



AUSTRALIAN SPECIAL EDUCATION PRINCIPALS ASSOCIATION (ASEPA)

INFORMATION STATEMENT 2009 - 2011

Background

ASEPA has evolved from the Australian Federation of Special Education Administrators (AFSEA). AFSEA was formed as an outcome of the inaugural national conference of special education leaders in Adelaide in November 1997. The body was incorporated in 2001. The name change to the Australian Special Education Principals Association Ltd (ASEPA) began on September, 5 2006.

ASEPA is the peak national organisation representing school based special education principals and leaders in Australia. ASEPA parallels the work undertaken by similar peak bodies such as the Australian Primary Principals Association and the Australian Secondary Principals Association. The unique patterns of education service delivery to students with disabilities/special needs requires ASEPA to represent special education leaders across all sectors of schooling including early intervention, primary, secondary and special settings.

The Purpose of ASEPA

The purposes of ASEPA as described in the constitution include but are not limited to the following:-

- To promote the role and status of special education principals and other leaders in special education
- To advocate for the full range of education services for students with disabilities from inclusion through to special school placement
- To promote the professional development of special education principals and other leaders in special education
- To promote research and excellence in special education
- To liaise with other organizations whose views and activities effect the development and standing of special education services and facilities
- To provide a forum for the development of policies that relate to students, teachers and leaders in special education

- To provide a forum for the exchange and discussions of ideas with a particular focus on school administration and leadership in special education
- To facilitate the development of national and international networks of special education principals and other leaders in special education

2009 – 2011 Action Areas for ASEPA

A number of ASEPA Position Papers related to some of the current Action Areas can be found on the ASEPA Web Site: www.asepa.org.au

1. Inclusive Curriculum “Built In, Not Bolted On”

Whilst all state and territories theoretically include students with disabilities in the curriculum ASEPA’s 3 year study has proved differently.

In 2006, ASEPA completed a three year study of curriculum materials from Australian state/territories. The focus of the review was to see how well the various curriculum resources met the challenge of ensuring that all students (including students with disabilities/special needs) were recognized and catered for.

The major finding of this study was that while all systems assumed theoretical responsibility for all students (including students with disabilities/special needs) they struggle to resolve the tension between this aspiration and an authentic curriculum model. Put simply the generic curriculum material are not able to accommodate the needs of all students where “all does mean all”. This continues to be a major focus in 2009 and is currently being pursued through input into and lobbying about the development of the Australian National Curriculum as the world first inclusive curriculum.

2. Assessment of Students with Disabilities

ASEPA and its affiliate associations have identified the need in the 21 century for an assessment tool that can be used nationally for students with disabilities.

ASEPA remains committed to working with all jurisdictions and federally to explore the development of such a tool. A national assessment sub-committee of ASEPA has been formed and will work on trialling appropriate tools in search of a best fit for all schools who support students with SEN. In order to inform this action research ASEPA has been working and consulting with colleagues from the University of Northampton, UK, the Department of Children, School and Families, UK and EQUALS, UK, to further research an authentic tool for an Australian context. This is an ongoing research and development project.

3. Future Planning for High Standards of Accomplished Teaching for Students With Disabilities/Special Needs

ASEPA and its affiliate associations have identified the need to maintain and extend the standard of accomplished teaching for students with disabilities/special needs across all schools.

Particular areas of focus are:

- Upskilling of the existing workforce to cater for the total range of students. This will require all teachers to have a broad capacity in the need to maintain teaching of SWD/SEN.
- Increase the number and quality of teachers with high specialised skills in high support needs areas.

All systems will need such teachers. ASEPA has developed the following position papers in this area: *“Teacher Training”*, *“Results of the ASEPA Survey of Qualified Staff in Special School and Facilities.”*

Towards Inclusion: an Australian Perspective has been published in the British Journal – support for Learning in 2007 by Fiona Forbes – current President

4. Disability Into The future and the Impact on Schools

There is a commonly held misconception that advances in technology and medical science have led to a decrease in disabling conditions. Examples cited include prenatal screening for Down Syndrome and identifying the link between Spina Bifida with the mothers intake of folic acid.

International research does not support the view that disability is decreasing. There is actually strong evidence to suggest that the nature of disability is changing resulting in an *increase* in some disabling conditions.

ASEPA's position paper "Disability Into the Future and the Impact On Schools" outlining the issues this area.

5. Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

Foetal Alcohol is the most common cause of birth defects and brain damage in children.

It is a lifelong disorder caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol. The diagnosis of FAS identifies only a relatively small proportion of children effected by alcohol exposure and does not necessarily reflect more severe outcomes for affected individuals. FASD is a complex multifaceted public health and social issue and although there have been only limited studies for the rates of FASD in Australia, it is widely accepted that it is underestimated, under diagnosed and under managed in our country.

6. Authentic Choice for Parents/Carers

ASEPA sees the importance of advocating for the full range of education services for students with disabilities from local school through to specialised school enrolment.

As part of the inclusion debate there is a danger of reduced program options and parental/carers choice. ASEPA places priority on developing and increasing the range of programs to meet both student needs and parents/carers choice.

7. Educational Resourcing Models for Students With Disabilities

The issues related to funding of programs for students with disabilities are a major area of concern for teacher, educational leaders and parents/carers. All state/territory education departments have undergone or are undergoing reviews of resourcing models. Two key understands are required in relation to the resource and education of students with disabilities.

(a) Cost of Education

The cost of education students with disabilities who have special education needs is inevitable, greater than that of students generally, wherever the education takes place. (Jenkinson, 2001).

(b) Equity

The concept of equity required the provision of additional resources to enable student with disabilities who have special educational needs to participate in education on an equitable basis with the majority of students (Cormack, 1997a). Equity does not necessarily mean equivalence of funding, but it does imply the provision of adequate

resources to ensure equal opportunities for learning. For some students, intensive support needs may mean a high level of resources to achieve equity; for others the need may be reduced.

8. *Post School Options – Adults with High Support Needs*

The development of a greater range of post school option pathways for adults with high support needs is required to maximise their potential in Australian society.

When parents have a child with a severe intellectual disability their family lives are changed dramatically. During the 12+ years that the child is able to attend school the parents are able to talk solace in the fact that their child's needs will be supported. The child will be involved in developmental activities and their child will be able to attend school 5 days per week for approximately 40+ weeks of the year. There is security for the parents and families of a child with high support needs in the schooling system. As the young person with high support needs reaches school leaving age this security is reduced. The parents now have to find a post school option service provider that will be able to meet the needs of their child with a level of funding decided by a government agency assessment that is regularly insufficient to allow their child to attend 5 days per week and will require at least one of the parents, if both parents are still living together to give up some if not all of their employment.

9. *International Partnerships*

In 2003 AFSEA and the New Zealand Association of Special School Principals (NZASSP) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOA) which focused on the development of an international partnership. As part of this agreement AFSEA and NZASSP will:

- Provide a joint forum for the exchange of information and ideas with a particular focus on leadership, curriculum and policies in special education.
 - Work together for the common purpose of promoting and enhancing special education leadership, policies and curriculum.
 - Jointly promote the role and status of special education principals and other school based leaders in special education.
 - Jointly provide opportunities for professional development between members of the respective national associations,
 - Jointly promote research and excellence in special education across the two countries.
 - Facilitate principal and teacher/staff exchange between schools across the two countries.
 - Jointly advocate for the full range of education services for students with disabilities and
 - Work together to develop a long term strategic view of special education.
- ASEPA will continue this existing partnership.

ASEPA have also presented papers at international education conferences in 2008 and 2009 in Greece, Sweden and Barcelona on Educational Leadership in Special Education and Issues Facing Initial Teacher Training..

ASEPA Affiliates

The ASEPA is composed of the peak State and Territory Associations of Special Education Principals and Leaders. The following are designated affiliates:-

- Education Support Principals and Administrators Association (WAESPAA Inc) (Western Australia)
- SSP Network of the NSW Primary Principals Association
- Association of Special Education Administrators of Queensland Inc (ASEAQ Inc)
- Special School Principals Association of South Australia
- Tasmanian Special Schools Principals Association
- Principals Association of Specialist Schools of Victoria Inc (PASS)

Individual Principals represent ASEPA in the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory.

ASEPA has strong links with the New Zealand Special School Principals Association (NZSSPA).

Organisational Structure

The Executive Council of ASEPA comprises two sitting representatives and one proxy member from each State and Territory in Australia. The Executive Council meets on a regular basis (at least once /term). Generally meetings are held by teleconference. The Council meets face to face at the Annual National Conference and at the AGM at the beginning of each year.

2009 – 2011 Office Bearers

President:

Fiona Forbes
Peel Language Development School
PORT KENNEDY WA 6172
Ph: (08) 9593 9030
Fax: (08) 9593 9040
Mb: 0409 409 901
email: Fiona.Forbes@det.wa.edu.au

Vice President:

Peter Bush
East Gippsland Specialist School
PO Box 274
BARINSDALE VIC 3875
Ph: (03) 5152 5922
Fax: (03) 5152 6145
email: bush.peter.n@edumail.vic.gov.au

Immediate Past President: Peter Davis
Ipswich Special School
PO Box 464
IPSWICH QLD 4304
Ph: (07) 38135777
Fax: (07) 38135700
email:pdavi16@eq.edu.au

Membership and Funding

ASEPA has a current membership of 1000 Australia wide. The organisation is self funding through fees of affiliate associations.

Life Members

2004 – Margot Radford (SA)
2007 – Allen Cullen (NSW)
Harry Terry (NSW)
Dr John Enchelmaier (QLD)
Peter Symons (VIC)

National Conferences

Each year ASEPA hosts in partnerships with affiliates a National Conference for Principals and Leaders in the area of leadership and disability/special needs education.

Future conferences are:

- 2010 – Darwin, NT June 17 - 18.
Theme At the Heart of the Matter – School Leadership
- 2011 – Brisbane, Queensland
- 2012 – Perth, WA
Joint ASEPA/NZASSP Conference

ASEPA Web Site

www.asepa.org.au