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## **Students with Disabilities Often Bullied and Forgotten**

Young people with disabilities are struggling to access and participate in education free from bullying and discrimination, according to a survey undertaken by the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC).

Five years ago the Federal Government implemented the *Disability Standards for Education*, which were designed to ensure that students with disabilities could access education equally to students who are not affected by disability.

However, AYAC's national survey of nearly 400 young people and parents reveals that, despite the Standards, students with disabilities still face victimisation and harassment throughout the education system.

While the Federal Government's Disability Standards specifically aim to protect young people from bullying and harassment, over 61% of parents of students with disabilities said they did not know of any such systems in their child's school or university. Similarly, 54% of students with disabilities were not confident that their school or university would take the right action in the case of bullying or discrimination.

"I've been bullied constantly at uni, to the point where I'm totally isolated and stigmatised by other students and I feel as if I'm just not good enough to study anymore. It's been one of the worst experiences of my life," said one student.

41% of students with a disability said they did not know how to make a complaint - or who to make a complaint to - regarding their education. Students and parents who had complained to their school about discrimination said the process could be extremely stressful.

"The survey findings reveal a startling lack of support for students with disabilities, and highlight the fact that many education providers are failing to uphold the rights of these young people", AYAC's Executive Director, Andrew Cummings, said.

"There is an urgent need for stronger mechanisms to enforce the Disability Standards. The current system needs to be improved so that compliance with the Standards is compulsory, and does not rely on young people or their parents making a complaint before it is set in place" he said.

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