

I am a parent of a 'twice-exceptional' 15-year-old child. That is a child that is both gifted intellectually and with learning challenges including Sensory Processing Disorder, Dyspraxia, Autism Spectrum Disorder and ADHD.

As a young child, we had some confusing challenges, on one hand, he was clearly bright, preferring inquisitive conversations with adults rather than playing with his peers. By 5, we knew that as he struggled with simple tasks like being able to pick up his shoes and put them on. Later he was identified as gifted, entered the state PEAC and GATE academic programs and was identified as in the 'superior range' via a full-scale IQ WPPSI test.

He has seen so many medical professionals; Occupational Therapists, Speech Pathologists, I can't keep track. His first Developmental Paediatrician advised that because she didn't think he had ASD (without conducting a proper assessment) and was bright that he didn't need assistance and instead referred me to parenting books for neurotypical children. This created more setbacks than anything else.

Later he was diagnosed as being on the spectrum by the Autism Association when he was already 12 years old. We lost valuable time due to the DP being either undertrained and/or so short of time that she didn't deem my child worthy of assistance.

But now that he is 14 and we have no access to a Developmental Paediatrician or Child Psychiatrist. Whilst he has NDIS funding it is virtually useless because there is a lack of available professionals such as Developmental Paediatricians or Clinical psychiatrists accepting new patients throughout Western Australia.

He has been on a waiting list for over three years with the Autism Association for social groups and other activities.

We have had to look to get services in Adelaide, and found professionals ready and available to take on new patients. Having to travel interstate to find a professional is unacceptable.

Beyond this schools are highly unprepared for students who are twice-exceptional or diagnosed with ASD, ADHD, Sensory processing disorder or dyspraxia. I suspect they are also unprepared for students with other developmental issues. My experience has been that most school principals, teachers and assistants have little, to no knowledge of these conditions and do not know how to support these children; often doing more harm than good.

Both the gifted and struggling students are being failed due to this systemic network of problems.

Our highly gifted children are not only floundering academically, but are suffering mentally from the sense of failure they get at knowing their comprehension is strong, but can't perform due to the lack of support and understanding.

Our children with disabilities are not being supported, when it is the most vulnerable- children and those with disabilities- that should be the most supported in our society.