

Improving education for students with disability

A roadmap for change

Improving education for students with disability

Realising inclusive education in Australia and preventing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of students with disability is an urgent national priority

A transformation in education is needed to ensure Australia complies with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD)

All Australian children must be welcomed and supported at their local school and provided with a high quality inclusive education. Sadly, for too many children and young people with disability, this is not the case.

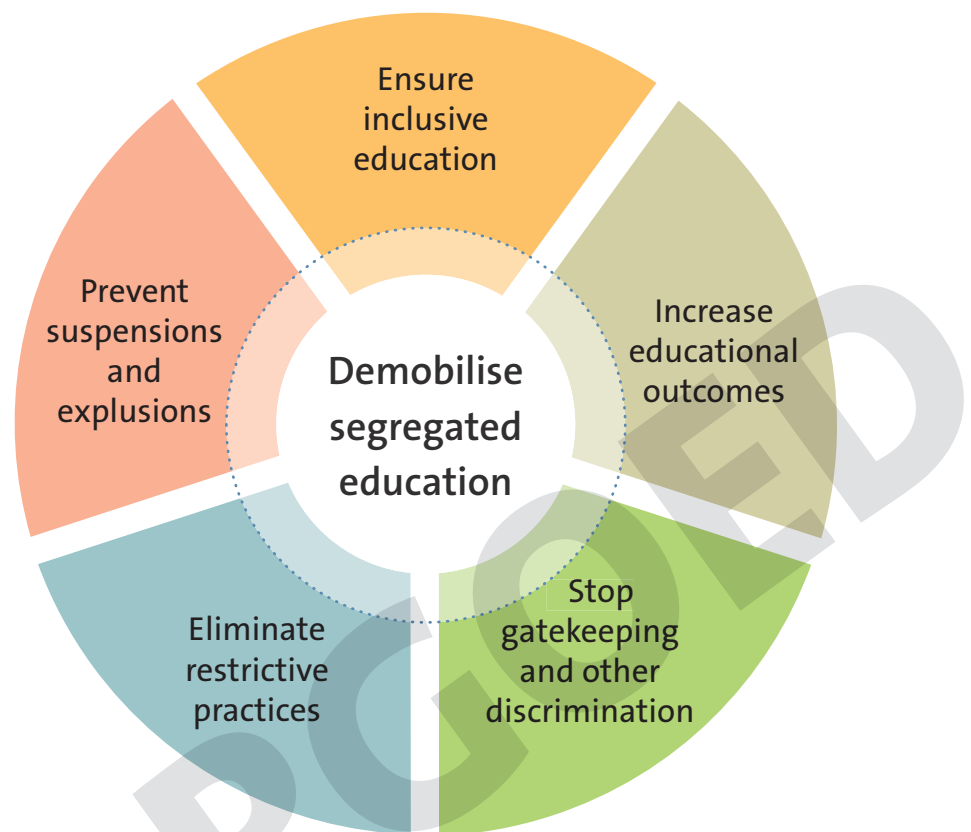
They continue to experience violence, neglect and abuse. They are also discriminated against, segregated from their peers, and ultimately denied the kind of inclusive education that 50 years of evidence tells us best prepares them for life and success. We know that inclusive education is essential for creating the inclusive society we should already be experiencing in Australia.

All our children deserve better and the Disability Royal Commission is now giving us the opportunity to bring to light these wrongs and make long overdue changes to the education system.

The Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE) is a national coalition bringing together organisations that share a commitment to advance inclusive education in Australia and across state and territory education systems, including government and non-government schools.

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Our roadmap for change



Our *Roadmap for Change* is underpinned by six key pillars to help realise inclusive education in Australia and prevent the abuse, neglect and exploitation of students with disability.

These pillars are drawn from the evidence base and are embedded in the rights of students set out in the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The *Roadmap for Change* has two key sections: the outcomes that need to occur, stepped out over the next 10 years, and the key levers for change needed to realise these outcomes.

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**Outcomes required to realise
inclusive education and prevent violence,
abuse, neglect and exploitation
of students with disability**



Demobilise segregation

Segregated education does not provide a pathway to an inclusive life for people with disability.

Segregated education **is not** inclusive education.

As the United Nations' CRPD states, "segregation occurs when the education of students with disabilities is provided in separate environments designed or used to respond to a particular or various impairments, in isolation from students without disabilities."¹

● Short-term outcomes (1–2 years)

There is a target set of no new prep enrolments in special schools by 2022 and no prep enrolments in a special unit separate from non-disabled peers in a 'mainstream' school.

There is research (quantitative, qualitative and longitudinal) on the consequences of segregated and non-inclusive education and its impact on:

- emotional and mental wellbeing of students
- academic achievement, attainment and outcomes
- employment pathways
- health outcomes
- housing solutions
- juvenile justice
- complementary and compensating support services
- life expectancy
- lifetime costs.

To identify system issues and barriers, there is independent research into the factors that families have taken into account when choosing segregated education.

COAG leads the development of and commitment to a plan to demobilise segregated education for **all** students, which includes milestones, key performance indicators, and monitoring and accountability.

The transition timetable is child-centred.

There is a commitment to no new investment in segregated infrastructure at a state or national level.

There is broader application of existing and new models of best-practice teaching and educational practice to support inclusion of **all** students.

New models have been co-designed with young people with disability, and they are involved in the change as paid community advocates.

There is funded individual advocacy and support for the transition for students and families.

The community, families, educators (including early childhood) and education system leaders recognise that segregation is not effective.

Existing support programs and services are refocused to de-segregation and transition (e.g. My Time funding, early childhood Inclusion Support Program, before and after school care Inclusion Support Program, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)).

1 UN CPRD, General Comment 4, Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education.

Demobilise segregation

● Medium-term outcomes (3–5 years)

There are no new enrolments in special schools in primary and secondary levels (via a grandfathering method), and special units in ‘mainstream’ schools are closed.

There are policies and legislation in place to support a reduction in segregated education over time, including changes to state and territory legislation that currently supports ministerial (or equivalent) enrolment override.

The rights of students with disability to inclusive education is reflected education policy and practice, and the myth of parental choice for segregation is debunked.

It is widely understood by parents, educators and the community that transition to inclusive education is achievable and should not be feared.

There is no further investment nationally or in the states/territories in a dual-track education system that segregates students with disability, and current specialised settings are re-purposed for general student populations.

● Long-term outcomes (5–10 years)

Segregated education no longer exists in Australia.

All primary and secondary schools are welcoming and inclusive of students with disability, with measured improvement in academic achievement and employment outcomes.

Ensure inclusive education

Inclusive education recognises **the right of every child and young person** – without exception – to be included in general education settings. It involves adapting the environment and teaching approaches to ensure genuine and valued full participation of **all** children and young people.²

● Short-term outcomes (1–2 years)

Pre-service teaching units and assessment adequately embed inclusive education principles across curriculum delivery.

There is widespread and high quality teacher and principal professional development in inclusive education.

COAG has agreed to a 10-year Inclusive Education Plan, developed alongside people with disability, experts and advocates.

There is a positive narrative for inclusive education as an expectation and human right, which includes positive media coverage for students, teachers, schools and the broader community.

Students, parents, unions, professional associations and education system employees can

all articulate what inclusive education is – and what it isn't – in line with the UN CRPD.

Principals, teachers, professional associations and unions are advocating for all elements of inclusive education and no further investment in segregated settings.

The components, evidence and benefits of inclusive education are well known and able to be described by teachers and principals.

Families have robust, transparent and independent complaints mechanisms when their child does not experience inclusive education (e.g. an independent tribunal or commission established by national harmonised legislation and implemented locally).

● Medium-term outcomes (3–5 years)

States and territories have an improvement framework for inclusive education that is rigorously monitored and reported transparently, with an independent oversight body/group overseeing this work.

Schools and school systems are held accountable for inclusive education (e.g. via a scorecard of schools that is transparent, through funding, etc.).

National data is collected on the experience of students with disability in inclusive education

(or not) from existing and new sources across a range of data points:

- student voice and satisfaction
- attendance
- learning and engagement
- educational achievement
- post-school transition and outcomes
- support and adjustments
- funding provided and spent
- inclusive education Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) monitoring change over time.

● Long-term outcomes (5–10 years)

Inclusive education is normalised in practice for students with disability.

2 Children and Young People with Disability Australia (2019) Fact Sheet 1, 'What is inclusive education?'

Improve educational outcomes

Students with disability in Australia experience considerably poorer educational outcomes than non-disabled students. Around a third of people with disability aged 20 or over have completed Year 12-level schooling – compared with 62 per cent of people without a disability.

● Short-term outcomes (1–2 years)

The school community embraces all learners and the value of students with disability to all learners is well known.

The role of teachers' aides in the Australian school system is independently reviewed, with recommendations for the future to ensure strong educational outcomes based on research of best practice.

All students with disability experience high learning and development expectations and have an Individualised Educational Learning Plan. This plan is developed in consultation with the family, the student and the school.

All pre-service teacher training includes how to differentiate curriculum for students with disability, and there is upskilling of the current teaching workforce.

The Australian Curriculum provides examples and modelling of how to differentiate curriculum.

The educational outcomes and post-school pathways of students with disability are routinely collated and publicly reported.

The relationship between educational outcomes and being a valued member of the school and class community is well known, and efforts to improve are articulated in school improvement planning.

Students with complex communication needs (CCN) are supported in their right to a comprehensive communication system relevant to their individual requirements, allowing them to participate, access the curriculum, learn and achieve with equity.

● Medium-term outcomes (3–5 years)

Best practice in educating students with disability is occurring in Australian schools and independently monitored through school improvement methods.

All students with disability are learning the same curriculum as their peers, reasonably adjusted and differentiated to their needs.

Personalised learning plans based on Universal Design for Learning are developed for **all** learners, including those with and without disability, so Individualised Education Plans are no longer needed.

● Long-term outcomes (5–10 years)

Increased retention of students with disability until year 12.

Increased rates of young people with disability enrolled in higher education and vocational education and training.

The gap in attainment and educational outcomes for students with disability and other learners is closing.

Stop gatekeeping and other discrimination

‘Gatekeeping’ occurs when there is formal or informal denial of access or informal discouragement of children with disability attending their school of choice. It may include school staff saying that a child is better off going to another school, a special school or a school with a special unit because their school doesn’t have enough resources or the skill to support the child. It may also include refusing to enrol a child with disability, only offering part-time hours, or encouraging home-schooling. It is discriminatory, devaluing and demeaning.

● Short-term outcomes (1–2 years)

Gatekeeping is well defined and:

- families know how to identify it, and what to do if it occurs
- there are consequences for schools that gatekeep.

Families have robust and transparent mechanisms to make complaints and have them remedied at a school level, and access to an independent tribunal if the complaint is not resolved.

Schools are required to record the number of enrolments they have refused or discouraged and the reasons why.

Families have a process to provide feedback on their enrolment experience, and systemic and individual issues are addressed.

Schools with enrolment management plans (e.g. catchment zones) are able to identify students with disability not enrolled at their school and why.

There is zero tolerance of gatekeeping in the Australian school system, with punitive consequences if this does occur.

● Medium-term outcomes (3–5 years)

Gatekeeping does not occur.

School performance is measured by inclusivity and embracing all learners.

The ratio of students with disability compared to the rate in the community is reflected in school enrolments (to prevent quasi-segregation via ‘lighthouse’ schools conducting best practice).

Eliminate restrictive practice

‘Restrictive practice’ is any practice or intervention that has the effect of restricting the rights or freedom of movement of a person with disability. This can include physical, mechanical or chemical restraint. It can also include psycho-social restraint, which involves using intimidation or threats to control a person. Restrictive practices are cruel, inhumane and degrading.

● Short-term outcomes (1–2 years)

There are clear definitions of restrictive practices in education and these are well known by educators, parents and school system employees.

There are senior practitioners for preventing restrictive practice that are independent in every jurisdiction and provide expertise in alternatives to these measures.

A multi-layered approach (e.g. wrap-around supports) is developed within each school to be responsive and proactive in supporting students to minimise the use of restrictive practices.

Cases of restrictive practice are independently investigated and reviewed to identify root causes and systemic issues.

There is an understanding of how to regulate against restrictive practices.

Data are routinely collected and transparently reported, including applications for the use of restrictive practices, unauthorised restrictive practices occurring and prevention activities.

Teachers are trained in alternative empathetic supports and approaches so that restrictive practices are eliminated.

Policies and procedures are developed to support inclusive education, as opposed to behaviour control.

Students are able to voice their concerns and be heard.

All primary and secondary schools are required to develop a plan for reducing and eliminating restrictive practices.

● Medium-term outcomes (3–5 years)

There is recognition that **there is no such thing as a low or no risk restrictive practice.**

There is a strong and enforceable regulatory regime to prevent restrictive practices in school.

Restrictive practices, including restraint and seclusion, are eliminated.

Stories of success in reducing and eliminating restrictive practice are shared.

There are strong consequences for schools and educators that use restrictive practices.

Schools have developed a culture of flexibility and accommodation to support **all** students.

Prevent suspensions and expulsions

Suspensions and expulsions are familiar practices in the school experiences of students with disability, which shows the lack of understanding and support available. Almost 15 per cent of students with disability surveyed by CYDA in August and September 2019 had been suspended in the previous 12 months; 1.8 per cent were expelled.³

● Short-term outcomes (1–2 years)

Data on suspensions and expulsions of students with disability are routinely collected and publicly reported across the states and territories (e.g. number of suspensions/expulsions, length of suspension, reasons, actions taken following suspension to prevent future suspensions and expulsions).

Each state and territory is required to have policies and practices that seek to reduce and eliminate suspensions and expulsions for students with disability, taking a whole-school approach.

Legislation is enacted in each jurisdiction to prevent suspensions and expulsions of students with disability.

Families have robust, transparent and independent complaints mechanisms to appeal and complain about suspensions and expulsions.

Schools and teachers are trained to prevent in-school and out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, and to make adjustments and modifications to keep students engaged in their learning.

When a student is suspended more than once, an independent investigation is undertaken to ensure the school's compliance with policies.

The impact of suspensions and expulsions on students is captured (e.g. student voice).

● Medium-term outcomes (3–5 years)

The number of suspensions and expulsions of students with disability is decreasing.

Schools and school systems are held accountable for reducing suspensions and expulsions of students with disability (e.g. via a scorecard of schools that is transparent).

School suspensions are only considered as a last resort for the most serious behavioural transgressions.

● Long-term outcomes (5–10 years)

All students with disability are wholly included full-time, or there is a short-term plan to get them back to school full-time.

³ Children and Young People with Disability Australia (2019) *Time for Change: The state of play for inclusion of students with disability, Results from the 2019 CYDA National Education Survey*

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Key levers for change



Key levers for change

All our children deserve better and the Disability Royal Commission is now giving us the opportunity to bring to light these wrongs and make long overdue changes to the education system.

a. Legislative/policy change

Recommendations

- All law and policy reform should comply with the CRPD.
- Review the Disability Discrimination Act, noting that anti-discrimination legislation can only go so far in helping to realise inclusive education.
- Meaningfully review the Disability Standards for Education, in line with the CRPD.
- Develop a National Inclusive Education Act, proactive rather than discrimination-based legislation.
- The Australian Government commits resources and collaborates with state and territory governments to develop and implement a new National Disability Agreement (NDA), which provides for inclusive education and includes:
 - the development of a COAG-endorsed 10-year Inclusive Education Plan
 - shared responsibility to improve education systems and schools to ensure inclusive education, including indicators and outcomes
 - educational improvement targets and outcomes for students with disability that are reflected in the National School Reform Agreement
 - clear responsibilities for advocacy outside of the NDIS, including individual advocacy for families and young people with disability.
- State and territory funding models move to needs-based funding (e.g. the Tasmanian model).
- Develop a national accreditation framework for inclusive education (along the lines of the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education).
- Audit education legislation in states and territories and amend or develop new legislation to realise inclusive education.
- State and territory education jurisdictions develop state-based inclusive education policies (inclusive of Catholic and independent schools sectors).
- Establish an independent national integrity body/commission for complaints resolution, with 'own motion' powers to conduct systemic inquiries into violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of students with disability in the education system (e.g. along the lines of the NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Commission).

b. Monitoring/accountability

Recommendations

- Deliver on the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment's commitment to complete an evaluation of the Inclusion Support Program (ISP).
- Commit to post-evaluation investment in the ISP linked to indicators of outcomes, and shared responsibility to improve mainstream education services per a new NDA.
- Invest in information to support better inclusive practice and funding to support students with disability.
- Deliver on the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment's commitment to review the loading for students with disability and invest in continuous improvement of the NCCD (Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability).
- Commit to post-review investment in the NCCD linked to indicators of outcomes, and shared responsibility to improve mainstream education services per a new NDA.
- Develop an inclusion scorecard for schools that has official status, is transparent and independently assessed (e.g. along the lines of the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority). This includes:
 - educational inclusion
 - student voice/feedback
 - family feedback
 - number/proportion of students with disability
 - intersectional representation (CALD, Aboriginal, out-of-home care, rural and remote, etc).
- Develop a National Minimum Dataset for education of students with disability (that can be analysed by state/territory, region, sector), including:
 - student voice and satisfaction
 - attendance
 - learning and engagement
 - educational achievement
 - support and adjustments
 - funding provided and spent
 - transition to inclusive education KPIs – experience and outcomes
 - retention, post-school pathways and transitions
 - educational achievement (e.g. NAPLAN)
 - educational adjustments (e.g. NCCD)
 - intersectional data (CALD, Aboriginal, out-of-home care, rural and remote, etc)
 - suspensions/expulsions and restrictive practices
 - number of students home-schooling.

c. Parent education/support

Recommendations

- Provide further funding for independent disability advocacy for families and young people with disability, to ensure they can have their rights to inclusive education upheld.
- Invest heavily in parent education, starting early in a child's life, so they are aware of the benefits and outcomes of inclusive education and move away from thinking children need 'special' education.
- Support family involvement in achieving inclusive education.
- Invest in a national, state and territory-supported campaign/ a broad communications strategy to increase community understanding of the importance of inclusive education. This should include case studies, social change narratives and whole-of-community messaging.

d. Teacher education

Recommendations

- Research and develop the evidence base of best practice models and ensure this is widely disseminated (e.g. using co-teaching rather than teachers' aides).
- Train teachers in team-based approaches and collaborative models to support students with disability, including family-centred practice.
- Develop a national standard for inclusive education in pre-service teacher training.
- Fund postgraduate qualifications in inclusive education and strategically use and reward expertise across education systems to support schools in inclusion.
- Increase the numbers of teachers with disability.
- Invest in professional development for principals and teachers in inclusive education and preventing discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect of students with disability.

e. School cultures for inclusion

Recommendations

- Adopt approaches for teaching diverse classes using methods such as universal design for learning approaches.
- Develop resources and toolkits for families and educators on inclusive practices.
- Develop additional measures for student success other than NAPLAN and ATAR (e.g. an inclusion index).
- Reward educators and schools for good practice (e.g. through remuneration, status and profile).
- Measure and evaluate whole-of-school inclusive practice using new and existing models.

f. Student agency and voice

Recommendations

- Involve students with disability in democratic processes at the school and at regional and state/territory levels.
- Provide accessible information that allows students to safely learn about their rights and the process to complain.
- Develop programmatic responses (e.g. a safe schools program).
- Seek feedback from students and ex-students with disability about what works, especially from those with complex communication needs and intellectual disability.
- Incorporate student voice in educational policy and practice.

The Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE) is an initiative bringing together organisations that share a commitment to advance inclusive education in Australia and across state and territory education systems, including government and non-government schools.

