19th December 2013

Education and Science Committee

Committee Secretariat  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington 6160

Submission on the

Inquiry into engaging parents in the education of their children

To the Education and Science Committee

Submission from Disabled Persons Assembly (DPA) Inc.

DPA Inc. wish to appear before the Committee to speak to our submission.

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**About DPA New Zealand Inc.**

DPA Inc. (New Zealand) is the national assembly and collective voice of disabled New Zealanders.

DPA Inc. is a Disabled Person’s Organisation (DPO), meaning it is governed by disabled people and the organisation’s main purpose is to articulate the aspirations of its members.

DPA has some 900 individual members who have disabilities themselves or are the parent, or guardian of a disabled person, and some 200 corporate members who represent or deliver services to disabled people. [DPA members](http://www.dpa.org.nz/our-organisation/our-members) form a network of regional assemblies to debate local and national issues.

DPA’s functions include:

* to promote the interests and wellbeing of all disabled people regardless of age, for our whole lives
* to engage with disabled people, DPOs and our valued allies, with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) being the driver of our work
* to progress the CRPD in Aotearoa New Zealand.

**UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

Government accountability

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) provides the mandate for disabled people to hold the Government to account on ensuring the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by disabled people.

Partnership with DPOs

The implementation of the CRPD depends on a partnership between DPOs and the Government. This is highlighted in Article 4.3 which says governments shall consult closely with and actively involve disabled people, including disabled children, through their representative organisations.[[1]](#endnote-1) This partnership goes beyond just consulting with disabled people.

CRPD is the minimum standard

DPA uphold the CRPD as the minimum standard for our participation in society.

CRPD on engaging parents in the education of their children

Aspects of the CRPD that are particularly relevant to this inquiry include:

1. The CRPD’s General Principles:

* Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons
* Non-discrimination
* Full and effective participation and inclusion in society
* Respect for difference and acceptance of disabled people as part of human diversity and humanity
* Equality of opportunity
* Accessibility
* Equality between men and women
* Respect for the evolving capacities of disabled children and respect for the right of disabled children to preserve their identities. [[2]](#endnote-2)

1. Governments are required to take all necessary measures to ensure disabled children have full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children.[[3]](#endnote-3)
2. Governments are to take effective and appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against disabled people in all matters relating to family and parenthood.[[4]](#endnote-4)
3. Government’s must ensure the right to education for disabled people including providing an inclusive education system directed to:

* The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights[[5]](#endnote-5)
* The development by disabled people of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential[[6]](#endnote-6)
* Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.[[7]](#endnote-7)

**DPA comments on this inquiry**

1. DPA welcomes this inquiry

DPA welcomes this inquiry into engaging parents in the education of their children, and the opportunity to provide input to this important issue. DPA’s comments in this submission seek to assist the Education and Science Committee’s inquiry to ensure consistency with, and implementation of, the CRPD.

1. Disabled parents, caregivers and family members

Disabled parents, caregivers and family members must be able to be involved in the education of their children without discrimination and on an equal basis with non-disabled parents, caregivers and family members. Disabled parents want to be parents, and to do all the things that parents do.

1. Parents, caregivers and family members of disabled children

The parents, caregivers and family members of disabled children must be fully involved in the education of their children without discrimination and without prejudice or undue stress.

1. Creating a well-adjusted education system

Within the current education system there are barriers that limit or exclude disabled parents/caregivers and family member’s participation in the education of their children. Examples of these barriers include:

* Parents who are blind or visually impaired may require school communications (newsletters, children’s reports, etc) in alternative formats, such as non-PDF electronic formats or Braille
* Deaf parents may be unable to stand for election to their child’s school Board of Trustees due to a lack of funding for New Zealand Sign Language interpreters
* All school buildings and grounds need to be accessible for *both* disabled students *and* disabled parents/caregivers/grandparents
* School websites need to be accessible to disabled people
* collaborating with and building relationships with disabled people, in order to enable their participation in decisions that affect them (such as decisions regarding the education of their children), often lacks a clear approach[[8]](#endnote-8)
* Parents of disabled children experience high levels of discrimination in matters to do with enrolment, access to the curriculum and participation in school life[[9]](#endnote-9)
* The main category of complaint about government activity to the Human Rights Commission is around matters of disability in the education system.[[10]](#endnote-10)

1. Elements of an effective strategy for engaging parents, families, whanau, aiga, and communities in education

Disabled parents want to be parents, and to do all the things that parents do.

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| **Recommendation**  DPA recommends that the following elements be included to ensure such a strategy can be effective in engaging disabled people:   * recognize that the diversity of parents includes *disabled parents* * enable disabled parents, caregivers and family members to engage in the education of their children, including by ensuring the provision of reasonable accommodations (such as alternative formats, NZSL interpreters) * require school environments (buildings, grounds) and websites be actively and progressively made fully accessible to enable disabled parents, caregivers and family members to engage in their children’s school * recognize the important role schools play in engaging with all people and thus promoting the shift to a whole new attitude to disability to one that highly values disabled people as part of the rich fabric of human diversity, including for example providing a welcoming environment to disabled parents and parents of disabled children. |

Thank you for considering DPA’s submission.

Sincerely



Rachel Noble

Chief Executive

1. **Endnotes**

   United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 4.3 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 3 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 7.1 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 23.1 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24.1(a) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24.1(b) [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24.2(e) [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Human Rights Commission (2010) *Making Disability Rights Real.* P.17 (Word doc.) [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. IHC Education Complaint. Accessed on 18/12/2013 at <http://www.ihc.org.nz/campaigns/education/education-complaint/> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Human Rights Commission (2010) *Making Disability Rights Real.* P.19 (Word doc.) [↑](#endnote-ref-10)