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Media Release

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Sheed co-chairs inaugural Diverse Learners Focus Group

Independent Member for Shepparton District Suzanna Sheed co-chaired the first Diverse Learners Focus Group this week.

The group is made up of Shepparton district community stakeholders, including parent, teacher, medical, multicultural, and student representation.

“We want to explore options on what type of education model will suit diverse learners in mainstream education and bring it back to the students, teachers, and parents of Greater Shepparton Secondary College,” Ms Sheed said.

“As it stands, there are some students with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder who receive a level of financial support, others with the same characteristics but who are not diagnosed and therefore unfunded, and also students who may have some autistic characteristics.

“These young people can be described as diverse learners and face significant challenges in the mainstream education system.

“There needs to be much greater awareness of these young people’s needs with a range of individual plans and innovative learning programs put in place for them.

“Our small group was briefed by a member who had lived experienced of the effects of the lack of resources, understanding, and sometimes intolerance of the issues that he faced at school such as light or noise sensitivity.

“He found his own ways to cope with these issues, which involved moving to a dimly lit space and playing music through noise cancelling headphones to help him concentrate on his schoolwork. He explained to us how some situations can be too overwhelming to tolerate.

“There is still a significant lack of understanding of the needs of diverse learners across our community and while our teachers are more informed than the general public, there is still much to be done to create a learning friendly environment for these students.

“With all our secondary school students now on the one campus, the capacity to design innovative programs across the nine schools at Greater Shepparton Secondary College has never been better. The capacity to pool resources, undertake professional education and design spaces to ensure better educational outcomes must be a priority for this group and

we look forward to continuing to have further meetings and discussions to eventually achieve a model that will suit our students.

“Once a new model is widely supported by students, their families, and teachers, it can be adopted and amended as needed by the school with the ongoing support of the group. This will be an inclusive approach which will fit with government policy and enable us to seek any additional supports we need from government to implement it.”

ENDS

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