, support groups and organisations. We advocate for people to be able to make their own choices and we welcome members who have exercised a wide range of options for themselves and for their families.

Our individual and family members and their children attend government and non-government mainstream primary schools, secondary schools, specialist education schools, education support centres located on the same grounds as mainstream schools. Some of the students move between education facilities on a regular daily or weekly basis, others are home educated and others again are in between a number of these settings as they try to find a place which will accept them and provide them with the education they are seeking and to which they have a right. Regrettably some students would be described as having fallen through the cracks of the education system.

A priority area of DDWA's work particularly in the past 5 years, has been support families to make the best education choices for their child. We do this by providing resources, information, opportunities for them to develop their own skills including advocacy skills, and education generally. We work collaboratively with education and departmental professionals to progress and advance our objectives to better support families in their role in the education of their child.

In responding to the ACARA survey on how to present data on students with disability on the My School website, DDWA seeks to provide constructive comment on what we perceive to be the gaps in suggested options for presentation, and recommendations for further information to be considered.

Given that all students, including students with disability, have a right to inclusive education at all levels, without discrimination, as determined by the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities to which Australia is a party, the question arises then as to whether schools should be examined for their

inclusion of students with disability or whether that should not be necessary as it is a given that schools include in their enrolment students with disability as is their legal obligation.

DDWA acknowledges the complexity of these matters and that they may not be resolved in the immediate term by the question of which information is or is not relevant or appropriate for the My School website. However we wish to participate in this discussion at this point as we are hopeful it will be a precursor to revisit discussion more generally about the accountability, reporting and presentation of information about students with disability in Australia.

In recognising the various choices our members and others make in terms of education options for their child, we acknowledge also that no one method of data collection or presentation of that data will be satisfactory for all concerned. As such we acknowledge the difficult task ACARA has in this regard.

However if deeper consideration and understanding is given in the first place, of the specific reason for the collection of the data and ultimate objectives, DDWA considers this will assist to determine the type of data to be collected, and whether My School on its own is the right vehicle for the presentation of this information.

INCLUSION OF DATA ON STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY ON MY SCHOOL WEBSITE

DDWA acknowledges moves by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to consider including data on students with disability on My School Website.

We understand ACARA's rationale for the My School website having been developed as being a result of a 2008 agreement by Australian Education Ministers that "greater transparency and accountability for the performance of schools were essential to help ensure that every Australian child receives the highest quality education. To achieve this, a range of information is delivered through the My School website, making it accessible to educators, parents, school communities and the Australian public." (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2015, FAQ's)

At the time of publication of the FAQs document referred to here, "Students with Disability is another aspect of school information that is being explored for presentation on My School". Explanations as to how that may assist with the objective of helping to ensure that every Australian child would receive the highest quality education, through the delivering of a range of information through the My School website, are not provided.

Q2: What is your initial reaction to the proposal to include SWD data on My School?

Very positive; Somewhat positive; **Neutral**; Somewhat negative; Very negative

At this point DDWA is **neutral** about the proposal to include SWD data on My School website as we are not certain as to the type of data that is proposed to be included nor are we certain as to what the intended objective is of including data on SWD.

Noting "number and type" does not demonstrate the experience of the students with disability, the desired or actual outcomes achieved by the students or the school and on their own do little to demonstrate much of significance. Noting number and type would provide information on data which is required to be collected in order to calculate funding as per the formula which funds schools, as will be discussed below.

Q3: Which of the following principles should the proposal to add SWD data to My School satisfy?

Transparency; Fairness; Accountability; Comparability; Data Quality; Reliability and Validity; Other

The My School website currently presents information on students in a given year including total enrolments, (girls, boys,) full-time equivalent enrolments, indigenous students, language background other than English, Student attendance. These (other than gender) are all factors which are included in the formula upon which a school receives funding - number of students enrolled, indigenous students, students with language other than English.

Schools also receive funding based on the number and level of disability of their students. In this sense DDWA acknowledges that if data is collected by a school based on its requirement to report to receive funding in accordance with a formula, it is good practice to then present that information as reported upon to the wider community also in order to be transparent about which data it collects for these purposes.

What concerns do you have about publishing SWD data on My School?

The ethical dilemmas presented by the portrayal of personal information again go to the purpose of presenting the information about students with disability. Where a student may have a disability they and their family do not wish to have made public that is a matter entirely for them.

It is acknowledged that ACARA has suggested numbers or percentages based on less than 5 students would be suppressed for privacy reasons.

Level of Adjustment by Disability Category and Comparison of school's proportions by Disability Category with national and similar schools

DDWA considers that insufficient evidence of the current use of My School website makes it difficult to plan adequately for the future use of the website.

While some parents may welcome having access to information which indicates that high level of adjustment is provided for students with cognitive disability, particularly if they are considering a new school, others have indicated that they would feel extremely uncomfortable about the detail of differentiation provided by presentation of data in this way.

It must be remembered also that the data is presented on a year by year basis, and while it is an indicator of a school's practice in more general terms, it is time specific and may change from year to year. Parents may welcome the fact that the school will, for example, practice high levels of adjustment, but if looking at the information another year and there are not high levels of adjustment practiced, it may simply mean that there are no students enrolled who require high levels of adjustment, as opposed to the school refusing to practice high levels of adjustment to respond to particular needs of students. Presenting quantitative data in the absence of qualitative data may provide only part of a story or may in fact lead to misinterpretation or inadvertent misrepresentation of a story.

ACARA states that for parents and other members of school communities, some constructive ways in which information from My School can be used include:

- Understanding how their local school is performing relative to other schools with statistically similar students
- Gaining a broader understanding of the learning environments and performance of schools in their local community, as well as within their state or territory and across the nation
- Initiating communication with a school, based on comprehensive and detailed information
- Seeking a greater level of engagement with a school in support of their child's learning
- Becoming involved in advocating for and supporting improvement initiatives within the school.

These answers given above by ACARA to **What do most people use the My School website for?** do not

demonstrate well a need or reason for including data on a given year's enrolment of students with disability nor the level of adjustment in a given year for students with disability.

DDWA considers that a national, state based or individual school based education website with easily accessible information on education options and other relevant information for students with disability, may be more appropriate vehicles on which to present the objectives and outcomes of particular schools in relation to their enrolments of students with disability. These would also allow for more detailed information to be provided to parents than any of the options presented by ACARA in the My School proposal.

Since 2014 all Australian schools are required to survey their school communities. ACARA convened the National School Opinion Survey Working Group to assist in developing specifications that this survey tool would need to meet. The Working Group was comprised of representatives from DEEWR, each government Department of Education, the Independent Schools Council of Australia, the National Catholic Education Commission and Education Services Australia (ESA) . The result is the *School Survey* website, developed by ESA on behalf of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), as agreed by Commonwealth, state and territory ministers for education through SCSEEC.

DDWA respectfully suggests that as parents and families represent the largest cohort of people who would utilise this survey, that a consumer representative group reflecting that cohort be included in future working groups of this kind.

Schools are required to report on student, parent and staff satisfaction under the National Education Agreement and the *Schools Assistance Act*. Schools are also required to include a link to the *My School* home page alongside their school satisfaction reporting in their annual reports. Each school profile page on *My School* will have information to inform viewers about the national items agreed for parents and students, but it does not have a link to the individual schools items as reported by parents and students.

Schools can use the national parent and student survey items to report on school satisfaction in their annual reports. At best this enables a school to provide far more detailed responses to parent interests and concerns, but at the other end of the scale it also allows schools to seek the minimal information from the school community while still meeting their surveying obligations.

If each school's *My School* profile page were to include a link to their annual report which demonstrates the school satisfaction, rather than the other way around as is the requirement currently, viewers would far more readily have access to the relevant information they may be seeking about an individual school, while visiting the *My School* website. Currently they would need to know to look at the individual schools' annual reports to find the relevant information.

In conclusion, DDWA would be seeking further explanation from ACARA as to the objectives and potential outcomes of including information about students with disability on the *My School* website, in any of the ways ACARA has suggested, before endorsing such a change to the *My School* website.

We consider there are more suitable ways for the community to obtain information which is relevant to them, about individual schools, and recommend schools be supported by the Education Department to make the necessary transitions in order to provide better access and information to parents and others in the community.

DDWA thanks ACARA for the opportunity to comment on their proposal for reporting on students with disability on the *My School* website and would welcome the opportunity to discuss the views and concerns of our members and others.