

While universal access and a no wrong door policy are likely to permeate an early intervention framework, the framework must allow for smaller numbers of early intervention specialist services to people with a disability or developmental delay.

Such programs are likely to be more expensive, but these costs do not outweigh the financial, social, and emotional costs of failing to fund specialist programs for vulnerable children. Nor do they take into account the potential returns on investment that such early intervention programs can produce in the longer term for children and their families.

7.4.2 Ongoing funding support for the CE early intervention program at Carson St

One of the areas of greatest concern to parents has been the uncertainty that has resulted from short term funding arrangements, particularly in 2010, when the additional funds needed to sustain the 0 – 4 program were extended for one year only.

Parents who are highly satisfied with the educational outcomes of the CE early intervention program understandably want their children to continue to experience its benefits throughout their early primary years.

While this evaluation has not demonstrated the cost effectiveness of the program (with this being impossible to determine from the records and the lack of agreed outcome measures for the purposes of this trial), it has demonstrated that for an annual additional allocation of \$200,000, combined with a range of other resources including the school's base allocation, Schools Plus funding, and parental contributions, the school has:

- Established a 0-4 conductive education early intervention program for parents and children with profound and multiple disabilities.
- Established Kindergarten and Pre-primary CE classes so that very young children can continue with their conductive education.
- Introduced an Aspects of Conductive Education Program for primary aged children up to Year 4 for students at Carson St and for others attending mainstream schools.
- Created positive flow-on effects for other children at Carson St, particularly in the area of communication skills development.
- Provided transition support to children, parents and teachers as they move between classes at Carson St, or move to other schools.
- Developed a more comprehensive transition program for future use.
- Introduced the principles of conductive education and conductive upbringing to nearly 250 children and their families
- Increased the choices available to many parents of children with a severe motor disability.

- Created an educational experience for children and parents that is highly valued.

On a range of outcomes, as assessed by interviews with participants, including satisfactory student progress, parental satisfaction, parental coping, parental engagement in their child's education, the early intervention CE program is having positive effects upon children, parents and other children at the Carson St School.

We recognise that the Department of Education does not currently have a mandate or a responsibility to provide funding for early intervention programs that cater for children younger than four years. It is, however, a community (State government) responsibility. It is also the case that the Department does fund a number of special needs groups in recognition of the particular significance of early intervention for young people with a disability, development delay or other special needs.

It is possible that interagency protocols will be strengthened over the next few years to unite the fragmented efforts of a range of government agencies seeking to address the developmental needs of young people with a disability. The Disability Service Commission's current review of its professional services, and the movement towards individualised service provision, for example, may present opportunities for parents to exercise greater choice about where they utilise the therapeutic services that their child is eligible to receive. This may enable parents to direct their entitlement to such funds into the CE program that integrates educational and physical therapy services for their children.

To continue the critical early intervention program for 32 children aged 0 - 4 attending 2 half-day sessions per week, an additional allocation of \$ 205,435 is required annually. Despite the idiosyncratic decision to fund the program initially, and acknowledging that it is not a requirement of the Department of Education, it is recommended that the Department, as an agent of the government, should continue to support this early intervention program.

It is not considered appropriate to withdraw program funding, despite the idiosyncratic decision to fund the program originally. Since that time:

- Considerable effort has gone into developing a CE choice for students and parents in WA;
- Governments and the scientific community worldwide have recognised the importance of early childhood interventions – particularly for young children with a disability or developmental delay;
- Aspects of CE have been introduced into the primary years;
- Satisfactory results have been achieved by students;
- The CE program aligns with current policy frameworks and good practice principles for early intervention programs;

- The CE program supports the philosophy of *Schools Plus* by highlighting the importance of working with parents as equals, by being flexible and finding creative ways to teach and support young people, and
- High levels of parental satisfaction, coping and engagement have been achieved.

Ongoing funding, however, should be provided for the express purpose of providing early intervention CE programs for parents and children 0-4 years. By cordoning the funding support in this way, the program will be established in ways that enable the outcomes and costs of the early intervention to be accurately monitored and the viability of offering the program to 32 students annually will be able to be tested. The Carson St School, with its new independent public school status, should be expected to assume responsibility for the program from K – P from within its existing resource base.

If the Department decides to withdraw its ongoing funding support for the program, such withdrawal should be phased over a number of years, and in the interim, Departmental staff with specialist and current knowledge of early childhood directions both nationally and in WA should actively work with Carson St Independent School to:

- Transfer funding responsibility to a more appropriate agency with a mandate to cater for the early education needs of children 0 – 4 years with a disability, developmental delay or special needs, or
- Identify and secure alternative sources of reliable recurrent funding.

7.4.3 *Appropriate resourcing for transition support*

Successful transitions between mainstream specialist intervention services will only be achieved if the real costs associated with effectively transitioning children with high support needs from one service to another are accurately measured and supported. Alcorn et al (2009) found that transition points were the most stressful for the person with disabilities and their families, “constituting a major life crisis for disabled people” (iii), and required additional funding to ensure proper transition arrangements were in place.

Teacher conductors have spent long periods of time putting such arrangements in place, but there is still insufficient time for teacher conductors to liaise with other schools and or services (through funding additional hours for example) to ensure all staff are familiar with CE and with the needs of the child.

It is suggested that the Department examine the alternative education transition model proposed by Carson St, to determine its applicability for other students transitioning between special education and mainstream schools, and to assess the associated staffing requirements.