

## Special Provisions Alert

Many readers will be aware that the Board of Studies makes special provision for students with a physical or psychological disability which may disadvantage them in examination situations. The range of disabilities which may be considered is extensive, but examples would include such things as

- Diabetes, where the student may need to eat regularly, to visit the toilet frequently or to test blood sugar levels
- Dyslexia, where an examination paper printed on a particular coloured paper may assist
- Chronic fatigue, where rest breaks may be required
- Chronically bad hand writing, where use of a personal computer or writer may assist
- Panic attacks, where environmental changes and access to medication may help.

Applications to the Board of Studies for appropriate provisions for particular conditions require substantial documentation as evidence, and considerable input from the School. Once submitted, they are reviewed and determined by an expert panel engaged by the Board. Hence, the process must begin early, so that the Board has the time to deal properly with the many thousands of applications which are received each year.

Students in Year 12, who had special provisions approved for the School Certificate, **must make a new application for the Higher School Certificate.**

Applications for special provisions for the 2008 HSC examinations and School Certificate Tests must reach the Board **by Friday 10 April**. Students who wish to make applications should thus begin the process *immediately* if they have not already done so. A great deal of evidence is required, both from appropriate professionals, and from within the School, all of which takes a good deal of time to garner.

Application forms may be obtained either from Mrs O'Bree in the TESS Department (9581 6035) or Mrs Wetton, in my office (9581 6135). While a substantial set of instructions accompanies the form, parents who need assistance with the form should call Mrs O'Bree in the first instance.

I do hasten to point out that, when conditions develop or are identified after 10 April, the Board is very accommodating in dealing with late applications, even up until the morning of the exam!. For students with known conditions, however, it is important that they realise that they may disadvantage themselves if they do not allow the Board sufficient time to deal properly with their application.

**IB students** should note that the procedures for the IB are significantly different and they should consult Mr Goetze, the Director of the IB, for information as soon as possible.

### **School Internal Provisions**

To the extent that resources allow, the School attempts to mirror the Board's provisions internally for boys in Years 7-9. Application forms may be obtained from Mrs O'Bree.

It is important that parents and boys realise that the granting of a provision by the School does not pre-empt any decision which may later be made by the Board of Studies.

### **Recent Press Commentary**

It concerned me to see during December and January, in both major Sydney newspapers, stories which alleged that Independent schools were somehow "rotting the system" with respect to the number of their students who were granted special provisions for the Higher School Certificate. The allegation was that such provisions gave the recipients an unfair advantage over other students.

Such reports can only be described as scurrilous, and are part of a concerted attack on Independent schools by some elements.

Trinity parents should be aware of three things. First, the Board does not grant special provisions lightly and requires the most rigorous medical and professional evidence to convince its panel of experts that the student is indeed at a disadvantage. Second, there is a considerable amount of work and later inconvenience (and sometimes expense) for the schools involved, into which they do not enter lightly. Third, it is difficult to see how most (not all) special provisions might constitute a rort or somehow unfairly advantage the student. Having your exam paper printed on yellow or green paper to help your dyslexia, being granted permission to check your blood sugar levels and eat

snacks to deal with a diabetic condition, or being supervised in a smaller group because of a medical or psychological condition surely cannot seriously be posited as unfairly roting the system!

In fact, Independent schools are also frequently accused of not carrying their fair share of students with disabilities. The number of successful applications for special provisions surely disproves this allegation because it demonstrates that many Independent school students do indeed have provable forms of disadvantage. Further, it demonstrates that the staff of Independent schools are perhaps more willing to work with the students and their families to shepherd their applications through to a successful conclusion than their colleagues in other sectors.

To me, rather than a criticism by which Independent schools should be embarrassed, these press reports actually, and unintentionally, vindicate Independent schools of allegations of discriminatory enrolment practices, while demonstrating one of the many value-adds that students and their parents gain from their investment in an Independent school education.

Alan Harper  
Director of Studies