

## Guest Editorial

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### New Directions for Australian Education The Challenge for A.A.S.E.

#### Strengthening Australia's Schools - National Goals

*We need to ensure that all Australian schools are of the highest possible standard. We must concentrate on the most effective use of resources available to schools, and work co-operatively so that the benefits of our best educational thinking and practice are available to all school students. (Strengthening Australia's Schools, 1988, Foreword)*

Stirring words indeed from the Commonwealth Minister for Employment, Education, and Training in our Bicentennial year! The challenge for A.A.S.E. is of course to ensure that political rhetoric is matched with appropriate action on a national level.

Implicit within the Commonwealth's broad directions is the recognition that the education of students with disabilities is an integral feature of generic education planning and resource allocations. Further, the notion of "national goals" by definition incorporates:

*. . . the need to ensure that every young Australian gets a general education of quality which provides both personal and intellectual development as well as broadly based and adaptable skills. (ibid., p.2)*

A.A.S.E. welcomes the initiatives taken by the Commonwealth Government, in conjunction with the states and territories, to strengthen Australia's schools. In particular A.A.S.E. strongly endorses the recognition within the Government documents, *Strengthening Australia's Schools* and *Teachers Learning*, of the vital importance of appropriate training and professional development for the teachers. "The quality of teaching is central to the quality of our schools" (*Strengthening Australia's Schools*, p.5). The issue of teacher education is also one of major significance in the current context of establishing national goals for schooling in Australia. The publication *Teachers Learning* highlights this factor:

*In long-standing specialist areas requiring highly skilled teachers, such as special education, disabled students are being integrated into regular classrooms, creating new demands on the skills of classroom teachers and new roles for the traditional specialists in these fields. (Teachers Learning, 1988)*

#### Teacher Education and Professional Development

In response to these important initiatives, the National Council of A.A.S.E., meeting in Sydney in March, 1989, adopted a national perspective statement, *Teacher Education and Professional Development - A National Perspective*. This document highlights the need for units in special education to be included as part of core studies in all accredited pre-service teacher education courses. Furthermore, A.A.S.E. has indicated that the basic requirement for all special education teachers should be one year of full-time study in special education.

The important issue of inservice teacher education for special educators and regular teachers working with integrated students with special needs is also addressed in the A.A.S.E. document. The full statement was included as a supplement to the March edition of the National Newsletter and was forwarded recently to Ms. Lindsay Connors, Chairperson of the Schools Council (National Board of Employment, Education, and Training) together with A.A.S.E.'s submission to the development of national goals for schools.

#### Other A.A.S.E. Activities

##### *State and Territory Special Education Coordinating Committees*

In addition to the preparation and submission of policies and responses at a national level, A.A.S.E. now has increased opportunities for involvement in national programs through its representation on

state and territory special education coordinating committees. These committees have responsibility for policy and administrative advice to both Commonwealth and State/Territory Ministers on a number of elements within the Commonwealth Special Education Program.

#### *Project of National Significance*

Most members of A.A.S.E. will now be aware that our association has received a grant to undertake an overview of educational services for children with mild or moderate disabilities in isolated areas of Australia. This project will involve gathering information which will ensure that future Commonwealth and State/Territory policy development includes a consideration of the needs of these students, and appropriate equity in the distribution of resources. The project is certainly a challenging task for A.A.S.E. It will provide us, as a national association, with a unique opportunity to draw on the experiences and knowledge of many A.A.S.E. members through Australia.

#### *The Australian Disability Achievement Foundation*

The important challenge ahead for the Australian Disability Achievement Foundation is to foster an increased awareness within the Australian community of the educational needs of children and adults with disabilities. Positive demonstrations of support for these persons will be achieved through the Foundation's award of grants on an Australia-wide basis. Such grants could be made to assist further study or to promote increased participation in educational programs within an integrated service delivery model.

#### *Trans-Tasman links: A new dimension for A.A.S.E. and N.Z.S.E.A.*

The forthcoming South Pacific Conference on Special Education, to be held in Auckland, New Zealand in January 1990, will provide a unique occasion for all special educators and those with an interest in the field to exchange views on special education issues at a personal level, and will provide the basis for increased communication between our associations.

#### **Future Directions - Our Response to the Challenge**

The significant developments now taking place within and between education systems and sectors across Australia have important implications for members of A.A.S.E. both individually and at a branch, chapter and national levels. While issues of policy and decision making may seem remote from our day-to-day involvement in special education, it is important to realise that those decisions taken by politicians and bureaucrats today, will affect the educational provisions, resources, and support services of the future.

The effectiveness of our association's advocacy in responding to these issues reflects the combined efforts of its office-bearers, councillors, committee representatives and the membership-at-large. I would seek the continued full and enthusiastic involvement of all A.A.S.E. members throughout the country as we continue to act as an informed, responsible body on issues relating to the education of students with special needs.

**Heather J. Martin**

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#### **References**

- Dawkins, J.S. (1988). *Strengthening Australia's Schools: A consideration of the focus and content of schooling*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.
- Department of Employment, Education, and Training. (1988). *Teachers learning: Improving Australian schools through inservice teacher training and development*. The Report of the Inservice Teacher Education Project, September. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.