

**EDUCATIONAL ENROLMENT OF STUDENTS WITH
A DISABILITY IN NEW SOUTH WALES AND VICTORIA**

Ian Dempsey, Phil Foreman, the University of Newcastle
and
Josephine Jenkinson, Deakin University

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Address for correspondence:

Dr. Ian Dempsey
Special Education Centre
University of Newcastle
Callaghan NSW 2308
Australia

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Abstract

The extent to which legislation and special education policy have impacted on the nature of the educational enrolment of students with a disability in Australia has not been clearly addressed. Although there are no detailed and systematic national data on the enrolment of students with a disability in inclusive settings and special schools in Australia, some broad trends are apparent. The legislative background to these trends is discussed. As might be expected, there are variations in the nature of the educational enrolment of students with a disability across the states and territories of Australia. Enrolment trends in the two most populous states, New South Wales and Victoria, are examined and discussed within the context of their respective special education policies, disability discrimination legislation and educational precedent.

INTRODUCTION

Australia is a parliamentary democracy with a population of about 19 million in six states and two territories. Although the Federal government can influence state policy and practices through the provision of discretionary educational funding, the provision of educational services is the responsibility of the states and territories. A national curriculum does not exist in Australia, although in recent years there have been attempts to standardise the curriculum (Boston, 1994a). Moreover, although all states and territories provide a range of educational enrolments for students with special needs (regular classes, special classes, and special schools) there is wide variation between states in the degree of emphasis given to each form of provision.

For many years, the Commonwealth and all state governments have supported the principle of maximum possible integration of students with disabilities into the regular school in age-appropriate classes (Jenkinson, 1987). The way in which policy is both interpreted and implemented has varied between states. No state has legislated to ensure the phasing out of segregated special educational provision, and Australia has tended not to rely on legislation to guarantee an education, or to specify minimum educational standards for students with a disability to the extent that has occurred in the United States. No bill of rights exists in Australia, and there is no comprehensive protection of rights in the constitution (Jones & Marks, 1999).

Experience in western countries, particularly in the United States (Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; Sawyer, McLaughlin & Winglee, 1994), and the United Kingdom (Norwich, 1994) has shown that moves to integrate students with disabilities into regular schools have resulted in varying outcomes. In the early 1990s in the United Kingdom there was a slight *increase* in the proportion of students with disabilities

enrolled in special schools (Norwich, 1994). Under the auspices of UNESCO (1994), the Salamanca Statement, which emerged from a World Conference on Special Needs Education, has called for a much more determined effort by the international community to give high priority to inclusive education. Although statements of this nature have been endorsed in principle by educational authorities, special schools continue to be a placement option for many students with special needs. In Australia, the enactment of disability discrimination legislation may be more likely to have had an influence on educational enrolment of students with disabilities in the past decade.

By the early 1990s, all Australian states had introduced equal opportunity legislation to protect the rights of a range of disadvantaged groups, including people with a disability. This legislation largely reflects corresponding legislation at federal level, which has overriding power over state legislation (Forlin & Forlin, 1998). In 1992 the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) was passed with the aim of eliminating discrimination against people with a disability in the areas of education, employment, accommodation, access to buildings, clubs and sports, and the provision of goods, facilities, services and land [section 3]. The Act does not differentiate between impairment and disability, but has adopted a very broad definition of disability that includes disorders or malfunctions resulting in the person learning differently from a person without a disorder or malfunction [section 4]. Under the Act, it is unlawful for any educational institution to deny admission, or to limit access to educational benefits offered by the institution, on the grounds that a person has a disability.

The Act does include an escape clause. Although discrimination may occur when an educational institution refuses admission to a student with a disability,

under Section 22 of the DDA a respondent may argue that any necessary adjustments to services or facilities for the provision of education to that student would impose an unjustifiable hardship on the institution. However, this defence is available only in cases that relate to the *enrolment* of individuals in educational institutions, and not in relation to adjustments to meet the student=s needs that become apparent after enrolment. Since it is often the lack of appropriate adjustments that deters parents from enrolling students in regular class settings, many parents may prefer enrolment in a special class or special school setting rather than confront the uncertainties of legislation.

Individual complaints based on the DDA are lodged with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) which may investigate and attempt to settle complaints by conciliation. Complainants may apply to the Federal Court for a public hearing once the complaints process has been terminated by HREOC. Up until April 2000, HREOC was empowered to both conciliate complaints and to conduct public hearings if the conciliation process was not successful. At the time of writing, 68 complaints, ten of which related to education, have resulted in formal decisions following a Commission hearing (HREOC, 2000). As the outcomes of the conciliation process are confidential, it is unclear how many complaints have been resolved by conciliation, and what agreements have been reached between the relevant parties associated with these complaints (Jones & Marks, 1999). Moreover, since anti-discrimination legislation is relatively recent, there is at present virtually no precedent to influence interpretation of the law in appeals against decisions about educational enrolment (Forlin & Forlin, 1998). States have generally responded to this legislative uncertainty by adopting a policy that a range of educational options should be provided, and that parents should have the right to choose the educational

setting for students who have a disability. Most states have now introduced procedures to ensure that resources for support are available to students with a disability regardless of the chosen educational setting, or who are moving in this direction.

While the DDA has been seen as helpful in raising community awareness about the rights of people with a disability, it has also come under some criticism (Jones & Marks, 1999; Tucker, 1994). Examples of perceived deficiencies in the Act include the confidential nature of the conciliation process, the cost and the time associated with this process, and HREOC=s lack of power to enforce decisions (an application must be made to the Federal Court). In addition to the complaints mechanism, the DDA includes a number of strategies, such as action plans, whose potential has yet to be fully tested.

There are plans for the framing of disability standards that will make rights and obligations under the Act clearer and easier to enforce. In 1997 a discussion paper on Disability Standards in Education was released (Banks & Kayess, 1999). However, it has taken three years for the states and territories to agree on the content of a draft set of standards which have been released for consultation. To some extent, this delay is not surprising, given such issues as what should be included in the standards, who should be involved in framing them, and the likely need for a separate body to monitor their implementation.

Another strategy available under the DDA is the use of action plans to precipitate social and/or administrative change. Any service provider, including federal and state government departments, may develop an action plan to address discrimination against people with a disability in their organisation. Although they are not mandatory, many government departments and universities have developed

such plans, or have developed equity statements that specifically mention disability. Having an action plan that is in the process of development can be a defence against prosecution under the DDA.

The non-prescriptive nature of the DDA means that the provision of educational services for students with a disability in Australia is primarily determined by the educational policies of the states and territories. Although there is some diversity in these policies, they are broadly consistent with the philosophies of normalisation and least restrictive environment and, particularly in Victoria, the Arights@ model. Moreover, they are generally guided by the principles that all children can learn, that instruction should be individualised, that the local regular school may be a logical place for enrolment, and that regular class teachers have a responsibility to meet the needs of all students in their classes (Dempsey, 1996; de Lemos, 1994).

AUSTRALIAN TRENDS IN EDUCATIONAL ENROLMENT

Against this background, it is timely to examine trends in the enrolment of students with a disability over the years immediately preceding and following disability discrimination legislation. At a national level, the impact of the DDA on the educational enrolment of students with a disability is not clear. Differences between states in their operational definitions of disability, and the lack of a national database which tracks enrolment across type of special need, make it difficult to identify clear trends in Australia. Discerning the impact of both policy and legislation on enrolment is made difficult by changes over the years, in all states, in mechanisms for identifying students with a disability enrolled in regular schools.

Trends in special school enrolments are more amenable to analysis. Dempsey and Foreman (1995) noted a significant reduction in the enrolment of

students in special schools in Australia between 1976 and 1993. In the early 1990s, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs was established to provide advice to a range of federal government departments. Figure 1 sources information from the Council and elsewhere, and shows the number of students enrolled in Australian special schools for the period 1976-1998. A clear reduction in enrolments is apparent until the early 1990s, with no clear trend since that time. The gaps in data across the study period are an indication of the lack of a consistent and reliable method of data collection at the national level.

Figure 1 about here

While some broad trends in Australian educational enrolment are apparent, there is evidence of substantial variation in enrolment across the states and territories (Dempsey & Foreman, 1995; de Lemos, 1994). This variation makes it very difficult to draw conclusions about enrolment trends in Australia as a whole. For example, Figure 2 shows an overall decline in the number of special schools in Australia between 1988 and 1999, but this trend is more obvious in Victoria than in New South Wales, where the number has remained relatively stable. These two most populous states have experienced different political, social and economic agendas in the past two decades. Historically, they have also emphasised very different forms of educational provision for students with a disability that are reflected in differences in proportionate enrolments across educational settings. We now examine trends in these two states in more detail.

Figure 2 about here

NSW special education policy and trends in educational enrolment

The New South Wales state education system has a long history of special schools and classes for students with a disability, particularly through its system of

opportunity classes (now known as support classes) and schools for specific purposes (special schools). By the 1970s, when proponents of normalisation (e.g. Nirje, 1970; Wolfensberger, 1972) were beginning to be heard and discussed in Australia, the NSW state system was supporting separate special schools or units for students with physical disabilities, hearing impairments, vision impairments, emotional disturbance, and mild or moderate intellectual disability, and was beginning to enrol children with severe or profound intellectual disability. There were also integrated single classes in regular schools for children in most of these categories, with emotional disturbance and moderate or severe intellectual disability being the main exceptions.

The government education system in NSW was supplemented by a private system of special schools, mainly run by parent-based organisations. For example, the Subnormal Children's Welfare Association (SCWA) ran a large number of schools for children with intellectual disability while the Royal NSW Institute for Deaf and Blind Children and the Catholic church provided schools for students with a sensory impairment. During the 1970s the NSW Department of Education accepted responsibility for the education of all children, regardless of their degree of disability, although the private system has continued to provide some services.

In 1980 the NSW Department of Education introduced an integration policy which, in many respects, gave parents more power than subsequent policies. The 1980 policy gave the school principal the right to enrol a child with a disability, or to defer enrolment, but not the right to refuse enrolment. If the principal thought that the child should not be enrolled in a regular class, the matter had to be referred to the Regional Director for decision. Later policies gave principals greater power to refuse

enrolment, although with increased emphasis on the parents' contribution to decision-making.

The Doherty Report (1982) stressed the right of the child to a full and appropriate education, as conveyed in various UN declarations (Rights of the Child, 1959; Rights of the Mentally Retarded, 1971; Rights of the Disabled, 1975). The report recommended that "...the fundamental aim of the State Government be the integration of all children with developmental disabilities and learning difficulties into the most normalised educational setting feasible..." (p.102), and that funding be allocated to support integration. The extent of integration in NSW at that time is difficult to determine, although Doherty estimated that two-thirds of students with a mild intellectual disability were enrolled in regular classes. While the report had some effects on policy and practice, integration was impeded at all stages by a teachers' union which saw it as a threat both to the career structure of special educators and to the working conditions of regular teachers (Dempsey, 1997).

A breakthrough in integration in NSW was the introduction, in the mid-1980s, of classes for children with moderate or severe intellectual disability within regular primary schools. This made it possible, for the first time, for children with moderate intellectual disability to attend neighbourhood schools, if not always their own immediate neighbourhood school, and allowed services to be provided in country areas without the need for a special school infrastructure.

The Department of Education's 1987 policy made a reasonably strong statement about integration, pronouncing that "every child with a disability must be able to attend their regular neighbourhood school where this is possible and practicable and in the best interests of the child". However, the second half of the statement, which made it possible for a principal to refuse admission on a variety of

grounds, weakened it considerably. The statement was repeated in the 1993 policy which, nevertheless, strongly supported integration and spoke of the need to "move from the provision of predominantly segregated educational settings" (NSW Department of School Education, 1993, p.4). The 1993 policy also stated that the Department would, from 1994, employ only those teachers who had undertaken a preservice unit of special education.

In 1996, the Minister for Education commissioned a consultant, David McRae, to conduct a feasibility study on integration and inclusion. The ensuing report (McRae, 1996) noted a significant increase in the number of students receiving integration funding in the early 1990s. McRae also made a number of significant recommendations supportive of inclusion which were opposed by the NSW Teachers' Federation. While the Department did not adopt the recommendations immediately or in full, the report has clearly influenced subsequent policy and practice.

A common enrolment policy, as recommended by McRae, was introduced in 1997. The Department's process for providing resource support in 2000, *Funding 2000*, also complied with McRae's recommendations that funding be "targeted to individual students; transferable with the student; allocated according to a common procedure; based on the student's support needs in an educational setting; guaranteed ...; controlled through an eligibility requirement; and able to be flexibly deployed" (McRae, 1996, p.103). Students with disabilities attending regular schools were to be assessed in a consistent way across NSW using the *Funding 2000* process (NSW Department of Education and Training, 1999), involving assessment of need in 13 focus areas, ranging from academic needs to medical procedures (Foreman, Bourke, Mishra, & Frost, in press). Under this procedure, Departmental

funding to support children with disabilities in regular classes in 2000 was over four times the level of funding in 1995.

In contrast to this recent policy, which has sought to encourage a climate of integration and inclusion, is a social and political environment that has encouraged segregation for some students. Increasing media attention to violence in schools and increasing suspension rates have been associated with strong statements of support for teachers' rights (Boston, 1994b), and with the establishment of special schools specifically for students with behaviour problems. At the time of writing, two such schools have been established in the south-western suburbs of Sydney, widely regarded as a 'hot spot' area for behaviour problems in NSW.

Despite inconsistencies in data collection at the national level, NSW has maintained a detailed database for more than a decade for students with disabilities, behaviour problems and emotional disturbance. Figure 3 shows the number of students with a disability enrolled in special schools and support classes in NSW for the period 1986-98. The reduction in the number of students in special schools is consistent with the trend observed in Figure 1. However, the increase of 3341 students enrolled in support classes is not fully explained by the reduction of 1505 students enrolled in special schools.

Figure 3 about here

The combined data in Figure 3 are of interest because they may be compared with total school enrolments for students with and without a disability. A significant reduction in the proportion of students in special schools and support classes would provide some evidence that students with a disability were moving from segregated to inclusive settings. However, the proportion has increased from 1.57% to 1.76% of the total school population for the study period (NSW Department of Education and

Training, 1988-97). At the same time, the number of students with a disability receiving State Integration Funding has increased from 1983 in 1990, to 5133 in 1997, and to over 12,500 in 2000..

NSW also maintains data on educational enrolment across disability. In special schools there were decreases in all disability categories from 1988-97, with the exception of students with behaviour disorders (an increase from 46 to 99 students), and emotional disturbance (an increase from 141 to 516 students). There were large proportional increases in the number of students with moderate intellectual disability (from 912 to 2570 students), physical disability (from 82 to 332), behaviour disorder (from 12 to 76), and emotional disturbance (from 35 to 141) attending support classes in regular schools (NSW Department of Education and Training, 1988-97).

Victorian special education policy and trends in educational enrolment

Victoria has traditionally emphasised special school enrolment for students with a disability. In 1958 the Victorian Department of Education was given responsibility for day special schools (Education Act, 1958), and following an amendment to the Act in 1973, progressively absorbed day training centres for students with moderate or severe intellectual disability into special developmental schools (Collins, 1984). During the 1970s, Federal funding targeting positive discrimination supported a rapid expansion of special schools in Victoria, in addition to a variety of specialist support, consultancy and remedial centres. However, with minor exceptions, most recently for students with hearing impairment or severe behaviour problems, special classes or units in regular schools have not been an enrolment option. These classes were to be phased out during 1999 and 2000.

By the early 1980s, there was a bewildering array of provisions for the education of students with disabilities in both regular classes and special schools. This complex system did little to foster Schools Commission policy of maximum integration, which the Victorian government had endorsed in 1973 in an Interim Inquiry into special education. It is difficult to say how far integration was being implemented in Victoria in the early 1980s, since students with disabilities who remained in the regular class were not recorded separately from the rest of the school population. There was no official attempt to promote integration, although some individual communities were promoting their own programs, often with commendable success but usually with very limited resources (e.g. Jenkinson, 1982).

Against this background, and in a climate which strongly favoured system change as a means of achieving social justice for disadvantaged students, the Victorian government set up a Ministerial Review of Educational Services for the Disabled which culminated in the Collins Report (1984). Integration, encompassing both the movement of students with disabilities from segregated settings to the regular school, and the provision of support to ensure that those who were already in mainstream schools remained there, became the focus of the review. The report acknowledged the rights of parents to choose the kind of education they wanted for their children, but also advocated the progressive phasing out of segregated special schools and the transfer of special education staff to the mainstream system. It also recommended abolition of categories of disability as a basis for legislation and service delivery, and advocated that services should be determined solely by a student=s Additional requirements@.

At the time, the Collins review was widely regarded as one of the most advanced statements in Australia on education for students with disabilities. The Education Department endorsed most of its recommendations, but there was considerable resistance both from mainstream teachers and from special education teachers who felt threatened by the prospect of closure of special schools. Many parents of students with disabilities also resisted the push towards integration, fearing loss of specialist resources and expertise (Jenkinson, 1998).

The government adopted an approach of cautious political pragmatism (Tarr, 1988). No special schools were closed, but specialist facilities were rationalised and no new special schools were opened. At the same time, support systems were developed for students with disabilities whose parents chose a regular school. By 1988, resources had been allocated to serve 2950 students in over 1000 regular schools (Tarr, 1988), including students with mild disabilities who were previously absorbed into regular classes without additional support. There was, however, no corresponding decrease in special school enrolments.

The substantial increase in the cost of the integration program, and evidence of inequities in allocation of funding between regions, prompted a critical review by the Victorian Auditor-General (1992). Responding to the Auditor-General's Report, Cullen and Brown (1992) maintained that there was no one best system of education for any student, and recommended that the (as yet unwritten) policy of full integration be replaced by one of developing regular and special school options, and rejecting the view that there is one best approach for all students with a disability.

A crucial outcome of the Cullen-Brown Report was the commissioning of an independent consultancy to develop criteria for funding eligibility based on

recognised definitions of disability, and the establishment of a set of resourcing levels linked to a student=s educational needs (Pickering, 1993). Victorian policy is now committed to parent choice, and states that the neighbourhood school (regular or specialist) is the first point of contact for all students (Program for Students with Disabilities and Impairments, Booklet 1, Department of Education, Victoria, 1998).

Eligibility for support funding is determined by referral to an appropriate professional or professionals, who must provide written evidence of special need based on formal assessment. The categories recognised for eligibility are physical disability, severe language disorder, severe emotional disorder, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, visual impairment, and autism spectrum disorder. However, neither category of disability, nor the type of school chosen by the parents, is used to establish the level of support a student receives. Under this system, eligible students with a similar level of educational need are guaranteed equivalent funding regardless of enrolment in a special school or a regular school (Department of Education, Victoria, 1998).

An Educational Needs Questionnaire is used to determine one of six funding levels for each eligible student. The six funding bands were broadly derived from the costs of educating students with disabilities in different special school settings (Cullen & Brown, 1992). Tagging funding levels to special school costs ensured that parents could not claim financial disadvantage in moving a child from a special to a regular school, and reflected the government=s continuing philosophical, if not political, commitment to maximising integration.

A further potential influence on the enrolment of students with disabilities in Victoria has been the move towards self-governance of schools (Caldwell, 1998), which means that schools may decide priorities for staff appointments. In a climate of

concern with educational standards and benchmarking, appointment of an integration teacher to coordinate special needs provision may not have high priority. Moreover, the abolition of school zoning means that principals may discourage enrolment of a student with disabilities and advise parents to approach an alternative mainstream school which places greater priority on the provision of facilities and resources to support students with disabilities. The result is that for some students with disabilities, the regular school attended is not necessarily the neighbourhood school, and some regular schools with a strong commitment to inclusion may enrol a disproportionate number of students with disabilities.

Figure 4 shows the number of students with disabilities in Victorian government schools, who received educational needs funding in either regular or special schools from 1984 to 1999. From zero funding of students with disabilities in regular schools in 1984, prior to introduction of the integration program, the number has grown to over 8000. In the early 1990s there was some slowing in the rate of increase, followed by a further upturn as the effects of the new funding system become more evident.

Figure 4 about here

Although this increase in the number of students with disabilities in regular schools largely accounts for the increase in the proportion of students with disabilities receiving funding overall, there have been only small fluctuations in special school enrolments, with an overall increase of 3.6 per cent since 1984. These increases have accompanied a decline of more than 8 per cent in total government school enrolments. The proportion of the government school population receiving educational needs funding overall has risen from 0.93 per cent in 1984, to 2.62 per cent in 1999 (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 about here

The rate of identification of students with moderate-severe disabilities has remained relatively stable since the introduction of the integration program, but there has been a significant expansion in the 1990s in the number of students identified as having a mild disability in regular schools (P. Tarr, personal communication, 29 February, 2000). Almost half of the students receiving funding in Victoria in 1999 were at Level 1 (minimum level of funding). Approximately 75 per cent of funding applications are now from students with mild disabilities (P. Tarr, personal communication, 17 August 1999). This expansion has coincided both with changes in the funding mechanism for students with disabilities, and with the introduction of statewide assessment programs. A student who is eligible for educational needs funding may, with the parents' agreement, be exempted from standard assessment; thus there may be advantages beyond the provision of support for both the school and the student in identifying students as eligible for educational needs funding.

DISCUSSION

The proportion of students enrolled in each setting in the two states clearly reflects the types of provision available. Victoria has 1.04 percent of the total student population enrolled in special schools, twice the proportion (0.5 percent) enrolled in New South Wales special schools. On the other hand, New South Wales has almost 1.8 percent of all students enrolled in support classes. With the introduction of a new funding formula in 2000, New South Wales is now also supporting 1.8 percent of students in regular classes (C. Curry, personal communication, November 2000), compared to about 1.6 percent in Victoria. The proportions are likely to continue to fluctuate. In August 2000 the Victorian Minister for Education announced additional

funding to support borderline students in regular classes, bringing the overall proportion of students with disabilities receiving support in Victoria to 3 percent. This compares to an overall proportion in New South Wales of just over 4 percent.

Although it would be impossible to tease out all of the influences on enrolment trends in special education, there is no evidence to suggest that disability discrimination legislation has had a direct or significant impact on school enrolments of students with disabilities in either NSW or Victoria. Statistics for both states indicate that the most significant declines in special school enrolments preceded rather than followed the Disability Discrimination Act of 1992. Legislation has not been followed by any downturn in special school enrolments in either state. If legislation has had an impact, it is most likely on the introduction by state governments of improved funding mechanisms to ensure students with disabilities in regular schools are not disadvantaged, in terms of resources, in comparison to students with disabilities enrolled in special schools. The outcome is more students in regular schools taking advantage of these mechanisms, rather than any significant movement of students from special to regular schools.

This trend is evident in both states, despite the fact that NSW and Victoria have experienced somewhat different political, policy and industrial environments in the past decade. For example, for much of the 1990s Victorian education was subject to significant rationalisation which resulted in many school closures, and in a weakening of the teachers' union in that state. In NSW, rationalisation in education has been less obvious, the teachers' union has continued to exert considerable influence over educational practice, and more equitable funding and policy have been slower to develop than in Victoria. An additional major difference is that, with the exception of classes (now being phased out) for a small group of students with

low incidence disabilities, special classes are not an enrolment option in Victoria. For many parents, moving a child from special school to regular class in a mainstream school may represent a more radical step than moving from special school to special class, or from special to regular class in the same school.

Despite large increases in funding support for students with disabilities in NSW schools in the past decade, there appears to have been very little impact on the proportion of students in special schools and special classes, in comparison to the total school population. The proportion of students in special schools has certainly decreased, although the data suggest that this decline may have leveled off. What appears to have happened in NSW is that there has been a transfer of enrolment of many students from special schools to special classes, or that students are maintaining their enrolment in a special class. As there is no evidence that significant numbers of students from either of these settings are being enrolled in regular classes, it is likely that increased integration funding is being provided to students who were already in the regular school system.

There are several possible reasons why increased funding has not been accompanied by an increase in the number of students with disabilities moving from segregated to regular classes in NSW. First, school and community awareness of special needs has increased in recent times. Evidence for this is apparent in the accelerating numbers of equity statements and policy initiatives for a variety of minority groups in the community. A consequence is that more students with special educational needs, including students with a disability, are being identified in regular schools. Second, and associated with this increased awareness, is an increased expectation from parents and students that they have a right to have their educational needs met. Recent examples of litigation against educational authorities

in Australia, concern about the drift of students from the public to the private system, media attention to perceived falling educational standards, and a Federal government benchmarking policy on literacy and numeracy provide some support for this explanation.

A net effect of the integration program in Victoria, particularly since the introduction of the revised funding mechanism in 1995-96, has been to bring the overall proportion of students in government schools identified for special needs funding more into line with the rest of Australia. The estimate by de Lemos (1994) for Australia overall was 2.3 per cent of students in government schools, compared to 1.8 per cent in Victoria. By 1999 the proportion in Victoria had risen to 2.6 per cent. De Lemos attributed the lower proportion in Victoria at the time of her study to the lack of formal provision, including special classes, for students with disabilities in Victorian regular schools. Parents may have been reluctant to have children with mild disabilities formally assessed for special educational support if that meant enrolment in a segregated school. The guarantee of support within the regular school has overcome this difficulty.

A further effect in Victoria, as in NSW, has been a steady increase in the proportion of students with disabilities enrolled in regular schools, in comparison to all students with a disability. With few exceptions, they are enrolled in regular, age-appropriate, classes. The proportion has grown from 8.6 per cent in 1985, immediately following the introduction of the integration program, to 60 per cent in 1999 after plateauing at around 55 per cent in the early 1990s. The increase in the latter part of the 1990s parallels introduction of the more equitable funding system for students enrolled in regular schools.

At the same time, the lack of a decline in special school enrolments in the face of a declining school population supports a conclusion that the increase in the proportion of students with disabilities enrolled in regular schools does not represent a move away from special schools. That a substantial proportion of parents continues to choose special school enrolment confirms that funding and resources are only one factor contributing to school choice. Attitudes, curriculum, student-staffing ratios, and availability of specialist staff are also important considerations (Jenkinson, 1998). Anecdotal evidence suggests that parents of older children may prefer the protected environment of the special school to the more difficult environment of the regular secondary school.

The relative stability of special school enrolments in both NSW and Victoria suggests that there are some similarities between these states despite differences in precedent, politics and industrial relations. This similarity adds weight to the suggestion that the national reduction in special school enrolments that was apparent in the 1980s has now stabilised. Different interpretations of the integration and inclusion of students with a disability have been associated with differences in enrolment of these students across the states and territories in Australia. Disability discrimination legislation appears to have had little direct impact without corresponding moves by state governments to ensure equality of resources between settings. However, the evidence mounts that, for reasons that require more detailed investigation, Australia has now reached a threshold that may continue to guarantee that a consistent proportion of students will start and end their school careers in segregated settings.

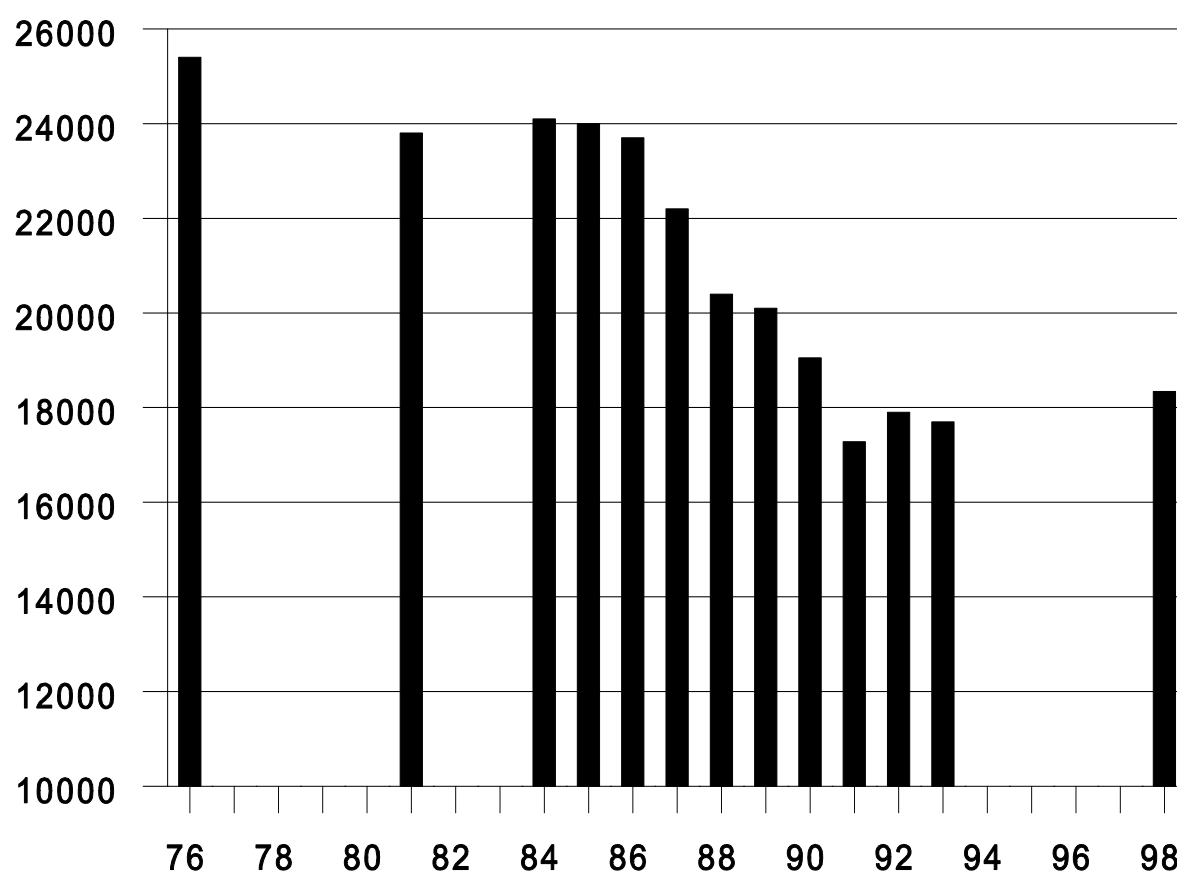
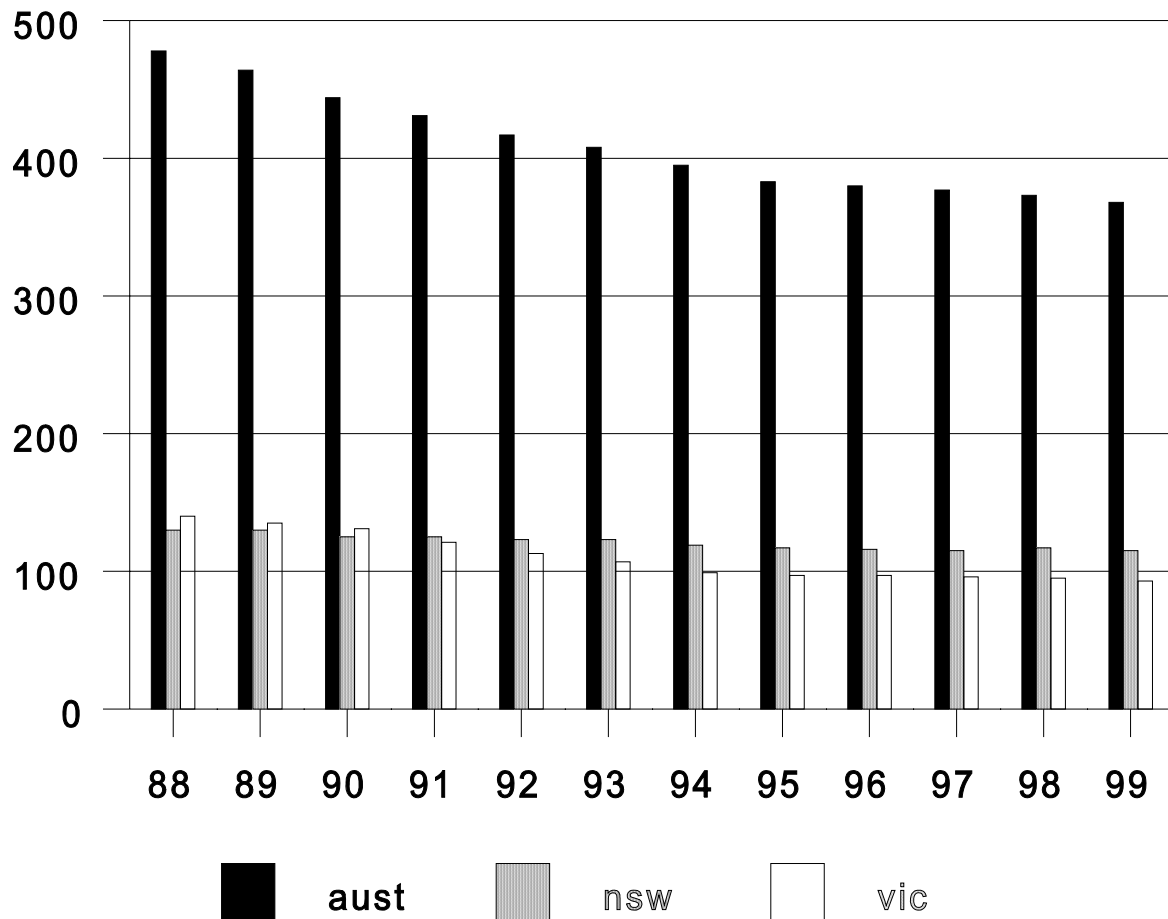


Figure 1. Number of students in Australian Special Schools (1976-98)

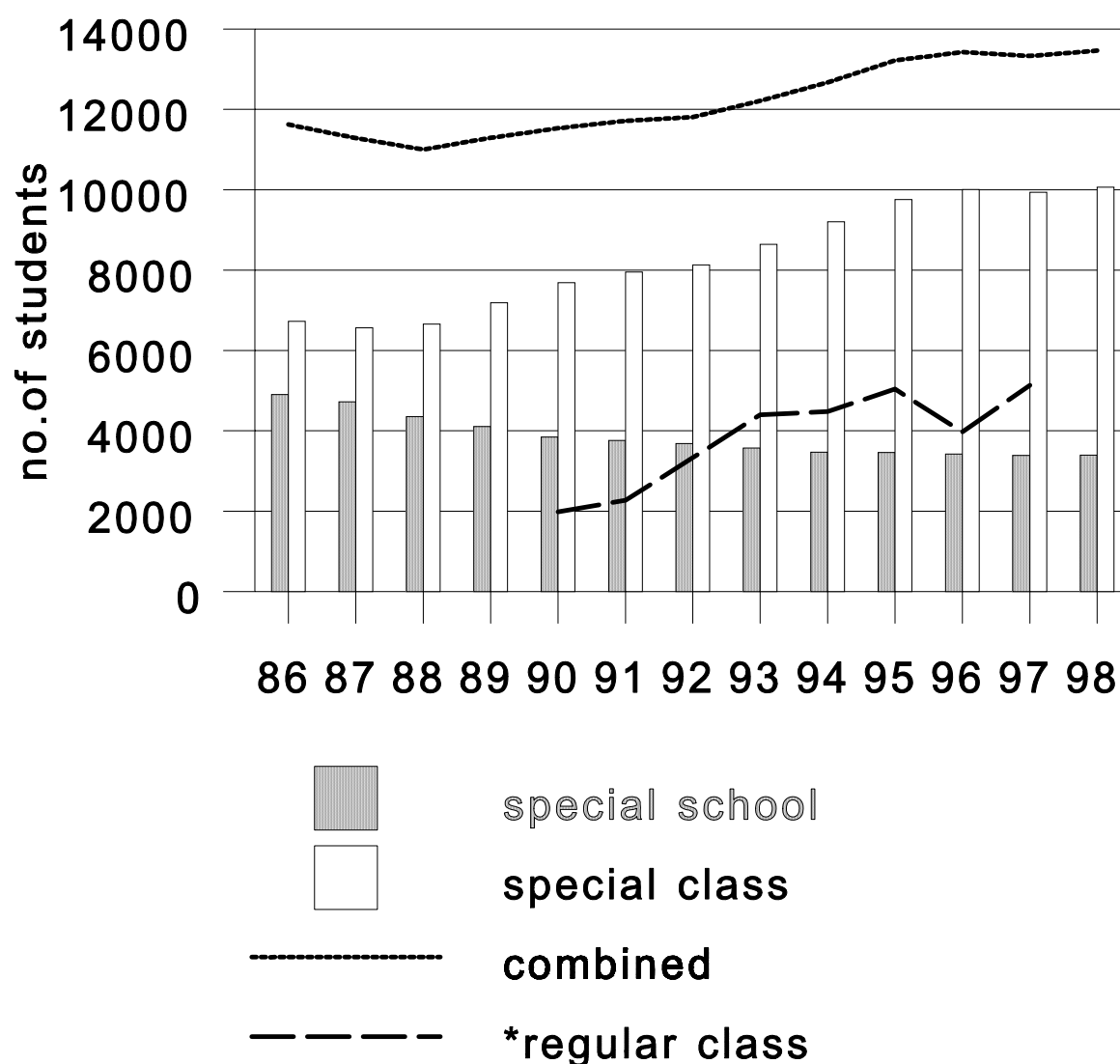
Data for 1976 appears in Schools Commission, Australia (1979). Data for 1981 appears in Australian Bureau of Statistics (1981). Data for 1984-88 appears in Australian Bureau of Statistics (1984-1988). Data for 1989 appears in Australian Bureau of Statistics (1990). For government special schools (1990-93), information sourced from Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. For non-government schools (1990-93), information sourced from Schools and Curriculum Division, Department of Employment, Education and Training. For 1998, data sourced from Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs

Figure 2. Number of Australian, New South Wales and Victorian special schools (1988-99).



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (1989-2000). Schools Australia. Canberra: Author.

Figure 3. Students with a disability enrolled in special schools and support classes, and students with a disability receiving integration funding in NSW



(1986-98).

* students with a disability in receipt of State Integration Funding.

Source: NCID (2001) Education for all. Canberra: Author; NSW Department of Education and Training (1986-98) Statistical bulletin: Schools and students in NSW. Sydney: Author.

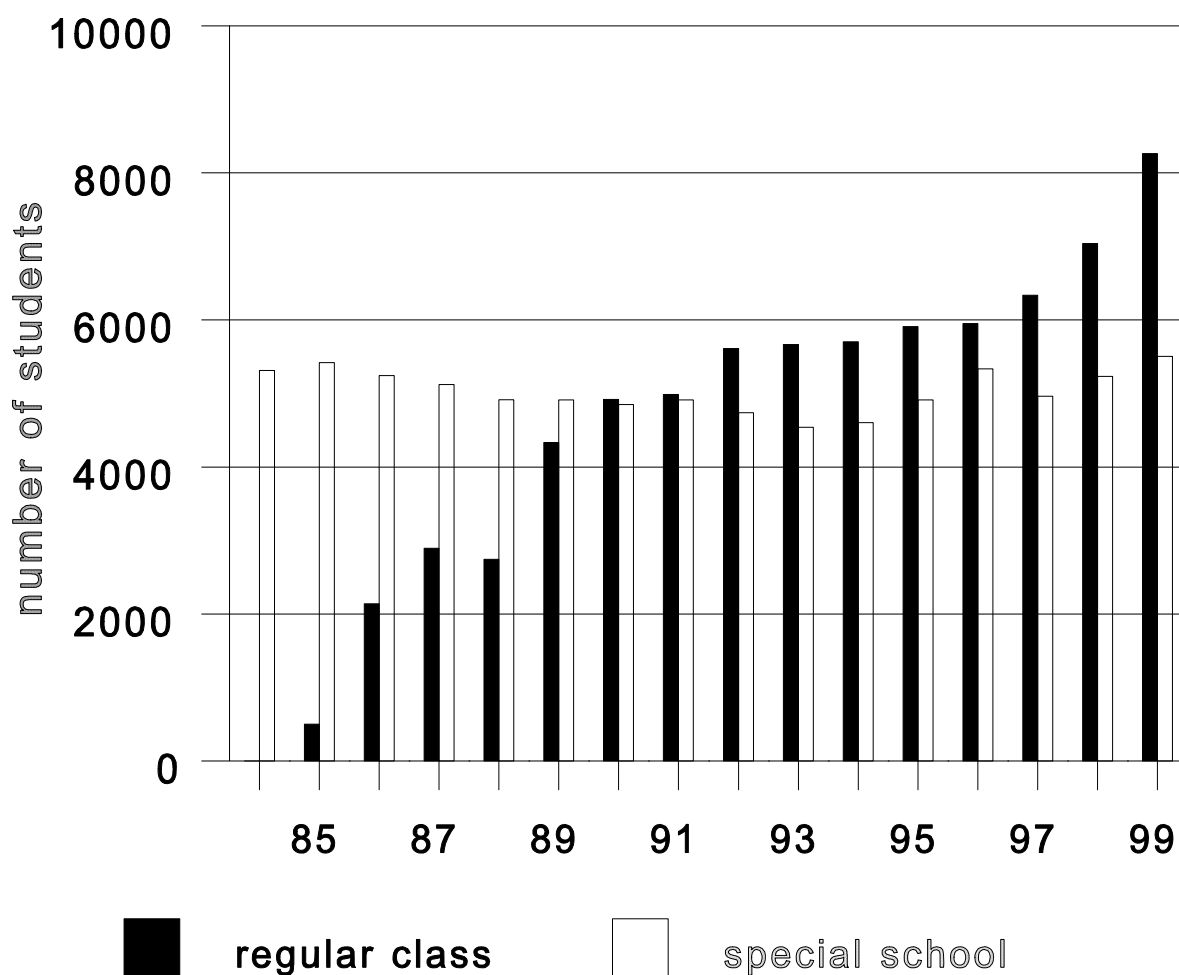
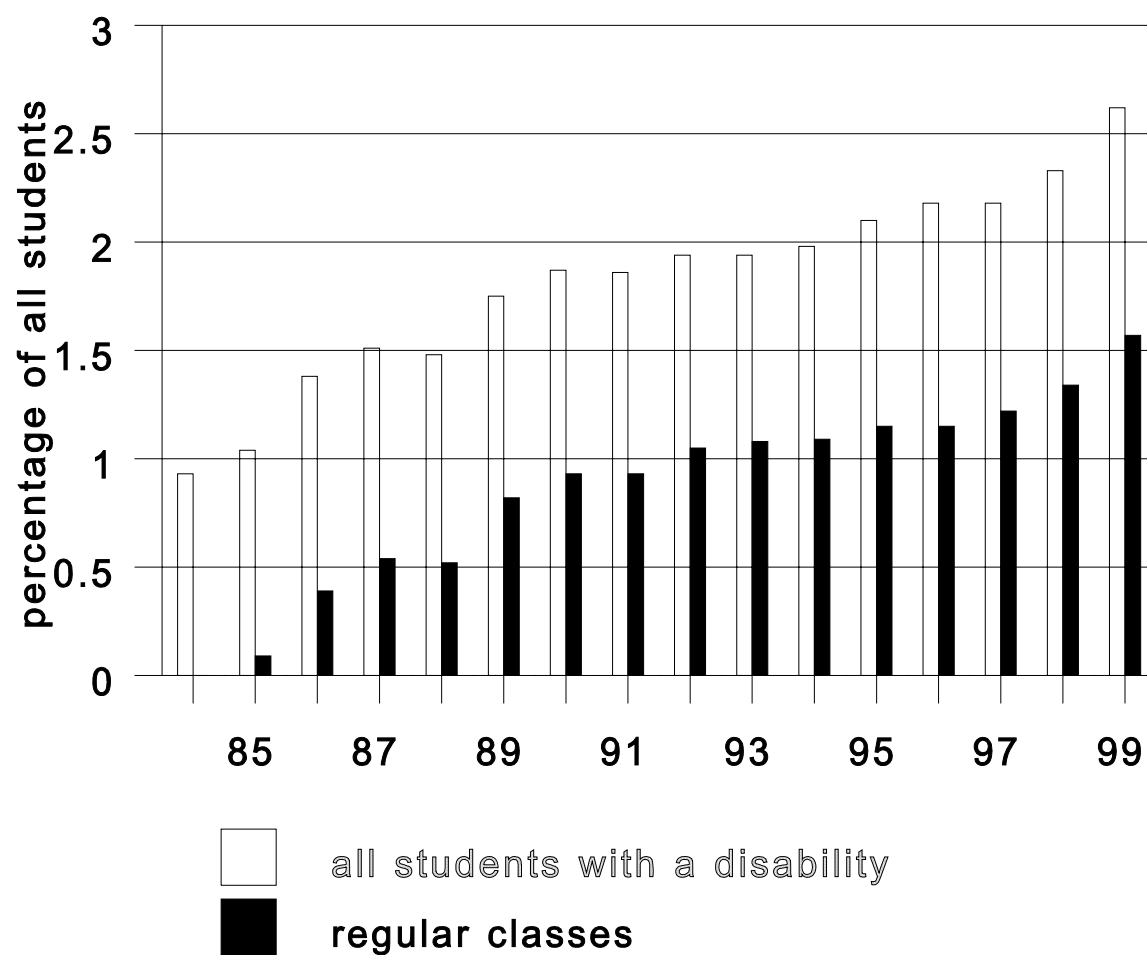


Figure 4. Number of students with a disability enrolled in regular classes and special schools in Victoria (1984-99).

Source: Department of Education, Victoria (personal communication, 18th October, 1999).

Figure 5. Funded students with disabilities in Victoria, as a proportion of all students in government schools (1984-99).

Source: Department of Education, Victoria (personal communication, 18th October, 1999).



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