

Spotlight

Inclusive education: Teaching students with disability

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This Spotlight:

- ⚡ provides an overview of relevant standards and legislation that require an inclusive approach to the education of students with disability
- ⚡ unpacks strategies that teachers and schools/early childhood services can use to provide personalised learning and support, including strategies for building a culture of inclusion
- ⚡ shares current research indicating that focusing on inclusive education can lead to improved behaviour for all students and children
- ⚡ includes videos and fact sheets developed in partnership with Get Skilled Access to help you translate research into practice.

Introduction

Inclusion is a concept in education most often associated with minority groups and people who experience disability, but in fact, inclusion is about everyone. Inclusion is a human right (Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons 1975) a legal entitlement to all (*Commonwealth*

Disability Discrimination Act 1992) and a core pillar of educational policy (*Disability Standards for Education 2005*).

“Inclusive education means that all students are welcomed by their school in age-appropriate settings and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of school. Inclusive education is about how schools are developed and designed, including classrooms, programmes and activities so that all students learn and participate together” (DET 2015, p 2)

The following guiding principles, based on the Australian Disability Standards for Education (2005), underpin the Australian government’s guidance on planning personalised learning and support in schools:

1. All students can learn
2. Every child has a right to a high-quality education
3. Effective teachers provide engaging and rigorous learning experiences for all students
4. A safe and stimulating environment is integral to enabling students to explore and build on their talents and achieve relevant learning outcomes
5. For students with disability and additional learning needs, reasonable adjustments should be made where required (DET 2015, p. 3).

The priority of inclusion for all children is also explicit in the **Australian Professional Standards for Teachers** across a number of focus areas, in particular: *1.5 Differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities; 1.6 Strategies to support full participation of students with disability; and 4.1 Support student participation* (AITSL 2011).

The **Australian Curriculum** is an inclusive curriculum for all students:

Students with disability are entitled to rigorous, relevant and engaging learning opportunities drawn from age equivalent Australian Curriculum content on the same basis as students without disability (ACARA 2016).

Across Australia, states, territories and systems interpret and apply inclusive practices through the lens of their own curriculum, planning and reporting processes. At the national level, the annual **Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability** (NCCD 2020a) collects information about Australian school students who receive an adjustment to address disability. This data collection takes a strengths-based approach to supporting resource allocation for students with disability.

The *Disability Standards for Education* require that all Australian schools:

- ensure that students with disability are able to access and participate in education on the same basis as students without disability
- make or provide 'reasonable adjustments' for students where necessary to enable their access and participation

- provide reasonable adjustments in consultation with the student and/or their associates; for most students, this means their parents, guardians or carers.



<https://vimeo.com/481508664>

The NCCD asks schools to consider the needs of their students and to collect evidence of the level of adjustments they make to provide for their students' needs, as well as providing information about the broad categories of students' disabilities (physical, cognitive, sensory or social/emotional). This allows schools to better plan for and support teachers across the school to personalise learning for their students. Since 2018 the NCCD has helped the Australian Government distribute funding by using these data to inform the disability loading provided to schools.

According to the NCCD nearly one in five (19.9 per cent) school students across Australia received an adjustment due to disability in 2019 (DESE 2020). As such, it is clear that inclusive education and supporting students with disability in schools and classrooms is a priority for all educators in Australia. Students with disability are taught in a variety of contexts depending on the best interests of the student to ensure they can participate in a range of educational opportunities - specialist schools, specialist classes/units in mainstream schools and within mainstream classes in mainstream schools (Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability 2020). This *Spotlight* summarises principles of inclusion and the responsibilities of Australian teachers and school leaders in supporting full participation of students with disability in their schools. Rather than discussing specific types of disability, the focus in this *Spotlight* is on broad strategies aimed at meeting all students' learning needs.

Resource list 1

National resources on inclusion

National agencies provide helpful resources for schools, including detailed information on inclusion of students with disability and additional needs, and how to approach planning for inclusion.

AITSL Illustrations of Practice

Wrap around care supports learning

🔗 <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/wrap-around-care-supports-learning-illustration-of-practice>

Establishing a program inclusive of children with disability

🔗 <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/establishing-a-program-inclusive-of-children-with-disability-illustration-of-practice>

Supporting participation

🔗 <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/supporting-participation-illustration-of-practice>

Meeting the needs of students with a disability (Australian Curriculum)

The Australian Curriculum website provides information on planning for students with disability as well as links to Australian state and territory jurisdiction websites.

🔗 <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/student-diversity/meeting-the-needs-of-students-with-a-disability>

Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD)

The NCCD site provides an extensive set of resources for teachers about disability, including templates, video-based illustrations of practice, and case studies highlighting specific disabilities.

🔗 <https://www.nccd.edu.au/resources-and-tools>

Data on disability

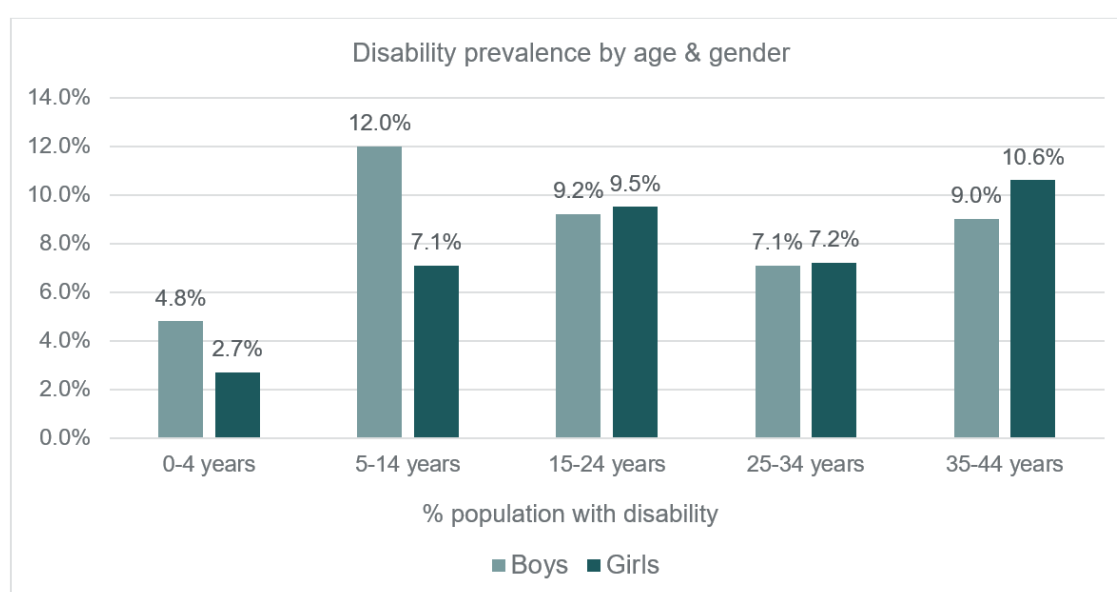
The *Disability Standards for Education 2005* includes seven criteria, ranging from “total or partial loss of a part of the body”, to “a disorder, illness or disease that affects the person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgement, or that results in disturbed behaviour” (p. 9).

In 2018, 7.7% of children under 15 were reported as having a disability, an increase from 6.9% in 2012 (ABS, 2019). The proportion of people living with a disability increases rapidly after the age of 45, although the incidence of autism and other specific types of disability declines (ABS, 2019).

Fluctuations in the prevalence of people with disability occurs from childhood to middle age (Figure 1).

The prevalence of disability in babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers (0-4 years old) is lowest of all ages at 3.7%. The proportion increases to 9.6% in school-aged children (5-14 years old) (ABS, 2019). There is a large gender difference in the school aged children, with 12% of boys and 7.1% of girls reported as having a disability (Figure 1). It is not clear the extent to which this sex difference reflects a social bias leading to increased likelihood of boys being diagnosed, or if there are sex-based differences in genetic susceptibility to neurodevelopmental disorders (Nowak & Jacquemont 2020).

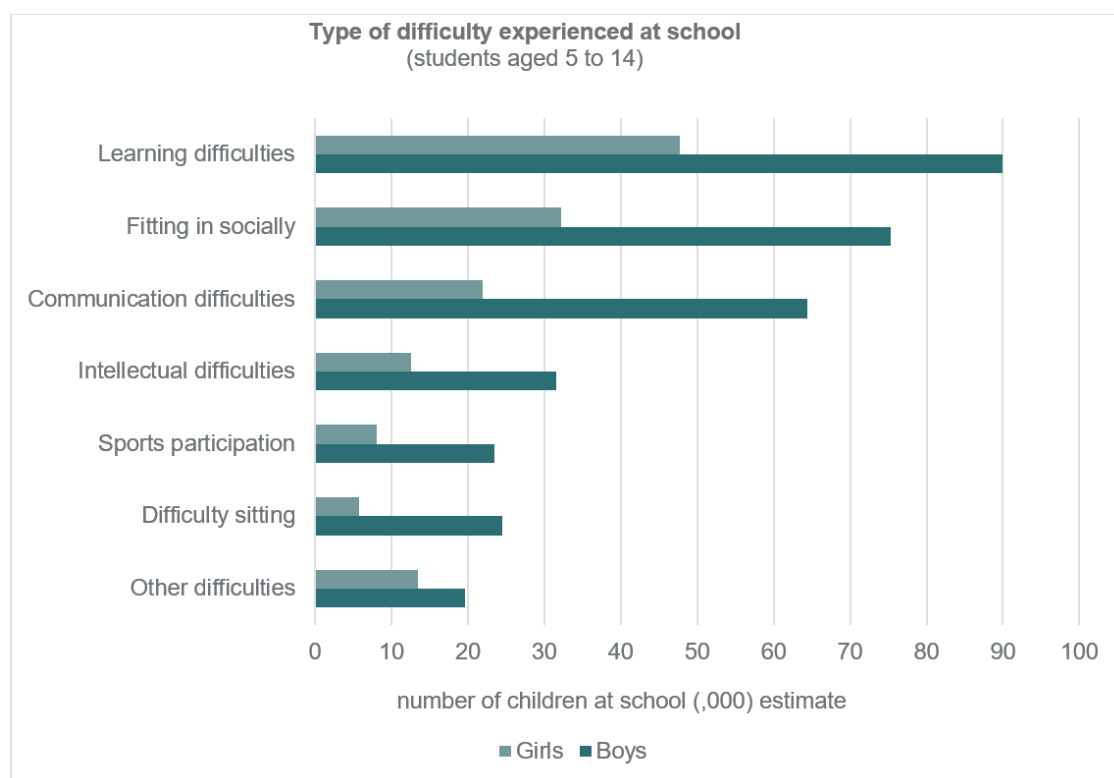
Figure 1: Disability prevalence by age group 0 – 44 years, 2018. Data source: Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings (ABS 2019)



Around one in twenty-two (4.5%) of children in Australia have an intellectual disability, other common types of disability effecting school children are sensory and speech disabilities (3.1%), psychosocial (2.7%), and physical (1.8%) (ABS, 2019). Of children with a disability who attend school, 86% attend mainstream schools, and of these 19% attend special classes within a mainstream school (AIHW 2019).

The most common type of difficulty students with disability face at school is learning difficulties (47,000 girls and 90,000 boys), followed by fitting in socially (32,000 girls, 75,000 boys) and communication difficulties (22,000 girls, 64,000 boys). Other difficulties, intellectual difficulties, difficulty in sports participation and difficulty sitting are also experienced by many students with disabilities (ranging from 6,000 to 24,500 students) (Figure 2).

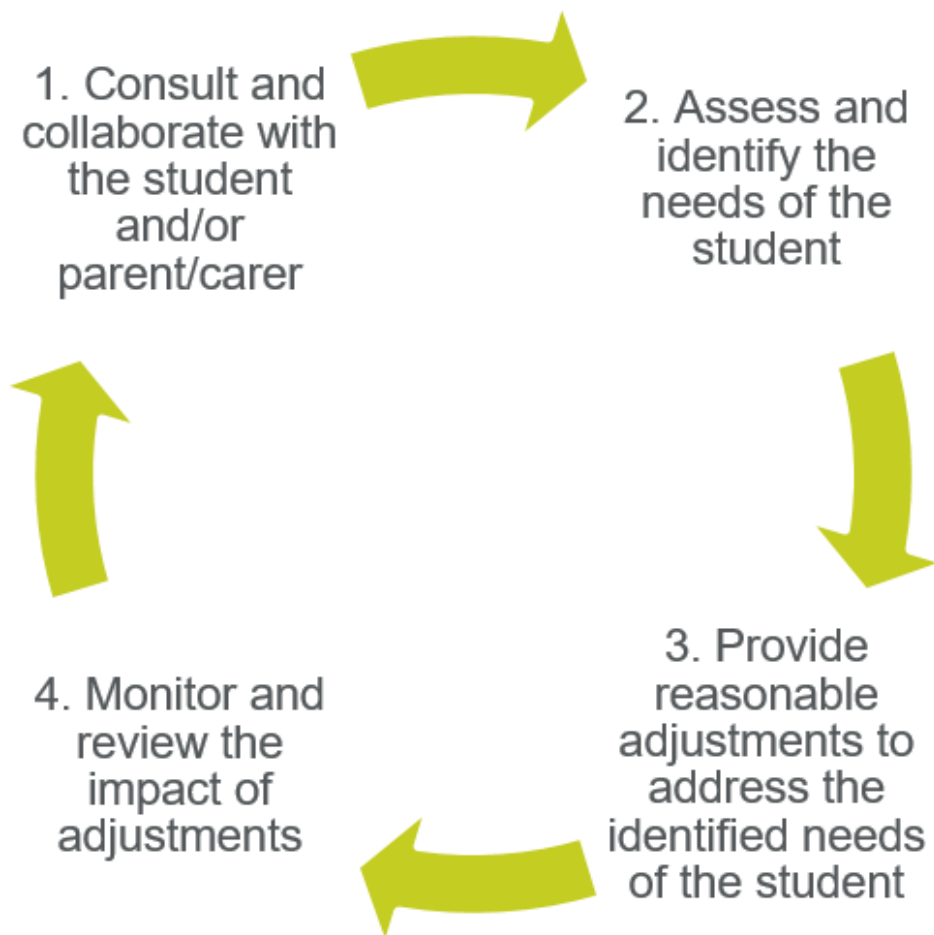
Figure 2: Type of difficulty experienced at school. Data source: Survey of Disability Ageing and Carers: Children with Disability. Table 8.1: Children aged 5-14 years with disability, living in households and attending school, Schooling restriction status, type of difficulty experienced 2018 (ABS 2019)



Personalised learning and support

The goal of inclusion is to develop processes of personalised learning and support so that students with disabilities can engage in learning and schooling in the same way as their age-peers. The following four-step process is a guide for developing personalised learning and support.

Figure 3: Personalised learning and support (NCCD 2020b)



1. Consult and collaborate

Getting to know their students is a key goal for teachers, one that involves discovering students' backgrounds, strengths, interests and goals. When teaching a student with a disability, this is a collaborative venture requiring close consultation with students, their family, and often a wider support team. Establishing and maintaining the best support for the student is a role shared by the class teacher and their school leader.

Resource list 2

Resources for early childhood teachers

These factsheets and templates offer practical support for early childhood teachers to teach children with disabilities and embed practices related to Focus Areas 1.5 and 1.6 of the Teacher Standards. They were developed with AllPlay Learn™ (Deakin University).

Strategies for building teacher-child relationships

Review the strategies and scenario to help build secure, respectful and reciprocal teacher-child relationships.

[!\[\]\(1bb72542b566d372dac2c69a59629371_img.jpg\) Factsheet \(403KB | PDF\).](#)

Getting to Know the child

Develop a holistic picture of each child with this factsheet and accompanying observation templates.

[!\[\]\(5ebcf382a6ee952d6c5b8b948415801e_img.jpg\) Factsheet \(587KB | PDF\).](#)

[!\[\]\(71ceb62b681518c82e95d615e7265d66_img.jpg\) Observation Template \(75KB | DOCX\).](#)

[!\[\]\(e10773081adcaeab632f9dd4c8931cd5_img.jpg\) Third party observation template \(75KB | DOCX\).](#)

A **Student Support Group** (SSG) is ‘the team around the student’, which may consist of the students’ parents/caregivers, their teacher and the teacher’s aide/s, a school leader or coordinator responsible for students with additional needs across the school. Any allied health professionals who have a therapeutic relationship with the student could also be included, as well as the student themselves where their communication needs and maturity allow it. This group may meet regularly to discuss the needs of the student as they evolve over the course of their education, including needs and learning goals – a personalised plan resulting from these discussions may then be reviewed regularly. Student support group meetings are usually initiated by the school although parents are also able to instigate these meetings whenever there are changes in a student’s needs that are likely to impact their learning. The SSG may be named differently depending on the jurisdiction within Australia.

2. Assess and identify the needs of the student

Though teachers are neither qualified nor expected to diagnose disability, they are in a position to recognise a student who is not learning as expected, and to discuss their observations with school leaders and the student’s family. In most cases, students with disabilities will require assessment by a paediatrician and/or allied health professional (psychologist, physiotherapist, specialist educator, or speech or occupational therapist) to support identification of their disability. Where a student’s learning needs were picked up by parents, maternal child health nurses and early childhood educators prior to schooling, such assessments may have already been completed. If the student receives support through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), schools and families may share some of the information from that assessment to determine the student’s needs at school.

Historically, the language of school-based processes has tended to focus on students’ deficits and encouraged parents/carers and teachers to problematise students’ needs (Mitchell 2015). The introduction of the NCCD and more inclusive practices has encouraged a shift towards assessment of student needs in terms of the curriculum. In order to assess student educational needs in a consistent way, some states provide a specific assessment system that is formative in nature and directly informs the teaching of students with additional needs. For students transitioning to Foundation^[1], their learning needs may be identified through diagnostic assessments^[2] given to all students. Other assessment strategies can also be used including provision of work samples and teacher observation.



<https://vimeo.com/481507739>

Resource list 3

Tools for assessing and identifying needs of students

The following list describes a number of the state-based tools available to help teachers assess the needs of students with additional needs.

Abilities Based Learning and Education Support (ABLES)

ABLES is an online assessment and reporting suite used in Victoria and South Australia that allows educators to link student capabilities to a learning progression and the Victorian Curriculum in the areas of English: Speaking and listening, English: Reading and writing; as well as Personal and social capability which includes self-awareness and the development of basic skills related to attention, memory and becoming an independent learner. The tool provides links to subsequent teaching strategies. There is an early years supplement, Early ABLES.

🔗 <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/learningneeds/Pages/ables.aspx>

Abilities Based Learning Education, Western Australia (ABLEWA)

ABLES was adapted for Western Australian teachers by the School Curriculum and Standards Authority and rebadged as ABLEWA. Teachers can apply the assessment tool to identify students' readiness to learn across seven learning domains, including a section specifically for students on the autism spectrum.

🔗 <https://k10outline.scsa.wa.edu.au/home/resources/ablewa>

ACT Student Centred Appraisal of Need

This booklet for ACT parents, carers, school principals and staff is used to inform a consistent approach in determining the educational needs of individual students in terms of access and participation. It uses a set of descriptors divided into ten areas of educational need.

🔗 https://www.education.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/20127/Student-Centred-Appraisal-of-Need-Booklet.pdf

Personalised Learning and Support Signposting Tool (PLASST)

An optional web-based tool to assist NSW Government school teachers identify the functional educational needs of students who may benefit from personalised learning and support.

🔗 <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/disability-learning-and-support/resources/plasst>

Individual Education Plans (IEPs) ^[3] may be used to describe personalised learning and support strategies including adjustments that are put in place for students with additional needs including disabilities. In the Australian context, IEPs are called by different names across different jurisdictions but they are all essentially a personalised plan for learning that records students' progress against goals (Varvisotis et al. 2017).

IEPs can be made by the SSG where the goals and strategies for student learning are negotiated collaboratively. Teachers may record SMART ^[4] goals as agreed during the SSG meeting and report against these goals. IEPs can then be reviewed at regular intervals to evaluate the effectiveness of different strategies to ensure the teacher, family and student are satisfied with student progress. IEPs may describe student academic goals and can include goals related to health, interpersonal skills, self-care, mobility, behaviour and communication, depending on what the SSG prioritise for each student. The IEP can also incorporate information from any academic assessments conducted by teachers or other members of the SSG which can inform the goals developed.

Each state and territory in Australia has a specified process for implementing consultation and developing personalised plans. IEPs are compulsory for students with disability in some states (e.g., Victoria) but not in others (e.g., NSW) and regulations vary across systems. School leaders should make sure they are aware of the requirements within their particular system and jurisdiction. Teachers require support from school leadership to develop IEPs and conduct SSGs, including time, dedicating space and release of relevant staff for these meetings and subsequent planning.

3. Provide personalised adjustments

Adjustments are “**actions taken to enable a student with disability to access and participate in education on the same basis as other students. Adjustments reflect the assessed individual needs of the student**” (NCCD 2020a). Adjustments may be planned by the student's

support group and can be made at the whole-school level, in the classroom and at an individual student level. Adjustments will vary based on the assessed needs of the student, the resourcing and the environment of the school.

In providing an adjustment, schools assess the functional impact of the student's disability in relation to education. This includes the impact on communication, mobility, curriculum access, personal care and social participation. Other areas that might be considered for some students are safety, motor development, emotional wellbeing, sensory needs and transitions (NCCD 2020a).

Effective teaching that accommodates personalised adjustments is aided by careful planning. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is one approach to planning for inclusive, personalised learning that aims to give all students an equal opportunity to succeed (Hall, Meyer & Rose 2012). The approach offers flexibility in the ways students access material, engage with it and show what they know.

Students with disabilities usually require alternative ways to access learning materials or activities. Applying UDL can help teachers plan in a way that allows students to perform a wide range of activities that ensures all students can understand the demands of the learning tasks and demonstrate their learning.

Universal Design for Learning

The Universal Design for Learning framework supports teachers to develop lesson plans and assessments that accommodate all learners. It is based on three main principles:

- **Engagement:** Look for multiple ways to motivate students. Provide choices and give assignments that are relevant to their lives to sustain students' interest.
- **Representation:** Offer information in more than one format. Lots of educational resources are primarily visual but if teachers provide a mix of formats - text, audio, video and hands-on learning - it gives all students a chance to access the material in whichever way is best suited to their needs.
- **Action and expression:** Provide students more than one way to interact with the material and to show what they learn. For example, students choose between taking a pencil-and-paper test, giving an oral presentation or making a movie.

🔗 <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>

Watch: Using universal design principles to support every student

This webinar hosted by Learning Difficulties Australia includes in-depth worked examples by Dr. Kate deBruin of how to identify potential barriers and appropriate adjustments.

🔗 <https://youtu.be/W26pzgozUxY?t=1114>

4. Monitor and review the impact of adjustments

For students with a disability, the process of continually monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of personalised learning support is important in order to “assess the progress of learning within the context of curriculum areas and find solutions to enhance the trajectory of learning of each student, ideally based on a strength-based approach” (Bowles et al 2016, p. 21).

A schoolwide framework used in many contexts to facilitate the monitoring and reviewing process for students with persistent learning difficulties and disabilities is Response to Intervention (RTI). The RTI process focuses on the relationship between teaching methods, effectiveness and student outcomes. Teachers assess how well students respond to initial instruction (primary level of intervention – Table 1), then make changes to instruction to achieve the students’ goals and best respond to their learning needs (Hughes & Dexter 2011). This may involve the provision of more personalised support if a student is struggling with a particular skill or lesson. RTI is characterised by a three-tier model of school supports centred in research-based academic and/or behavioural interventions, targeted to the differing needs of students. These tiers align to the first three levels used in the NCCD as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Mapping of RTI and NCCD levels of adjustment

Instruction / Intervention	RTI Tier	Target student group	<u>NCCD levels of adjustment</u>
Universal high-quality instruction, screening, and group interventions available to every student in the class	Tier 1	Primary level of intervention - All students	Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice
Targeted interventions that are delivered to small groups, for a specific purpose, over a defined period of time, with time sensitive targets	Tier 2	Secondary level of intervention – around 15% of students considered to require additional supports	Supplementary Adjustments
Intensive interventions and/or comprehensive evaluation, often delivered 1:1 or 1:2, over an extended period, possibly for the entire length of schooling	Tier 3	Tertiary level of intervention – around 5% of students receiving intensive, personalised supports	Substantial Adjustments
Intensive, individualised instruction or support in a highly structured or specialised manner for all courses and curricula, activities and assessments, enabling access to learning through specialised equipment, highly modified classroom and/or school environments, extensive support from specialist staff.			Extensive Adjustments

Most states and territories use this model in some form, some applying interventions targeting student behaviour, and others taking a broader view of RTI as a framework to address student learning in academic, behavioural and social-emotional domains (Stoiber & Gettinger 2016).

By monitoring and tracking learning progress, teachers shift the focus of personalised learning and support toward the delivery and evaluation of instruction, and away from the provision of resources and support based solely on diagnosis or classification of disability.

Teaching practices

The responsibility for educating a student with disability is one shared by the student's teachers, school and support systems. As part of implementing agreed plans and adjustments teachers are involved in the granular, day-to-day cycle of planning, teaching and monitoring their student's progress. Since students come to the classroom with a diverse range of learning needs, teachers need a rich set of strategies to draw upon to meet these needs. The following set of strategies can be used to support delivery and instruction for students with disability.

Physical adjustments

A student with limited mobility may require specialised furniture and may require specialised tools for writing or communicating their learning if they cannot hold a pencil or type easily. Similarly, a student with visual impairments may require a slope board, materials with enlarged text and textured or physical objects to hold and feel to help them learn about a specific topic or concept. Other strategies include:

- adjusting the physical or virtual classroom space
- using some form of adaptive or assistive technology, or sign language
- preparing modified material, with content that has alternative visual and auditory elements.

Learning difficulties

Teaching strategies that prove effective for students with intellectual restrictions or learning difficulties are in fact strategies that are effective for all students. For example, teachers may work with smaller groups or even one-on-one to enable specific targets to be set for each student, to deliver explicit instruction, and provide plenty of drill and practice for foundational concepts.

As a guide, some recommended practices include:

- direct teaching of skills, and practice to establish these skills
- frequent questions to stimulate thinking and check for understanding
- appropriate pacing and sequencing of lessons
- concepts that are developmentally appropriate
- use of real-life problems (Westwood 2017).

In a whole class setting, examples of adjustments that some students may need include the use of aids such as:

- concrete materials, for example counters when doing arithmetic
- computer or calculator to check results
- pictorial or textured charts to aid communication
- peer tutoring
- additional time to complete a test.

Social and practical skills

Some students may also require support to develop social skills and there are many strategies available to assist teachers to guide students in this area. For example, task analysis is a useful strategy for teaching students to do things like eat their lunch in the playground, complete the morning arrival routine, or complete and turn in assignments. Teachers can use task analysis to break procedural tasks into a sequence of logical smaller steps or actions for students to learn. Watching a demonstration of the task and documenting the steps also helps students recognise what is expected in specific situations (Pratt & Steward 2020).

Video modelling is another strategy that can be used to teach practical skills and increase positive behaviours. It is a teaching method where an individual watches a video of someone completing an activity and imitates the activity themselves. Teachers can use a task analysis for the skill being targeted and record someone performing the task based on the task analysis. The learner watches the video and then performs the task with least to most prompting. This strategy works best if the videos can be played on portable devices so they can be viewed immediately preceding the task.

Classroom management

Despite evidence that disciplinary and punitive approaches to managing behaviour for students with disability is outmoded (Zaglas 2020), these students experience higher rates of suspension and expulsion from school than students without disability (*Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability* 2019, p. 3). This suggests management of behaviour is a challenge for schools. Effective teaching practice for students who have difficulty with self-regulation include the:

- provision of structure and predictability
- frequent reinforcement of appropriate behaviour
- praise given to students for on-task behaviour and preparedness
- use of clear, simple instructions that describe what students need to do.

It is important to provide appropriate learning opportunities at the student's developmental level to ensure that they can achieve and succeed and thus remain engaged with their learning. Some strategies teachers can use to help minimise students' feelings of frustration include:

- break large tasks down into smaller steps

- use visual signals to support instructions about “what to do and how to do it”
- follow tasks with which the student struggles with a preferred activity
- give students opportunities to choose activities, ensuring some choices involve preferred tasks or materials and settings.

A whole school focus on behaviour can enhance the overall emotional climate of the school for the better. Schools that use prevention programs that establish schoolwide rules and expectations related to student and teachers’ behaviour can improve the social norms across classroom settings (Bradshaw et al. 2009; Sugai & Horner 2006). This not only reduces students’ disruptive behaviours and suspensions (Bradshaw, Waasdorp & Leaf 2012), but positively influences the way teachers view their students’ behaviour (O’Brennan et al. 2014; Freeman et al. 2016).

Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports

An increasingly used prevention model, *Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports* (PBIS) has been shown to significantly improve staff members’ perceptions of school climate, as well as reducing students’ disruptive behaviours and suspensions (Bradshaw et al. 2009, 2012). Also known as School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) ^[5] it uses a three-tier intervention model to address school-wide needs for connectedness among students, teachers, and administrators, and also provides specific behaviour management skills to staff that can help reform antisocial behavioural norms within the classroom and across different contexts.

School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support

The School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support approach integrates planning and monitoring through a multi-tiered support structure based on Response to Intervention.

- Tier 1 primary prevention: supports for all students, staff and settings
- Tier 2 secondary prevention: additional specialised group systems for students with at-risk behaviour
- Tier 3 tertiary prevention: specialised, individualised systems for students with high-risk behaviour, provided in addition to primary and secondary prevention

Key features of the approach

- Establish a common philosophy and purpose
- Establish leadership and school-wide support for implementation
- Clearly define a set of expected behaviours that are positively stated and are identified and displayed in different school settings
- Establish procedures for teaching and practising expected behaviours
- Implement a continuum of procedures to encourage expected behaviours (awards and privileges)
- Develop a continuum of procedures to discourage inappropriate behaviour with specific and understood procedures in response to behavioural infractions

- Use procedures for record-keeping, decision making and ongoing monitoring by collecting and reporting on behavioural data
- Support staff to use effective classroom practices by establishing systems to support staff to adopt evidence-based instructional practices (DET VIC 2020)

Functional Behaviour Assessment

Functional behaviour assessment (FBA) is a systematic set of strategies that is used to determine the underlying function or purpose of a behaviour, so that an effective intervention plan can be developed. FBA consists of describing the interfering or problem behaviour, identifying events that influence the behaviour, developing a theory about the function of the behaviour, and testing the theory. It acknowledges that student behaviour occurs in response to a mixture of biological, psychological and social conditions that may not be immediately obvious. To conduct a Functional Behaviour Assessment teachers note:

- The form of the behaviour in detail: What is the student actually doing?
- The context of behaviour including the environmental setting, the personal circumstances that influence a student: Where does the behaviour occur and what happens immediately before and after?
- The function of the behaviour: What does the student avoid or gain from undertaking the behaviour? (NSW DoE 2019)

The 'function' of the behaviour may have tangible, sensory and/or psychological elements. Identifying these pieces of key functions allows teachers to design strategies and interventions that improve the student behaviour by meeting their needs in more prosocial ways.

Guided Functional Behaviour Assessment Tool

This tool from the Queensland Government's Autism Hub and Reading Centre is designed to help teachers understand, effectively respond to and prevent frequent minor behaviours. It leads to a wealth of further practical resources and strategies.

🔗 <https://ahrc.eq.edu.au/services/fba-tool>

Building a culture of inclusion

Evidence from a variety of sources continue to demonstrate that students with disability (and their families) face exclusion, and in some cases, victimisation in Australian schools. For example, in an Australian survey conducted in 2016, over 70% of families of a student with disability reported

experiencing gatekeeping or restrictive practices in schools (Poed, Cologon & Jackson 2020). It is concerning that physical, verbal and social victimisation of students with autism is described in responses to the Royal Commission *Education Issues paper* (2020, p. 2).

Similarly, in a survey^[6] conducted by Mission Australia more than twice the number of young people (aged 15-19) living with disability had experienced bullying in the past twelve months (43%) compared with respondents without disability (19%). This included physical bullying (e.g. hitting, punching) and cyberbullying (e.g. hurtful messages, pictures or comments) (Hall et al. 2020). For these young people, levels of concern about mental health, suicide, and bullying and emotional abuse were higher when compared with respondents who did not identify as living with a disability. This survey also highlights that young people with disability are experts in their own lives and needs. When asked about post-school plans, young people living with disability want to go to university (48%), get a job (40%), travel/have a gap year (24%), go to TAFE or college (20%), or get an apprenticeship (15%) (Hall et al. 2020).



<https://vimeo.com/481509017>

Programs and services for those with disability should be informed and co-designed by people with disability. Schools have a key role to play in ensuring educational services and programs support all the aspects of a young person's life (Hall et al. 2020). This includes enacting the *Disability Standards for Education* (2005), namely to "promote recognition and acceptance within the community of the principle that persons with disabilities have the same fundamental rights as the rest of the community" (p. 8). This goes beyond ensuring a learning environment free from discrimination, harassment or victimisation on the basis of disability. It involves working to build a school community in which all members feel they belong, are accepted by peers, connected to friends and supported by key adults. A positive lived experience of inclusion fosters a school-wide culture of respect and belonging and provides a natural opportunity for everyone in the community to learn about and celebrate individual differences. Teachers play an important role in modelling expectations for students with disability, which can influence the expectations and attitudes of other students (Robinson & Truscott 2014).

The sum of all the strategies and phases outlined above, when implemented appropriately, is a truly inclusive school environment, one where all students are afforded high quality educational experiences. As schools and society work to move beyond historical patterns of hiding or ignoring disability, it is important to hear all voices: students with disability, their families, their classmates and those in teaching, leadership and support roles. Each person has learning needs and the challenge is to determine how these are best met, at the same time improving their experience of learning, and providing the support each needs to build their confidence and do their best. All school staff have a role to play in creating a truly inclusive school environment, especially teachers and school leaders.

Working together – supporting students during transitional periods

Transitions to school, between activities and classes, and between primary and secondary, to post-school options can be a difficult experience for students with disability (Pitt, Dixon & Vialle 2019; Richter, Popa-Roch & Clément 2019). To enable effective transitions, it is important for teachers and support teams to be proactive in planning and preparing for changes in a student's schooling. The goal is to give learners confidence, and to reduce anxiety during transitions (Sugai et al. 2016). During transition phases, teachers can help prepare students for the next stage by working together with parents and the SSG to develop contingencies to support the student. Teachers can also help reduce student anxiety by explaining the transition in ways that students can understand.

Teachers

In studies on attitudes towards inclusive education, both teachers and pre-service teachers consistently affirm the importance of inclusion of students with disability (Carrington et al. 2016; Goddard & Evans 2018; Loreman, Sharma & Forlin 2013). They also highlight challenges faced in resourcing inclusion (Walsh 2012), and concerns relating to their professional competence, achievement levels of students with special educational needs, and managing challenging behaviours and on-task engagement in the classroom (Cook et al. 2000; Round, Subban & Sharma 2016).

Submissions to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (2019) suggest that educators require support and training to better understand inclusive education and how to build classroom environments that support the needs of all students. The Royal Commission heard that when funding is provided for professional learning opportunities in disability, courses are quickly filled with teachers keen for the extra study (Alderslade 2019).

When implemented, professional learning “is pivotal in developing the affirmative attitudes and skills required for successful inclusion, with formal educational training being identified as one of the main factors that promote an inclusive attitude” (Vaz et al. 2015, p. 2). Despite the power of professional learning to promote inclusive teaching practices, teachers report that “there is

generally a lack of opportunities to view good practices” (Forlin & Chambers 2017). It is promising that teachers report opportunities to shadow an experienced teacher working with students who share similar needs to be a powerful form of professional learning. Shadowing an experienced teacher is one way of enabling teachers to view examples of good practice – other ways include video case studies, observation and collaboration. This suggests there is potential for schools to promote collaboration among their teaching staff to support each other in this space.



<https://vimeo.com/481509017>

Resource List 4

Online Professional learning

The following online professional learning resources on topics related to students with disability, and inclusive practice are provided by jurisdictions and organisations for Australian educators and parents.

All Means All

The Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education commissioned an online inclusion toolkit for educators on topics including: creating an inclusive class culture, supporting peer connection, including ALL students in the same curriculum, and behaviour support in the inclusive classroom.

🔗 <https://allmeansall.org.au/for-educators>

Disability Standards for Education eLearning modules

A package of e-learning lessons on the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, with a focus on the Disability Standards for Education 2005. The modules were funded by Australian governments and are delivered on the NCCD site. Teachers register using their school

email address.

🔗 <https://www.nccd.edu.au/resources-and-tools/professional-learning>

OnLine Training (OLT) for Special Educational Needs

Many Australian jurisdictions subscribe to this library of online supported learning modules for their teachers who can register for courses including Personalised learning, Understanding hearing loss, Speech, language and communication needs, and Dyspraxia. There are several free short elearning courses for parents.

🔗 <https://aus.oltinternational.net>

Positive Partnerships

Self-paced, interactive modules on supporting a child on the autism spectrum. Topics include Positive Behaviour Support Template, Visual Supports, Sensory Processing and teacher and teacher assistant teams. Modules are free and require registration.

🔗 <https://www.positivepartnerships.com.au>

School leaders

School leaders have an important role in navigating the support context for students with disability. Funding, reporting and accountability requirements for programs for students with disability vary according to the student, the jurisdiction, and available resources. The Principal's role also involves ensuring the school meets the *Disability Standards for Education* 2005 in the areas of:

- enrolment
- participation
- curriculum development, accreditation and delivery
- student support services
- elimination of harassment and victimisation

School leaders have the challenge of interpreting key concepts relating to students with disability and providing guidance to their staff. For example, key aspects of the disability standards, including 'reasonable adjustments' require careful attention. Similarly, schools are required by the standards to meet the needs of students with disability 'on the same basis' as other students – here, 'same' does not mean identical or equal, but rather equitable (Duncan et al. 2020). It is up to the school leader to guide teachers through implementing these adjustments.

Teacher assistants

Teacher assistants often provide direct student support in a one-to-one or small group context. Training specific to their duties is important. It is recommended that teaching assistants provide general classroom support and deliver specific programs under teacher direction, rather than ad hoc individual assistance, and that they not be required to plan instruction (Carter, Stephenson & Webster 2019; Gibson, Paatsch & Toe 2016).

Making best use of Teaching Assistants

This Evidence for Learning guidance report is relevant to principals and other members of the leadership team in both primary and secondary schools who are involved in the resourcing and deployment decisions for Teaching Assistants.

🔗 <https://www.evidenceforlearning.org.au/guidance-reports/making-best-use-of-teaching-assistants>

Conclusion

The Disability Standards for Education 2005 charge teachers and school communities to ensure accessibility of education for students with disability. Accessibility goes well beyond access to school enrolment, facilities, buildings, and education materials. It includes access to the same curriculum, teaching and educational opportunities as other students their age, and participation in school activities such as excursions, assemblies, or sports. Schools are also required to protect students with disability from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation (Royal Commission 2020). In sum, schools should be inclusive spaces where all students are afforded opportunities to thrive.

Inclusive education involves teachers, leaders, students, parents and support teams working together to directly target the needs of each student. The NCCD's four elements of personalised learning, outlined here, form the basis of an effective process to enhance the learning experience of students with disability:

1. consultation and collaboration with the student and/or parents or carers
2. assessing and identifying the needs of the student
3. providing reasonable adjustments to address the identified needs of the student
4. monitoring and reviewing the impact of adjustments (NCCD 2020a)

Through careful attention to the progress of each student's learning, and the provision of appropriate adjustments, teachers, school leaders and school communities can support all students to succeed. Building a culture of inclusion is a vital step towards the elimination of

discrimination against students with disability in Australian schools.

Footnotes

1. First year of formal schooling
2. Assessments such as Early Start (QLD), Mathematics Online Interview, English Online Interview and the Diagnostic Assessment Tools in English (Victoria), Best Start Kindergarten Assessment (NSW)
3. Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) in Catholic jurisdictions; Individual Curriculum Plans (ICPs) in Queensland; Negotiated Education Plans (NEPs) in South Australia
4. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely (SMART) goals
5. This approach has been endorsed by education departments in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria (DoE NSW 2019; DoE QLD 2018; DET VIC 2018)
6. There were 25,000 young people aged between 15 and 19 who participated in Youth Survey 2019, and of those 1,623 reported a disability.

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