

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Sunday, 17 April 2016 11:35 AM  
**To:** FCDC  
**Subject:** Autism Spectrum Inquiry

My name is Mrs Michele Maes

[REDACTED] I confirm that I do not need the contents of this email to be kept confidential.

On reading about the investigation into how the Victorian Government is handling the issue of Autism, I would like to submit the following:-

A family with a young autistic son were living in far North Queensland and decided it was time to come back to Victoria to be closer to family, friends and what they thought would be either an equally as good if not better education for their son.

At this time the young boy had been fully intergrated into a North Queensland primary school. This started with part time attendance between a special school and the primary school in prep and then five days a week for grades one and two with a full time aide at the primary school. The teachers and special needs teachers were exceptional in their duties to ensure that every effort was made to ensure that the intergration went smoothly and any problems were attended to immediately. For this the family were very grateful.

Prior to making a final decision regarding their move back to Victoria many telephone conversations were held with the principal at the Victorian school as the special aide teacher was on extended sick leave. It was advised that the child needed to undergo specific tests before he could be assessed for the Victoria school. This was done by the parents at a cost of over \$400-00 and these reports were provided to the principal.

After being assured by the principal and having it confirmed that the child could attend the school the family took the relevant steps to return to Victoria.

I wish to point out that all the phone calls, tests etc were not something that was done in five minutes, in fact many hours were spent ensuring that the decisions made would be beneficial to their son. This whole process took approximately six months.

Now, welcome to Victoria...

On returning to Victoria and attending the school to discuss any further needs, the family were told that some of the staff members including the principal were no longer at the school. Furthermore, they were advised that the tests requested by the previous principal were not acceptable in Victoria and all the tests would have to be done again at their expense. Again in excess of \$400-00.

To be blunt, the overall message to the parents was that it was too hard and they (the school representatives) did not want to deal with this sort of situation. Funny how in Queensland the transition was completed into full time primary school with very few problems yet in Victoria it was just too hard.

I don't think you could even imagine how this family was feeling by now, not only had the tests been redone but they were advised that the child only qualified for five hours per week of assistance and this five hours was to be split between a special school and the primary school until full intergration occurred. So what was meant to be an easy transition had turned into a nightmare.

The child was now subject to the following:-

Monday and Tuesday

A bus trip (with his sister) with pick up from opposite the driveway of their residence to the primary school which took approximately 40 minutes each way.

Wednesday

A 30 minute car trip to a different school at the same country town as the primary school bus did not go near this second school.

Thursday and Friday

A car trip of 30 minutes and then a bus trip of 50 minutes to attend another special school which the child does not like as he knows it is different to the primary school and that is where he wants to be. (again the bus that passes their residence does not get into the township in time to connect with the special school bus)

Also, it was required that the child wear three different uniforms for these schools. The added expense this family endured in relation to tests, uniforms, additional petrol etc were draining to say the least.

After less than six months, the child had been moved from the primary school to the special school on a full time basis, much to the relief of the primary school representatives.

This now meant a sixty minute return trip every morning and every afternoon for the mother and an additional fifty minute trip twice a day for the child.

This was an eight year old child we are talking about and the decision makers should hang their heads in shame at this treatment.

Move on two and a half years and the child is still attending the special school which in many ways has been beneficial and many other ways not so beneficial. The most obvious thing is that the child desperately wants to be at a main stream school as he is fully aware of the difference in the schools.

Just to add something else to the pot, the mother of the child was diagnosed and had surgery for cancer last year and has had further surgery this year for a secondary cancer. During this time she was taking the child to the bus stop, going to chemotherapy after drop off, then going home till the afternoon pick up time and then driving back into the bus stop in the afternoon for pick up. Plus the fact that numerous tests, xrays, scans and specialist appointments all had to be fitted in between these times. Imagine the difference it would have made/make if the child could just get a bus from outside the home every day.

It is incredible that the child had a full time aide available in Queensland and yet in Victoria only qualifies for one hour per day. It just screams of total neglect in regards to any assistance available in this state.

I am sure this is only one of many letters you will receive will do more than placing all these problems in the too hard basket, as was done in this families case.

Finally, I would like to point out that this is the fourth attempt in submitting these details to you, as each time I completed the form on your website I got to the very end and a notation came up advising that the system was down and the information was deleted. Even when I saved it, on checking the form it was returned to a blank document. Wonder how many people just gave up due to this error.