"Fairness is not everyone getting the same, but everyone getting what he or she needs."

SOCRATES 431 BC

The Federation of Parents & Friends Associations, Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle is made up of parent representatives of the 56 Diocesan schools. The Working Party for Children with Special Needs is a sub-committee of, and is accountable to, the Federation. There are two roles of the Working party – the Support Role and the Lobby Role.

**ROLE OF THE WORKING PARTY**

- Act as a forum for the exchange of information relevant for the education of Children with Special Needs.
- Facilitate a Support Group for parents of Children with Special Needs.
- Lobby relevant bodies to ensure justice and equity in the provision of educational resources for the Children with Special Needs.

**SUPPORT ROLE**

The Special Needs Support Group provides an opportunity for parents to share their experiences, seek support and learn from others. It also

- Provides a forum to discuss issues relating to the education of your children.
- Encourages a sharing of information.
- Skills parents in the roles of advocacy.
- Provides information regarding the availability of services for Children with Special Needs
- Provides professional support by inviting guests in particular fields to address Support Group meetings.

**LOBBY ROLE**

The Working Party provides a “voice” for parents in relation to issues which affect parents generally by:

- Submission to State and Federal government for increased funding.
- Organised meetings with relevant ministers and shadow ministers.
- Providing schools, P&F’s and parents with a process to allow them to actively lobby local members and to seek representation in Parliament.
- Liaising with the NSW CEC (Catholic Education Commission), CCSP (Council of Catholic School Parents), and Catholic Schools Board Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

**Membership of the Working Party**

The Federation Council appoints a Chairperson with suitable experience, and two other parents to the Working Party. Another two parents are sought, via written nomination, with selection made by the Council to maintain a balance of representation across ages and special needs. Other members include a Principal, a Support Teacher, and members of the Student Support team. Others may be invited to join the Special Needs Working Party as the need for their expertise and advice arises.
For more information about the Special Needs Working Party contact
Cath Garrett-Jones, Parent Liaison & Resources Officer
Ph: 4979 1303  Fax: 4965 4208 Email: pnf_federation@mn.catholic.edu.au

Who can attend Special Needs Education/Support Days?
ALL PARENTS who have children within the Catholic Schools system, and also their family, friends and caregivers.

What constitutes “special needs”?
The term “special needs” was used in an attempt to give as broad a name as possible. Some students may have a recognisable and long-term need/s in some areas, and may be supported by integration funding dependent on meeting government eligibility criteria. Other students may experience passing times of “special needs” when, eg, learning difficulties occur, when behaviour presents a challenge or when emotional distress, for whatever reason, takes over their lives. Special need is NOT determined by whether the child receives integration/support funding.

Where are Special Needs Education Days held?
Newcastle days are generally held at the Catholic Schools Office in Hunter Street West. Guest speakers also present in the Taree-Forster cluster, and the Upper Hunter when possible to arrange. Minimum numbers may be set by presenters.

What topics are covered?
Parents, through surveying, have determined the topics covered, including:
• support services in schools
• managing difficult behaviours
• issues in relating with siblings
• building self–esteem
• sexual development
• assistance with literacy skills

When are the Education/Support days held?
Once per term, varying between daytime and evening. Parents are free to arrive and depart as it suits them. There are no restrictions placed on participation.

What is the cost?
There is no cost to participate. However, a donation to cover the costs of morning tea and lunch may be sought.

Remember…
Student Support is part of the Teaching & Learning Service Area of the Catholic Schools Office. Counselling and special education services are available. Staff provide a service to schools, teachers, parents and students in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle. There are also school based Learning Support Teachers and Coordinators available at some schools. More information about student support services can be made at the Catholic Schools Office on 4979 1247 or through the school.

Where can you obtain information or newsletter on the “Special Needs” activities?
• The Parent Liaison & Resource Officer: Phone: 4979 1303  e-mail: pnf_federation@mn.catholic.edu.au
• Student Support Unit Catholic Schools Office  Phone: 4979 1247
• School Learning Support personnel
• Principal or school newsletter