

Submission
No 29

**INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITY IN NEW SOUTH WALES EDUCATIONAL
SETTINGS**

Organisation: NSW Government

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Introduction

The NSW Government is committed to driving equitable outcomes, opportunities and experiences for all students to ensure every learner receives a high-quality education. A truly equitable education system lifts everyone up; it empowers all students, including those with disability, to succeed, creates stronger communities, and promotes a more just and inclusive society. This submission acknowledges the importance of education at all stages of life, including across:

1. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)
2. Schools
3. Training and Skills.

Each chapter will address the focus areas of the Plan for NSW Public Education as relevant to that sector. As the submission focuses on the education portfolio in the context of the public early childhood, school and skills/higher education systems, the references to schools throughout are to public schools unless otherwise indicated.

Our Plan for NSW Public Education

The NSW Government is committed to building a more inclusive public education system. To support this goal, in 2023, the NSW Department of Education (DoE) released [Our Plan for NSW Public Education](#). The plan is built on the power of public education to provide opportunities for all and to transform lives through learning. With equity as the centrepiece, the plan outlines DoE's strategic direction and priorities, to ensure that every learner receives a high-quality education that enables them to excel.

This approach is informed by evidence and insights from engagement with the education community. It harnesses the commitment of teachers and schools to provide an outstanding education for every learner and to support them to achieve their potential by enabling lifelong learning. The key areas of focus of the plan are:

1. Advance equitable outcomes, opportunities and experiences
2. Strengthen trust and respect for the teaching profession and school support staff
3. Give children the best start in learning
4. Deliver outstanding leadership, teaching and learning
5. Strengthen student wellbeing and development
6. Provide meaningful post-school pathways.

A whole school, whole system approach to inclusion

At the commencement of 2024, there were more than 805,000 students enrolled in more than 2,200 NSW public preschools and public schools, supported by around 99,000 teachers, educators, and support staff. Almost 500,000 children accessed ECEC services across the state, including approximately 4,400 children who attended the 101 NSW public preschools. In 2023, approximately 26% of school students, from Kindergarten to Year 12, were identified as living with a disability. Accordingly, the DoE [Disability Strategy](#), released in 2019, outlined the vision for building a better education system for students with disability in NSW public schools.

Under the Disability Strategy, inclusive education in NSW is defined as:

all students, regardless of disability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, nationality, language, gender, sexual orientation or faith, can access and fully participate in learning, alongside their similar aged peers, supported by reasonable adjustments and teaching strategies tailored to meet their individual needs. Inclusion is embedded in all aspects of school life, and is supported by culture, policies and everyday practices.

The [Disability Strategy](#) led to the development of the [Inclusive Education Statement for Students with Disability](#) which further defined what inclusive education means for school communities. This includes education environments that adapt design and physical structures, teaching methods, and

curriculum, as well as the culture, policy and practice of education environments, so they are accessible to all students without discrimination.

DoE continues to adopt a whole school, whole system approach to inclusion, to drive ongoing improvements in the learning and wellbeing outcomes for students with disability. The [Disability Strategy](#) delivered a strong foundation. [Our Plan for NSW Public Education](#) builds on this, seeking to advance equitable outcomes, opportunities and experiences by reducing gaps in student outcomes due to structural inequities. This includes students with disability, Aboriginal students, students experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, students in rural, regional and remote NSW, and students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and communities.

Rural, regional and remote communities often suffer from a lack of allied health services that can provide diagnostic assessments and/or support for children and young people with a disability. The result is that many young people are not assessed and therefore do not have the right disability specific supports in place and/or are unable to access a full range of supports that can help them within the context of education. This is why as a department we have started moving to support models which shift us from being reliant on disability diagnosis to approaches which recognise functional needs of students.

Ensuring equity of access to quality education for all learners, no matter where they live, is the foundation of the DoE [Rural and Remote Education Strategy](#). This Strategy aims to improve outcomes for students in rural, regional and remote locations, by ensuring the specific needs and contexts of these learning communities are understood and factored into decision-making across DoE. Understanding the compounding effect remoteness can have on the ability to access supports means a differentiated approach is required, to ensure equity for all learners. Under the [Rural and Remote Education Strategy](#), DoE is monitoring the performance of programs being rolled out across the department to make sure they are fit for purpose in rural, regional and remote areas.

Transitions

Ensuring students with disability in NSW feel confident and empowered to access education as they progress between the sectors is also critical. Our Plan for NSW Public Education identifies the goal of every student being known, valued and cared for at school, and improving support for students as they transition through school is a key action. Successful transitions from early childhood to primary school and on to high school and further learning, positively impact long-term academic, social, and wellbeing outcomes, particularly for priority equity groups such as students

with disability. NSW Government agencies provide a range of services to assist these transitions and support lifelong learning.

Looking ahead

The NSW Government will consider any recommendations of this inquiry in the context of recommendations arising from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (the Disability Royal Commission), the proposed changes from the recent independent review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), and the outcomes from the current performance audit by the NSW Auditor-General into DoE support for students with disability in NSW public schools.

The NSW Government is taking time to carefully consider the findings of the Disability Royal Commission and will provide a response in due course. Accordingly, this submission does not address any proposed response by the NSW Government to the Disability Royal Commission recommendations.

Chapter 1: Early Childhood Education and Care

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Australia is complex, with responsibility for the funding, regulation, and delivery of different early childhood service types split across different levels of government. The Australian Government's primary role is as funder of Long Day Care, Outside School Hours Care and Family Day Care. Funding is primarily directed to these services through the means-tested Child Care Subsidy which provides fee relief for parents and carers to facilitate workforce participation. Through the Preschool Reform Agreement, the Australian Government also provides funding to state and territory governments to support the delivery of 600 hours of preschool education for children in the year before school. In addition to Preschool Reform Agreement funding, state and territory governments use own-source revenue to fund public and community preschools. The NSW Government also provides funding to Long Day Care services to support preschool participation, through programs such as Start Strong for Long Day Care.

In NSW, almost 510,000 children access ECEC services. Approximately:

- 261,600 children currently attend long day care services. (CCS June Quarter 2023)
- 183,800 children attend outside of school care services. (CCS June Quarter 2023)
- 23,700 children attend family day care (CCS June Quarter 2023)
- 33,400 children attend community or mobile preschools (PEA 2022)
- 4,200 children attend public preschools. (PEA 2022)

The NSW Government has a multifaceted role in shaping the ECEC system in NSW as a provider, funder and regulator. The government provides support to and regulates more than 6,000 ECEC services. DoE operates 101 public preschools including 2 distance education preschool classes (Dubbo School of Distance Education and Broken Hill School of the Air). There are 61 preschools located in the Sydney metropolitan area and 40 in regional and rural areas. It is DoE's intent that preschools provide for the most disadvantaged children in each local community and provide access to high-quality early childhood education and care.

The NSW Government has committed to building 100 new public preschools by 2027. This includes a commitment to build preschools on new school sites. In September 2023, the locations of 10 new schools with a co-located preschool were announced. An independent selection process for the remaining 90 sites has been undertaken over the past few months based on a rigorous analysis of educational need, child development outcomes and where there is undersupply of

preschool places based on predicted future demand and following due diligence processes undertaken by School Infrastructure NSW regarding site feasibility. This will double the current number of public preschools. The 100 new preschools will be operated by the department and will deliver high-quality play-based preschool programs.

Focus Area 2: Strengthen trust and respect for the teaching profession and school support staff

DoE provides sector capacity-building programs to support educators and teachers to include children with disability in quality early childhood education.

The NSW Disability and Inclusion Program Sector Capacity Building Program

The [NSW Disability and Inclusion Program Sector Capacity Building](#) program is available to all community preschools (including mobile preschools) receiving Start Strong for Community Preschools funding. The program provides free training and support to staff in community preschools to implement inclusive education practices and enhance ongoing inclusion readiness.

The program is delivered by experienced early childhood agencies specialising in early childhood inclusion practice. Each program provider is allocated a region or regions within NSW and is assigned to work with each community preschool in that region.

All community preschools are encouraged to engage with a Sector Capacity Building provider to support inclusive education practices and enhance ongoing inclusion readiness. Preschools that do not currently have children with disability and additional learning and support needs enrolled can still benefit from the free training, support, networking and advice offered under the program.

The NSW Early Childhood Inclusive Education Scholarships 2022-23

The 2022-23 [Early Childhood Inclusive Education Scholarships Program](#) aimed to increase the number of NSW early childhood education teachers with a postgraduate qualification in Early Childhood Inclusive Education in NSW community preschools, mobile preschools and long day care services.

76 successful scholarship recipients received:

- up to \$20,000 for those completing the Master of Special and Inclusive Education (specialising in Early Childhood); or

- up to \$10,000 for those completing the Graduate Certificate in Early Childhood Disability Support.

NSW Identify and Include Children with Additional Needs (IICAN) Program

TAFE NSW developed and delivered IICAN to train early childhood educators working with children and their families to identify children who may need additional support, understand early childhood development and disability, recognise indicators of developmental delay, work in a family-centred team approach, and apply universal design principles to include children. The program seeks to improve the early intervention skills of ECEC educators and to strengthen their therapeutic partnerships with allied health providers. The program was delivered to 190 educators in rural and remote regions in Far West NSW. The program has now been extended to 600 places across the state.

NSW Safety and Quality Practice Program

To further support and strengthen the capacity of educators and teachers to ensure a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students, DoE's [Safety and Quality Practice Program](#) funded a series of seven interactive webinars delivered by Special Teaching and Research. The webinars focused on the delivery of quality educational programs for children with disability and developmental delays and inclusion within ECEC settings, including Out of School Hours Care and Family Day Care.

Children's Perspectives in Early Childhood Pedagogy, Policy, and Practice Project

DoE is undertaking the Children's Perspectives in Early Childhood Pedagogy, Policy, and Practice Project, which focuses on children's right to be active participants by seeking out and creating spaces to gather, reflect on, and respond to children's views. Particular consideration has been given to the development of data-gathering tools that are accessible and flexible for all children, including children with disability. DoE is partnering with early childhood teachers to incorporate their expertise and support ongoing professional learning. The project is underpinned by an inclusive, strengths-and rights-based approach. This project involves an iterative process of developing a framework and suite of research-based, qualitative, participatory and child-friendly data collection and analysis tools.

The Commonwealth Inclusion Support Program ([link](#))

Inclusion agencies in each state and territory (KU Children's Services in NSW) provide free advice and support to ECEC services. They work with ECEC services to identify and address barriers to inclusion.

Focus Area 3: Give children the best start in learning

Children with disability in ECEC services

The NSW Government is committed to ensuring that children with disability and additional learning and support needs receive quality early childhood education and care on the same basis as their peers. People with disability have varied identities, circumstances, lived experiences, and varied experiences accessing ECEC. There may be intersectionality of disability and other factors (such as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, being from a culturally or linguistically diverse background, or experiencing socio-economic disadvantage) that compound and increase experiences of discrimination, disadvantage, and inequitable access to early childhood education.

DoE's First Steps - NSW Aboriginal Children's Early Childhood Education Strategy 2021-2025 aims to ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have access to quality early childhood education while being supported to embrace their culture and identity. A specific goal highlights the importance of providing culturally appropriate support and equal educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with disability. The strategy also highlights a 2024 deliverable to use block funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in delivering services to First Nations people with disability.

A positive transition to school can better prepare children to handle challenges and is linked to academic success in later years and positive life trajectories. A range of transitions approaches and resources have been developed by DoE to meet the individual needs of each child, family, and community spanning a broad network designed to strengthen transitions and continuity of learning. These include orientation programs and the Transition to School Digital Statement (TTSDS). The TTSDS is a state-wide initiative enabling early childhood teachers and educators to create transition to school statements digitally for children starting kindergarten in the following year, and has led to more children being supported in their transition from preschool into the school environment.

Children with disability and additional learning and support needs may require further support as part of their transition program. It is recommended that early childhood education and care

services work with families, allied health professionals and schools to support the individual needs of a child who requires additional support. This can sometimes be as early as 12-18 months prior to the child starting school. Within schools there are specialist staffing positions, such as Early Intervention Teachers, that support and facilitate the transition to school for children with disability.

Programs supporting children with disability in ECEC settings in NSW

The NSW Government delivers a range of initiatives to support inclusive early childhood education.

The Disability and Inclusion Program

DoE's Disability and Inclusion Program supports children with disability and additional learning and support needs in NSW community preschools. High Learning Support Needs funding is provided to community preschools to develop and deliver a child's individual learning plan, enabling participation in an educational play-based program on the same basis as their peers. Community preschools can apply for funding for a child with high learning support needs up to a total of \$14,562 (ex GST) per child, per year.

Inclusive Environments Funding (IE), formerly known as Minor Capital Works, promotes access and improves educational opportunities, learning outcomes and personal development of children with disability and additional learning and support needs in community preschools. Funding is available for minor environmental modifications and specialised equipment or furniture enabling children with disability and additional learning and support needs to participate in the educational program, on the same basis as their peers. There are two types of Inclusive Environments Funding:

- Child-based funding for a community preschool to support individual children with constant and ongoing support needs currently attending their service. Up to \$5,000 (ex GST) per child per year is available for specialised equipment/furniture. Up to \$20,000 (ex GST) per child per year is available for minor construction projects.
- Service-based inclusion readiness funding for a community preschool to improve their capacity to include children with disability or additional learning and support needs in the future. Up to \$5,000 (ex GST) per community preschool per year is available for specialised equipment/furniture or minor environmental modifications.

An [independent evaluation](#) finalised in November 2022 found that 'the Disability Inclusion Program provides critical supports for NSW community preschools to meaningfully include children with disability and high learning support needs in early education programs with benefits for all

children'. The evaluation was completed by the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales and the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Start Strong for Community Preschools

The [Start Strong for Community Preschools](#) program provides funding to deliver affordable quality preschool education for 3-5 year old children enrolled in eligible community and mobile preschools in NSW. The program provides additional funding to achieve equitable outcomes for children in priority cohorts, including children with disability or additional learning and support needs. Additional funding is provided as an equity loading, available in addition to 'base' funding, as well as any other loadings an enrolled child may be eligible for (such as regional loading, English language assistance and/or higher order multiple funding). Start Strong for Community Preschools funding is scaled based on annual hours of enrolment. Recognising that 600 hours per year is not always possible for children with disability and/or additional learning and support needs, the maximum rate for the Program Payment and Fee Relief Payment may be available to these children when enrolled for a minimum of 300 hours per year.

Start Strong for Long Day Care

The [Start Strong for Long Day Care](#) program provides funding to deliver affordable quality preschool education to children aged 3 and above who are enrolled in eligible long day care services in NSW. Providers funded under the program are encouraged to give priority access to children in certain cohorts, including children with disability and/or additional learning and support needs.

Integration Funding Support

[Integration Funding Support](#) helps schools, including public preschools, provide adjustments for students with disability who have moderate to high learning and support needs in mainstream classes. Funding is used:

- for additional teachers and school learning support officers to assist with personalised learning and support for students in their own classrooms
- to provide relief for classroom teachers to undertake professional learning and to plan adjustments with parents and carers and other school staff.

A student in a public preschool may be eligible for Integration Funding Support if they:

- have a disability and require substantial or extensive adjustments as defined by Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on school students with disability (NCCD) guidelines

- have a moderate or severe intellectual disability, mental health disorder, autism, physical disability or hearing or vision impairment (as defined by the DoE's disability criteria)
- have personalised learning and support adjustments to access learning opportunities and school experiences due to disability, and
- have documented adjustments requiring additional resources to those available through the school.

Start Strong Pathways

The [Start Strong Pathways](#) initiative has been supporting children across NSW to access quality early childhood education and care since 2018, providing educational supports to young children prior to preschool enrolment, to establish pathways into early childhood education. Start Strong Pathways provides grants to not-for-profit and community-based services which engage children and families before preschool. Activities and services such as playgroups, toy and resource libraries, mobile, outreach, and home-based services, and transition support for children newly enrolling in preschool or other ECEC settings are delivered by a variety of organisation types, including disability-focused service organisations.

The program guidelines prioritise funding for services provided to vulnerable community groups, including children with disability. The program objectives are to support educational engagement of children too young to receive a preschool education, supporting pathways to preschool and promoting the importance of early childhood education to parents and communities.

The Commonwealth Government also provides funding to support inclusive early childhood education.

The Commonwealth Inclusion Support Program

The [Commonwealth Inclusion Support Program](#) helps children with additional learning and support needs participate in early childhood education. It provides tailored support and funding to services to address barriers to inclusion.

The program is open to Child Care Subsidy approved services that provide Centre Based Day Care, Family Day Care or Outside School Hours Care. The program supports services to; address barriers to inclusion, build capacity and capability to include children with additional learning and support needs, and implement quality, inclusive and equitable practices.

The program aims to provide children with additional learning and support needs the opportunity to learn and develop next to their typically developing peers, and to ensure all children have genuine opportunities to participate and achieve positive learning outcomes. Inclusion Agencies in each state and territory deliver this program. To do this, they work with a national Inclusion Development Fund Manager.

Early intervention programs that support children with disability in NSW

Brighter Beginnings

[Brighter Beginnings](#) is a NSW Government collaboration aimed at improving child health and development outcomes, recognising that no single system or agency can drive the level of improvement required to lift the number of NSW children developmentally on track. The evidence highlights that supporting childhood health and development is essential to improve outcomes for NSW children, families and communities. The early years are a critical time for a child's physical, cognitive, social and emotional growth.

Brighter Beginnings aims to achieve increased universal access to education, health, community, and government services, provide targeted early interventions to families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage, improve families' experience in their interactions with government services, and raise awareness and understanding of the importance of the time between pregnancy and primary school. The program includes specific strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children and parents and carers with disability, children from low socio-economic backgrounds, children living in rural, regional, and remote NSW and cross-border communities, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

8 agencies are collaborating as part of Brighter Beginnings to lift health and development outcomes for all NSW children. Partner agencies are:

- NSW Department of Education
- NSW Health
- NSW Department of Communities and Justice
- NSW Department of Customer Service
- The Cabinet Office
- Department of Regional NSW

- Aboriginal Affairs NSW
- Multicultural NSW.

Funding of \$376.5 million has been committed over four years (from FY23) to support evidence-based accelerator initiatives targeting child development from prenatal to age 5. These programs are now all in delivery stage and are:

- Pregnancy Family Conferencing: conferencing services to provide early family support
- Health Development Checks: for 4-year-olds in preschool settings
- Digital Baby Book (clinical, birth to age 3): development of a digital health record for children born in NSW
- Sustaining NSW Families (birth to age 3): nurse-led health home visiting service for families living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage
- Aboriginal Child and Family Centres: expansion of culturally safe services and supports for Aboriginal families with children aged 0-8 years.

Health and Development Checks in early childhood services program

The [Health and Development Checks for Children](#) in early childhood services program is a partnership between NSW Health and the DoE to deliver a free, universal, recurrent program to 4-year-old children in preschool and long day care environments. Health professionals will check children's health and development, such as listening and talking skills, social skills and behaviour, gross and fine motor skills, learning, thinking and problem-solving skills and how their bodies are growing. Offering checks in ECEC services will ensure more children are supported if they require further care before they start school. This is an opt-in program for services and families.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Early Childhood Approach

Nationally, children younger than 9 may be able to access the [NDIS Early Childhood Approach](#). The NDIS Early Childhood Approach is delivered by Early Childhood Partners commissioned and funded by the NDIS, and aims to:

- provide families with timely support to ensure they can access the supports they need and where necessary, obtain a NDIS package for their child

- give families information about best-practice early childhood intervention supports and how they can help their child
- increase families' confidence and capacity to manage and respond to their child's support needs
- increase children's ability to do activities they need or want to do
- increase children's inclusion and participation in mainstream and community settings such as playgroup, childcare or preschool
- give families information about, and referrals to, other support services such as parent support groups, to have the opportunity to meet other people with similar experiences or situations.

Focus Area 4: Deliver outstanding leadership, teaching and learning

Early childhood education and care services operate within a national regulatory framework. The National Quality Framework, the Early Years Learning Framework and the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) (DDA) are key regulatory levers for children with disability.

The National Quality Framework

The National Quality Framework (NQF) aims to raise quality and drive continuous improvement and consistency in early childhood education services. Equity, inclusion and diversity underpin the framework and are embedded throughout including the National Law and Regulation, the National Quality Standard and the approved learning framework for early childhood education, the Early Years Learning Framework.

The framework uses the terms each child, every child and all children to promote inclusion. It recognises all children as confident and capable learners with the capacity and right to succeed regardless of diverse circumstances including strengths, cultural background and abilities. The right of every child to be included, to participate and have equitable access is demonstrated through all seven National Quality Standard Quality areas.

The NQF, which includes the law, regulations and quality standards, sets the benchmark for safe and high-quality early childhood education and care.

The Early Years Learning Framework

In 2023 the approved learning framework, *Belonging, Being, and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF)*, was updated to ensure it continues to reflect contemporary developments in evidence-based, early education pedagogical practice and knowledge, while supporting all educators to promote the learning, development and wellbeing of every child.

As part of the EYLF update, the Principle, High expectations and equity has been renamed Equity, inclusion and high expectations. The expansion of this Principle strengthens the focus on inclusion, recognising that all children have the right to participate in quality, inclusive early childhood education, regardless of their circumstances, strengths, gender, capabilities or diverse ways of doing and being. Australia Children's Education and Care Authority has developed an [information sheet](#) on the changes for the ECEC sector.

Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) supports children with disability, their families and carers to access and fully participate in early childhood education on the same basis as their peers. All early childhood education services (including family day care) must comply with the Act. The DDA makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of a person's disability. This includes discrimination that occurs in the context of accessing and participating in early childhood education services.

It is unlawful under the DDA for any staff member at an early childhood education service to harass, victimise or discriminate against an enrolled child, or a child seeking to enrol, in relation to their disability. Discrimination does not have to be intentional to be unlawful and includes the failure of a service to make reasonable adjustments. Complaints under the DDA are made directly to the [Australian Human Rights Commission](#).

A suite of [resources](#) was developed by Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) to support ECEC providers and services to understand and implement their obligations under the DDA. There is also work underway to amend the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth) to include all services in the early childhood education sector. More information is available [here](#).

Focus Area 5: Strengthen student wellbeing and development

Ensuring a safe and inclusive learning environment for all children, educators and teachers.

Under the NNQF and DDA, ECEC services have an obligation to provide a safe and inclusive environment for all children. The NQF sets out the relevant obligations and requirements, including through national regulation and laws.

Relevant sections of the Children's (Education and Care Services) National Law include:

- Section 166: Offence to use inappropriate discipline
- Section 162A: Persons in day-to-day charge and nominated supervisors to have child protection training
- Section 167: Offence relating to protection of children from harm and hazards
- Section 174: Offence to fail to notify certain information to Regulatory Authority.

Relevant regulations include:

- Regulation 168: Education and care service must have policies and procedures. (Regulation 168(2)(k) – enrolment and orientation).

Relevant standards include:

- Quality Area 5: Respectful and equitable relationships are maintained with each child; dignity and rights of every child are maintained
- Quality Area 2: Each child's health and physical activity is supported and promoted; each child is protected; at all times
- Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities to support children's access, inclusion, and participation in the program
- Quality Area 7: A statement of philosophy guides all aspects of service operations; and systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service.

ACECQA's [Inappropriate Discipline fact sheet](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-06/inappropriate-discipline.pdf) provides guidance on appropriate and inappropriate discipline and behaviour guidance, including the use of restraint in an emergency situation. The fact sheet includes links to legislative requirements and NQS elements that apply when managing behaviour for children attending education and care services, and can be accessed on its website: <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-06/inappropriate-discipline.pdf>

Chapter 2: Schools

Focus Area 1: Advance equitable outcomes, opportunities and experiences

Our Plan for NSW Public Education commits to fostering a culture that values diversity and eliminates barriers. Through the development of targeted, differentiated and evidence-informed initiatives, every learner will receive a high-quality education that enables them to excel.

Ongoing commitment to inclusive education

DoE is committed to creating an inclusive and supportive environment for all NSW public school students, ensuring their safety, wellbeing and access to high quality education. An inclusive education system is one where every student is known, valued and cared for, and all students receive the support they need to succeed and fulfil their potential.

The rights of students with disability to equitably access and participate in education are protected through a comprehensive legal and policy framework that supports the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disability. This framework includes:

- the Education Act 1990 (NSW) which provides for universal compulsory education for school aged children in either government or non-government schools or in registered home schooling. This Act includes a number of specific provisions enabling support for students with disability, including the right of students to enrol in their local school.
- the Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW) which makes it unlawful to discriminate in a number of areas including work and education on prescribed grounds, including disability.
- the DDA which makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of a person's disability.
- the Disability Standards for Education 2005 which clarifies the obligations of education and training providers under the DDA. The Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth) require schools to provide reasonable adjustments to ensure students with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as other students. Reasonable adjustments should be determined in consultation with the student and/or parent or carer. The Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth) also cover areas such as enrolment, curriculum and student victimisation and harassment.

These legislative frameworks are reflected in DoE's Inclusive Education Statement and Inclusive Education for students with disability policy. The statement focuses on the principles of inclusive practice for students with disability, whilst recognising that improving inclusive practice benefits all students. DoE's journey towards embedding inclusive practice across the education system is guided by the following principles:

- student agency and self-determination
- parent and carer inclusion
- social and cultural inclusion
- curriculum inclusion
- workforce capability for inclusion
- system inclusion.

The policy provides guidance to support the inclusion of students with disability and additional learning and support needs in NSW public schools, and applies to all staff employed by DoE. The policy outlines the roles and responsibilities of staff in providing an inclusive education for students with disability. This includes ensuring all students with disability are welcomed, included and, where necessary, supported by reasonable adjustments and personalised support to fully participate in all aspects of school life. It also describes effective practice, including partnering with students, parents and carers, external service providers and the community, to achieve the best outcomes for students with disability.

The NSW Education Standards Authority supports all schools to deliver the best possible outcomes for students

The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) provides advice on the requirements of all NSW schools in relation to the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth) to support teachers to provide reasonable adjustments for students with disability in school settings. NESA illustrates this advice through case studies and examples of adjustments in teaching, learning and assessment activities to support teachers.

NESA requires all NSW schools to maintain and implement policies and procedures for identifying and providing support for students with disability and learning needs. NESA monitors school compliance with this requirement through its risk-based regulatory processes. NESA expects that a school's policies and procedures reflect its obligations under other relevant legislation, including the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth) and the DDA.

The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability

In the 2023 Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD), around 1 in 4 students in NSW public schools were identified as having disability as defined under the DDA. Students are not required to have a formal medical diagnosis to be included in the NCCD. A school's learning and support team can impute disability based on the DDA definition, when it believes, based on reasonable grounds and supported by documented evidence, that undiagnosed disability is having a functional impact on a student's capacity to access and participate in education on the same basis as their peers.

The majority of students with disability learn in mainstream schools. Approximately 86% of students with disability learn in mainstream classes within mainstream schools and approximately 11% of students with disability are enrolled in support classes in mainstream schools. Around 3% of students with disability attend schools for specific purposes (SSPs).

Approximately 206,000 students in NSW were recorded in the NCCD as having a disability in 2023.

As at January 2024:

- approximately 24,750 are enrolled in support classes in mainstream schools
- approximately 6,050 are enrolled in support classes in SSPs

Funding for students with disability in mainstream classrooms

Effectively resourcing schools is crucial to building an inclusive education system and improving outcomes for, and experiences of, students with disability. To support this, DoE is progressively moving to a disability funding model based on the functional needs of individuals in the classroom.

All mainstream schools receive an equity loading based on the number of students with disability in their school. The Low Level Adjustment for Disability Loading (LLAD) provides a learning and support teacher allocation and flexible funding to mainstream schools. In 2023 DoE introduced an

improved methodology for the calculation of the LLAD in the School Budget Allocation Report (SBAR). The new methodology is informed by the needs of students with disability and school efforts to meet those needs, using data from the NCCD, the Student Learning Needs Index and school enrolments.

In addition, mainstream schools can apply for targeted funding for students with moderate to high support needs through the Integration Funding Support program (IFS). If eligible students are assessed through a needs profile, the school will receive funding commensurate with their needs. Around 17,800 students currently receive IFS. The current process relies on students being diagnosed with a disability recognised by DoE's disability criteria. A diagnostic approach is not reflective of contemporary needs-based approaches to disability support. DoE is exploring potential options to move to a more contemporary needs-based funding model, in consultation with stakeholders.

Principals determine how allocated resources are used within the school to meet the additional learning needs of students. This may include additional teacher time, professional learning for teachers, and/or school learning support officer time.

In 2023, funding provided to schools to support students with disability through these two allocations was:

- \$348 million under the LLAD equity loading for specialist learning, including more than 1,970 learning and support teachers, and a flexible funding allocation to every mainstream school. In 2024, this has increased to more than \$357 million and more than 1,975 learning and support teachers.
- \$410 million in Integration Funding Support for more than 17,800 students with moderate to high support needs in mainstream classes.

Specialist educational settings for students with disability

There is no single approach that meets the educational and support needs of all students and their families. Specialist settings are available in the NSW public education system to meet the diverse needs of the student cohort. These settings provide parents, carers and students with choices regarding their education. DoE is committed to strengthening inclusive practice across all settings to improve student outcomes.

Specialist settings for students with disability provide more extensive and targeted support where this is relevant and necessary to strengthen a student's academic achievement, specific skills or interests, wellbeing and/or social development. Specialist settings range from support classes within or attached to mainstream schools to dedicated environments where students have access to specific infrastructure, facilities and staff with specialised knowledge and skills. Specialist settings do not operate in isolation from each other or from mainstream school settings. DoE developed NSW Education specialist settings, outlining the broad scope of specialist settings available to meet the strengths, interests and needs of students and explaining how specialist settings for students with disability operate, and their role in the NSW public education system in supporting students and their families.

Specialist settings include:

- Schools with a specialist class or facility. Students are placed in these classes through a process known as Access Request.
- Schools for Specific Purposes including for medium/high support needs, behaviour disorder, emotional disturbance, hospital schools, youth justice, students with physical disability and students with a diagnostic remedial reading assessment.
- Classes and schools can provide differentiated support to students with multiple forms of disability.

Around 14% of students with disability attend either a support class within a mainstream school or a school for specific purpose (SSP):

- Support classes in mainstream schools are located within some mainstream primary schools, high schools and central schools. Support classes can accommodate students with higher support needs as class sizes are generally smaller (between 6 and 18 students depending on class type). As they are located in a mainstream school, support classes can enable participation in mainstream classes and other opportunities for students with disability to engage with their mainstream peers.
- SSPs are specialist education settings designed and resourced to provide students with complex needs with more intensive support.

In 2020 the SSP Supplementary Funding Program was established to alleviate critical resource constraints while longstanding structural issues are being addressed. In 2023, \$37.6 million in supplementary funding was provided to SSPs.

From the start of 2024 (as at the end of November 2023) an additional 238 new support classes are available (227 in mainstream schools and 11 in SSPs). The total number of support classes approved for the start of 2024 (as at the end of November 2023) is more than 4,520. Of these 3,445 are in mainstream schools and 1,075 in SSPs. As at November 2023 DoE provided personalised learning and support for more than 29,000 students in approximately 4,270 support classes in mainstream schools and SSPs. There are currently 117 SSPs across NSW.

Opportunity Classes and Selective High Schools

To make access to opportunity classes and selective high schools fairer for underrepresented groups, including students with disability, the Equity Placement Model was introduced in 2022. The Equity Placement Model holds 20% of student places at each school for students from equity groups to help increase their participation. Of the 20%, 2.5% of places under the Equity Placement Model are held for students with disability. Under the model students from equity groups can be offered a place if their placement test performance is comparable to general applicants. Typically this is based on their performance being within 10% of the minimum performance accepted from a general applicant during first-round offers.

Successful delivery of the Disability Strategy

In 2019 DoE released its [Disability Strategy](#). The Strategy outlined a positive reform agenda to improve educational outcomes for students with disability in NSW public schools, across four pillars of reform. DoE has successfully delivered the commitments from the Strategy and continues to identify and deliver work to drive strong educational and wellbeing outcomes for students with disability in NSW public schools. An overview of some of these initiatives is provided below. Further detail is included in other sections of the submission.

1. Strengthening support: investing in teachers and other support staff
 - In 2019 DoE launched the Inclusive Practice in Education Scholarship Program for teachers wishing to increase their skills and expertise in inclusive or special education.
 - In 2021 the Inclusive Practice Hub, developed in partnership with Deakin University and Monash University, was launched. The Inclusive Practice Hub provides staff with evidence-based resources to support the delivery of inclusive education. The hub continues to expand to include additional resources co-designed with critical stakeholders such as students with disability, their parents and carers, disability and education experts, NSW public school staff and allied health professionals.

- In line with recommendation 29 of the 2017 Parliamentary Inquiry, Students with a disability or special needs in NSW schools, DoE has mandated the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth) training for all school leaders.
- As part of the commitments under the Strategy, DoE has infrastructure design, planning and advisory services for inclusive design as part of School Infrastructure NSW.

2. Increasing resources and flexibility: enabling schools to operate with more flexibility

- DoE completed a review of the criteria used to determine the eligibility of students with disability to additional targeted support.
- The SSP Supplementary Funding program was introduced in 2020 as an interim solution to alleviate workforce pressures. The program provides flexible funding to SSPs to ease the resourcing pressures caused by the outdated funding and staffing entitlement model. Schools decide how to use the funding to address school-specific issues and improve student outcomes.

3. Improving the family experience: making experiences better and easier

- DoE's inclusive learning support hub for parents and carers continues to expand. This hub is a one-stop online resource with information for families and carers of students with disability or those with additional learning and support needs. The hub, co-designed and tested with parents and carers, offers a central source for up-to-date information, interactive tools and downloadable resources on topics related to their child's education.
- DoE continues to streamline the Access Request process, which is used to apply for IFS and placement in several types of specialist settings (as well as other supports). From 2021, standardised procedures for the placement of students in support classes were introduced. DoE is also developing systems and processes to support and streamline processes for applying for additional funding and specialist placements for students with additional learning needs. The system will enable easier and faster access to targeted funding and support.
- DoE continues to work to improve the school community and consumer complaints process through the review of the Community and Consumer Complaint Procedure, and associated policies. DoE is also partnering with the NSW Department of Communities and Justice to improve advocacy support and system navigation for

students with disability and their families. An alternative dispute resolution process is also being established as an optional approach to resolving complaints outside the Community and Consumer Complaint Procedure.

4. Tracking outcomes: building an evidence base to measure progress

- The Disability Strategy committed to improving measures and tracking outcomes around student learning growth, physical, emotional and mental wellbeing, and independence of students with disability. DoE has undertaken the Inclusive Assessment Program to research, design and trial new assessments tools that help teachers understand the skills of students with complex learning needs (that is, students with very high support needs including those with cognitive disability and those who are non-verbal). The project sought to improve educational outcomes by providing educators with tools and clear guidelines on how to assess, support and scaffold learning for students with complex learning needs and disabilities. Assessments such as NAPLAN and the National Literacy and Numeracy Learning Progressions are mostly not suitable for these students. In response DoE has developed a consistent, fit-for-purpose, system-wide assessment approach to measure progress against learning outcomes for students with complex learning needs and disabilities.

Accessibility standards

All department websites must conform to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0. The guidelines are organised into four main principles that explain what to keep in mind when developing websites and publishing web content. These are that content should be perceivable, operable, understandable and robust.

Focus Area 2: Strengthen trust and respect for the teaching profession and school support staff

[Our Plan for NSW Public Education](#) commits DoE to attract and retain high-quality teachers, especially in specialist subject areas. The plan aims to ensure teachers and staff feel valued, included and supported to perform at their best through high-quality and accessible professional learning.

DoE is committed to delivering a number of attraction and retention initiatives designed to address the teacher workforce shortage. These initiatives focus on improving attraction to teaching, re-

training and upskilling more teachers to specialise in high-demand subjects, and boosting teacher supply in regional and remote communities.

This commitment has already delivered meaningful change across schools in NSW, raising the wages of teachers and the school counselling service, to a nation-leading position. The department has also delivered the Temporary Workforce Transition Initiative, offering permanent employment to at least 10,000 temporary teachers and 6,000 support staff, with almost 17,000 staff accepting an offer of permanent employment as at 12 January 2024.

To further support teacher attraction and retention the NSW Government has committed to the establishment of a \$20 million Innovative Teacher Training Fund to develop new and innovative teacher training methods.

Workforce capability for inclusion

DoE provides access to a wide range of evidence-based tools, resources and professional learning opportunities to build knowledge, capability and confidence of school staff to meet the diverse needs of students with disability. These include:

- a suite of evidence-based professional learning courses. Between 1 January 2020 and 24 January 2024 there have been 88,150 course completions by leaders, teachers and support staff. Courses cover a range of topics including disability awareness, inclusive practice, personalised planning, student wellbeing, and supporting students with specific disabilities such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia and hearing loss.
- a package of e-learning lessons on the DDA and the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth) which provides professional learning tailored for seven different roles in DoE. The lessons are a compulsory element of professional learning for principals, Directors Educational Leadership (DELs) and school executive staff and are highly recommended for all teaching staff in NSW public schools. Between 1 January 2020 and 24 January 2024, 46,344 staff completed these lessons.
- the Inclusive Practice Hub which contains over 170 evidence-based resources for teachers and school leaders specifically to support inclusive teaching and learning practices.
- the Universal Resources Hub hosts over 1,600 quality-assured teaching, learning and school improvement resources for school staff to use and share. This includes a range of resources on inclusive practice, recently expanded to include a further 20 resources which build on existing teacher practice and outline approaches for teachers to plan, personalise, implement and evaluate strategies for students with disability to learn to their full potential. Each of

these resources includes the evidence base, step-by-step guides, explainer videos and downloadable checklists and templates.

DoE also provides current teachers with the opportunity to apply for Inclusive Practice in Education Scholarships. This professional development opportunity is open to existing qualified teachers, enabling them to study inclusive or special education whilst remaining in their current position. Approved casual and temporary teachers are also eligible to apply and will be appointed to a permanent special education teaching position upon successful completion of studies.

The program offers three pathways:

- a masters in inclusive/special education
- a masters with specialisation in the area of deaf and hard of hearing or blind and low vision
- a graduate diploma in inclusive/special education.

A total of 415 scholarships have been awarded since the commencement of the program, with an additional 57 offers of scholarship made to teachers commencing studies in 2024.

The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) supports quality teaching and regulation of all NSW schools

NESA ensures all NSW teaching degrees include mandatory studies in disability education, so that graduates possess a foundational understanding of addressing the learning needs of students with disability. NESA supports teachers, learning support staff and others, through a range of materials that can be used to support students with disability. This includes teaching advice, sample teaching programs, case studies, and examples of reasonable adjustments.

Teaching students with disability is a priority area for the professional learning of teachers in NSW. NESA provides criteria for providers designing and delivering courses in NSW, including making a panel of experts available to provide advice where required. NESA requires all NSW schools to maintain records of all teaching staff employed and engaged to deliver NESA curriculum, including the accreditation details of all teaching staff.

All NSW schools must be able to assure NESA that their premises and buildings meet all council and government requirements, including national disability standards, throughout the registration period.

Specialist support staff

Students with disability are supported in their school through:

- School learning and support teams and school counsellors who help teachers identify, assess and respond to the individual needs of students, and coordinate a whole school approach to improving the learning outcomes of every student
- School-based specialist staff who work across a number of schools to make sure the needs of students with disability are met.

DoE's Team Around a School is made up of more than 800 staff. The team builds the professional capacity and expertise of those working directly with students with additional support needs, as well as building all teachers' understanding of how to meet the requirements of diverse learners in the classroom. The team consists of non-school-based and school-based staff with a range of specialist skills and expertise.

The Team Around a School works alongside teams in schools to share specialist knowledge, skills and understanding in the areas of learning and wellbeing, disability and inclusion, mental health, behaviour, attendance, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student support, and transition into and out of the school environment. There are 28 Team Around a School groups across the state and each group services between 3-5 principal networks.

Specialist Allied Health and Behaviour Support

Under the Specialist Allied Health and Behaviour Support Provider Scheme, schools can use their budget to access a range of prequalified allied health and behaviour support providers. Services available under the scheme include occupational therapy, speech pathology, physiotherapy, exercise physiology and specialist behaviour support. Prequalified providers in the scheme have demonstrated that they meet the necessary qualifications and requirements to deliver effective and appropriate support to students and staff. The scheme includes several tools and resources to reduce school administrative burden, including:

- a searchable database of prequalified service providers for school staff to identify and compare services to best meet their school's needs
- a simplified order form for schools to use when engaging these providers
- resources and templates that may be useful to establish collaborative relationships with scheme providers.

Inclusive, quality learning environments

Embedding inclusion in all aspects of school life means incorporating best practice infrastructure design when building and modifying schools. DoE is committed to removing physical access barriers so that students, staff and community members with disability have access to facilities, and can participate in learning and employment opportunities.

The Integration Program, a component of the Minor Capital Works Program, aims to provide targeted capital funding each year to meet the specific access needs of students and staff, to ensure their inclusion in school activities. Integration projects provide adjustments for students with disability in NSW Government schools to provide a more inclusive educational experience. The local infrastructure teams work closely with school principals and Learning and Support teams to undertake any adjustments required. Parents and carers are consulted to understand specific needs, and a strategy and scope of works is developed.

All new school buildings are designed and built with accessibility in mind and in accordance with the DDA Access to Premises - Building Standards 2010, to ensure equal access. Schools are built to be welcoming and fully accessible. Some examples of accessible features include lifts, ramps and accessible bathrooms. All new buildings meet the Building Code of Australia and DoE's Educational Facilities Standards and Guidelines. Targeted upgrades of existing buildings can include ramps, handrails, tactile ground surface indicators, accessible sanitary facilities and passenger lifts.

Safe and inclusive learning environments and workplaces

DoE is committed to ensuring safe and inclusive learning environments for students, teachers and school support staff. This commitment is articulated in DoE's Work Health and Safety (WHS) Policy, supported by essential WHS requirements and reinforced through core procedures.

The Risk Management Procedure serves as the standard process for identifying and managing WHS hazards and risks impacting the health and safety of workers, students and visitors. Individual student healthcare plans must be reviewed when identified as a key control measure in a common hazard factsheet, for example, school excursions, sporting and physical activities. Information on disabilities may be disclosed here, however, it is not a requirement. These resources promote proactive risk management and enhance decision making processes. Workplace inspection and safety checklists including individualised canteen, classroom, and playgrounds and play equipment checklists, provide a resource to systematically assess and identify potential hazards, risks and compliance issues within various workplace environments.

The Emergency Management Procedure serves as practical guidance for all DoE workplaces, assisting in the development, implementation, and maintenance of site-specific Emergency Management Plans (EMPs) and response procedures. Schools utilise this procedure to navigate emergency management arrangements tailored to the distinct characteristics of each school, including location, size, structures, students, staff and community. This includes considerations for students with disability.

The Incident Notification and Response Procedure provides a structured approach to managing and reporting incidents, ensuring a comprehensive response to various situations that may impact the health, safety, and wellbeing of workers, students and visitors and the operational integrity of the workplace. Requiring timely reporting of incidents, particularly when they involve staff or student physical and non-physical injuries, is critically important to the department's ability to support students with disability, and the staff supporting them. DoE also has a dedicated Incident Response and Support Hotline for schools to report incidents and receive support for health and safety matters.

The Consultation and Issue Resolution Procedures outline the steps for establishing or reviewing robust consultation arrangements and addressing WHS issues in the workplace. These procedures are crucial to help staff effectively manage health and safety risks, ensuring a secure work environment, and fostering a culture of safety and collaboration. This is particularly important when considering, designing and reviewing safety measures for students with disability.

The Staff Wellbeing Strategy, launched Day 1, Term 1 2024, is a comprehensive four-year plan to cultivate a positive workplace, fostering the physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing of staff. Key components of this initiative include access to various programs that address the diverse aspects of staff wellbeing, including:

- Access to the Black Dog Institute: providing resources and support for mental health
- Employee Assistance Program: offering confidential counselling services to address personal or work-related challenges
- Access to Wellbeing Community, Resources, and Webinars: enabling staff to access a supportive community, informational resources, and educational webinars
- Fitness Passport: facilitating opportunities for physical health and wellness
- Respectful Workplace Program: promoting a positive and inclusive workplace culture

- Domestic and Family Violence Support and Assistance: providing support and assistance for those affected by domestic and family violence.

In the event a worker sustains an injury in the workplace or encounters medical restrictions or limitations due to a personal health condition, DoE's Return-to-Work Program details the available support mechanisms designed to aid workers in their recovery and facilitate a smooth return to work. Both mandatory and proactive training resources, and efficient and reliable safety communication systems and processes are also in place, to enhance staff capability in WHS matters, providing timely information and updates on health and safety matters.

NESA requires all NSW schools provide a safe and supportive environment and have policies and procedures in place regarding codes of conduct, security and supervision, student behaviour, student wellbeing and providing support for students with disability and identified learning needs.

Focus Area 4: Deliver outstanding leadership, teaching and learning

[Our Plan for NSW Public Education](#) supports schools to deliver excellence through continuous improvement. Students are encouraged to achieve ambitious learning goals through explicit teaching practices, evidence-based curriculum resources and strong educational and instructional leadership.

Curriculum inclusion

DoE is committed to supporting and empowering teachers and staff to create optimum learning outcomes for students with disability. NSW syllabuses acknowledge the diversity of students in schools, and are structured with a commitment to equity for all. Inclusive curriculum planning enables teachers to provide optimal learning opportunities and support for students to achieve their potential.

DoE seeks to ensure students with disability are supported to access the same curriculum and syllabus outcomes as their peers in developmentally appropriate ways. To support this DoE offers teachers and other school staff a range of professional learning. This includes 'Curriculum planning for every student in every classroom' which comprises 25 microlearning modules designed to allow K-12 teachers to effectively identify and meet the diverse learning needs of our students. The modules consider students with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, English as an additional language or dialect students and high potential and gifted learners. These modules also support teachers and school learning and support teams to collaboratively plan and develop authentic learning experiences, based on an understanding of Universal Design for Learning principles.

Statewide Curriculum Implementation professional learning is developed to align with inclusive education practices and provide opportunities for activities within course modules that allow participants to focus on different aspects as needed, including students with additional learning needs and high potential and gifted students.

In Term 2, 2024 the school development day will include specific professional learning that supports staff across all comprehensive and specialist settings to implement the new curriculum with consistency and equity for all students. School leadership teams can determine the content and structure that best meets the needs of their staff and context.

One of the available sessions focuses specifically on curriculum support for students with disability. This is based on the tiered approach to curriculum planning which explores universal teaching practices, differentiation and personalised adjustments. It also explores 20 evidence-based practices that classroom teachers can use for students with disability, to provide more focused and intense support, to learn new skills or behaviour or achieve specific learning goals.

The NSW Education Standards Authority ensures NSW curriculum is inclusive of all learning needs

NESA removes barriers to inclusive education by ensuring curriculum development in all NSW schools is inclusive of all students, including students with disability. NESA's Equity Principles underpin the syllabus development process. For students with intellectual disability or imputed intellectual disability, the curriculum offers 7-10 Life Skills outcomes and content (at a level appropriate for students with significant intellectual disability, provided within a general education syllabus), 11-12 Life Skills courses (a separate course specifically for students with intellectual disability) and new K-6 access content points (for K-6, access content points are additional syllabus content points at an appropriate level for students with significant intellectual disability). These inclusions advance equitable outcomes, opportunities and experiences.

NESA provides advice on curriculum pathways and options for students with disability. This includes guidance for teachers on appropriate decision-making processes through collaborative curriculum planning and involves parents, carers, teachers and other significant individuals determining the most appropriate curriculum options and adjustments for a student with disability.

To support students with disability to access, read and respond to the HSC examinations NESA offers a Higher School Certificate Disability Provisions program to eligible students in all NSW schools. These provisions include, but are not limited to, readers, extra time, rest breaks, braille papers, enlarged papers, and modified exam papers. Application rates have increased by 52% from 2018 to 2023, while approval rates have remained stable at approximately 96%.

NESA provides resources on the HSC Disability Provision program for students, parents and carers and teachers, including a comprehensive guide for teachers and parents and carers, and professional development workshops for teachers.

NESA requires schools to comply with all relevant legislation (e.g. DDA and Standards) to ensure students with disability are able to access and participate equally in education. Schools are required to notify NESA if they have allegedly breached the DDA. NESA will consider any finding as relevant to the school's registration. NESA also requires schools to publish their enrolment policies.

NESA's risk-based regulatory processes include monitoring the delivery of NESA syllabuses and reviewing related teaching and learning documentation.

In August 2023 the first Australian Sign Language (Auslan) syllabus for primary and secondary students was released to NSW schools. Developed in consultation with the deaf community, teachers, students and parents and carers this new syllabus gives NSW students the opportunity to experience a unique part of Australia's linguistic heritage and learn a valuable communication skill.

Regulatory and oversight mechanisms

The following NSW government agencies have powers of overview to protect children and young people with disability, including:

- The Advocate for Children and Young People, established under the Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014 (NSW), advocates for and promotes the safety welfare and wellbeing of children and young people. It can conduct special inquiries into issues affecting children and young people and make recommendations to government and non-government agencies on legislation and policies affecting children and young people.
- The Office of the Children's Guardian, has regulatory and monitoring functions under the Children's Guardian Act 2019 (NSW) and the Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012 (NSW). The Office of Children's Guardian implements the Reportable Conduct Scheme, under which the DoE is required to report on its investigations into reportable allegations. It also implements the Child Safe Scheme, where the DoE is required to put into action the Child Safe Standards.
- NESA regulates school policies and procedures in relation to ensuring a safe and supportive environment for students. All schools in NSW (government and non-government) are

required to implement policies and procedures regarding raising and responding to complaints or grievances identified by students and/or parents and carers.

- The NSW Ombudsman handle complaints from individuals who feel their complaint has not been resolved with a NSW Government agency, or feel they have been treated unfairly or unreasonably by a NSW Government agency. Parents can make a complaint to the NSW Ombudsman about the conduct of DoE and its schools. The Ombudsman use information from complaints to identify and investigate public interest issues and make recommendations.
- The Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW (ADB): Parents or guardians can make a complaint about alleged discrimination under Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW), including disability discrimination, in respect of NSW government schools. The ADB must investigate any accepted complaint and may resolve the complaint through conciliation.
- The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC): Parents can make a complaint to the AHRC where they consider that a government or nongovernment school has contravened the DDA and the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth). The AHRC can investigate and seek to resolve the complaint through conciliation, although it cannot make a determination that discrimination has taken place.

NESA requires all NSW schools to have and implement policies and procedures that comply with the following Acts: Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012 (NSW); Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW); Children's Guardian Act 2019 (NSW). NESA requires all NSW schools to have and implement policies and procedures to ensure that at least every 12 months:

- staff who have direct contact with students are informed of their legal obligations for child protection and other relevant school expectations
- staff who are mandatory reporters are informed of their obligations and the school's procedure for making reports for students at risk of significant harm
- staff are informed about their school's policies and procedures to prevent, identify, and report allegations of employee reportable conduct
- NESA monitors school compliance with this requirement through its established risk-based regulatory processes.

NESA amended its school registration manuals in 2019 in response to the NSW Government's acceptance support of Recommendation 37 of the 2017 NSW Parliamentary Inquiry, education of students with a disability or special need in NSW. The amendments require schools to set clear guidelines and expectations for stakeholders regarding complaints or allegations of staff misconduct or reportable conduct, and to publish the associated complaints handling procedures.

NESA supports parents and carers by requiring schools to set clear guidelines and expectations for stakeholders regarding complaints and allegations of staff misconduct or reportable conduct, and to publish the associated complaints handling procedures. Schools are required to have and publish discipline policies that include procedures for suspension and expulsion, and that are based on procedural fairness.

Complaint and appeal mechanisms available to students/learners, parents, carers and community members

Any person can raise an issue or concern about any aspect of the services provided by DoE. Concerns can be raised via email, mail, phone, in person or via DoE's online complaint form. Parents, carers, students/learners and other members of the community are encouraged to raise their concerns directly with the decision-maker, principal or workplace manager at the time of, or at a reasonable point after, the event or situation. Information for members of the community about how to raise a concern, provide feedback or make a complaint about DoE's services is available on DoE's website.

Workplace managers, principals or their delegates have the responsibility to address concerns that are brought to their attention. Although a person may refer to a concern as a 'complaint' or raise a concern through complaint mechanisms, workplace managers, principals and their delegates are responsible for deciding what action to take, considering the nature and seriousness of the issue. Specific guidance for workplace managers, principals and their delegates is available through DoE's intranet, to assist them to decide the appropriate procedure or process for addressing the specific nature of the concern. The Professional and Ethical Standards directorate may address or provide specific guidance to workplace managers and principals in relation to the management of complex complaints and conduct concerns in relation to employees.

Students, parents and carers may also appeal certain decisions, including out of area enrolment, suspension and expulsion decisions. Specific guidance about appeal processes, including DoE's appeal form, is available through DoE's website.

Complaint mechanisms available to employees

Any employee can raise an issue or concern about a situation arising in DoE's workplaces. Concerns can be raised via email, mail, phone, in person or via DoE's online complaint form. Employees are encouraged to raise and address workplace concerns promptly, locally and as informally as possible, with regard to the relevant procedure or process for addressing the specific nature of the concern.

Employees have the responsibility to raise concerns directly with the decision maker, principal or workplace manager at the time of, or at a reasonable point after, the event or situation. In most situations, employees raising a concern should expect to provide their name and be identifiable.

Workplace managers, principals or their delegates have the responsibility to address workplace concerns that are brought to their attention. Although a person may refer to a concern as a 'complaint' or raise a concern through complaint mechanisms, workplace managers and principals are responsible for deciding what action to take, considering the nature and seriousness of the issue. Concerns raised by employees about a situation arising in a workplace may be addressed under the Staff Complaint Procedure, as a misconduct issue or in accordance with other relevant policy, procedure or processes. Specific guidance for employees is available through DoE's intranet, to assist them to decide the appropriate procedure or process for addressing the specific nature of the concern. The Professional and Ethical Standards directorate may address or provide specific guidance to workplace managers and principals in relation to the management of complex complaints and conduct concerns.

Focus Area 5: Strengthen student wellbeing and development

Our Plan for NSW Public Education seeks to support student wellbeing through the implementation of evidence-informed, whole-school wellbeing approaches to ensure positive, inclusive and safe school cultures. Every student is known, valued and cared for.

Wellbeing and mental health

DoE has a diverse learning and wellbeing workforce. There are more than 2,000 wellbeing-focused roles in NSW public schools, providing direct support to students to enhance their mental health and wellbeing, enabling them to thrive and achieve academically. This workforce includes the School Counselling Service, Student Support Officers, Wellbeing & Health In-Reach Nurses, School Chaplains and Student Wellbeing Officers.

All NSW public schools receive an allocation of counselling services. Rural and remote schools are also supported by the School Counselling and Telepsychology Rural and Remote Schools team.

DoE has commenced preparations to meet the NSW Government's commitment to grow the School Counselling Service by 250 FTE. DoE increased the number of Student Support Officer roles so that as of July 2023 every high school, targeted central schools, and certain SSPs were allocated a full time Student Support Officer position.

To support school's access to high-quality resources, in 2022 DoE established a quality-assured catalogue of external programs. There are more than 70 quality-assured programs in the catalogue across the themes of behaviour, resilience and sense of belonging. Respectful relationships and consent education programs will be added to the catalogue in 2024. DoE is also refreshing the Wellbeing Framework and continues to strengthen wellbeing support services, with a focus on early intervention. DoE partners with leading mental health organisations to support schools in delivering best practice mental health support for students.

DoE has a memorandum of understanding with NSW Health designed to create an overarching state-level framework for the parties' collaborative approach, to maintain and strengthen student health and wellbeing across NSW, supported by an annual work plan.

Student behaviour

The Student Behaviour Policy and Suspension and Expulsion Procedures were reviewed in 2023. The revised policy and new procedures were jointly developed with key partners. This includes extensive consultation with the NSW Teachers Federation, the Primary Principals Association, the Secondary Principals Council and the Special Education Principals and Leaders Association of NSW. The department also consulted with the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW, the Public Service Association, the Advocate for Children and Young People, and the department's Disability Strategy Reference Group.

DoE helped familiarise schools with the revised policy and procedures by running a series of familiarisation sessions across NSW in Term 4, 2023 for principals, school leaders and DELs. There were 22 sessions in 16 different locations across NSW, with several thousand participants. The new policy was fully operational from Day 1, Term 1, 2024.

The updated policy and new suspension and expulsion procedures balance safety with managing challenging behaviour, emphasising inclusive and positive student behaviour support. This approach ensures early access to support, addresses diverse student needs including disabilities, trauma, and cultural considerations in the management of behaviour.

As an inclusive education system, DoE has a focus on prevention and positive approaches to student behaviour support and management. Behaviour support and management interventions

are implemented in line with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth) in that they must be fair, equitable, inclusive and proportionate. They must take into consideration the diverse learning and wellbeing needs of students, including developmental age, trauma, child protection concerns, cultural considerations, disability and individual needs and circumstances.

The revised policy and procedures retain a limit on the duration of suspensions at 5 days for students in Kindergarten to Year 2 and 10 days for students in Years 3 to 12. The policy also returns decision-making authority to principals where they were previously required to seek permission from DoE for any suspension over 10 days (K-2) or 15 days (3-12). It also provides a clear list of grounds for suspensions and reintroduces continued and persistent disobedience and/or disruptive behaviour as grounds for suspension.

The new policy also enables system accountability to provide timely and effective support to schools in managing circumstances where there is the greatest need – including students in K-2, students who are disproportionately suspended and students with high numbers of suspension days.

Consistent with the focus on whole-school, prevention-focused and positive approaches to behaviour support, DoE has also developed the care continuum. The care continuum recognises that students require different types of intervention, delivered in different ways, along a continuum of need, with programs, practices and services that are structured accordingly. This includes:

- Prevention: whole-school prevention approaches aim to establish and maintain safe, respectful learning environments for all students
- Early intervention: early intervention to respond to emerging, low-level behaviours of concern or students at risk of developing behaviours of concern
- Targeted intervention: targeted support to encourage positive behaviours, particularly for students who exhibit more complex and challenging behaviours, or where the frequency of the behaviour of concern may put students' learning and social success at risk if not addressed quickly
- Individual intervention: strategies for students with highly complex and challenging behaviours may need comprehensive systems of support and regular reviews in consultation with parents. Strategies and support require individual assessment, implementation, monitoring, and review.

Restrictive practices

Following the release of the Restrictive Practices Policy and Framework its implementation timeframe was paused in response to feedback from stakeholders that more time was needed to engage with and understand the policy. In the interim, NSW public schools and government preschools must continue to be guided by the following 6 principles in their use of restrictive practices. These principles are:

- student-centred
- least restrictive
- for the shortest time
- helping to reduce and eliminate restrictive practices
- monitored
- reviewed regularly.

Chapter 3: Skills

Focus Area 1: Advance equitable outcomes, opportunities and experiences

The vocational education and training (VET) system plays an essential role across NSW communities, for learners, for industry and to deliver economic and social outcomes. It sits within the wider tertiary education and skills system. The scale of the NSW VET system is significant, with:

- over 1 million learners each year
- over 1,000 registered training providers
- a vast array of training from microcredentials to formal VET qualifications in hundreds of locations and online

There are over 430,000 NSW government-funded post-school students with 252,100 students with a disability enrolled in VET in NSW in 2022.

TAFE NSW is Australia's leading provider of vocational education and spans the state, with 156 campuses, delivering 515 VET qualifications to more than 400,000 students enrolling each year, with around 12% identifying as having a disability.

Adult and Community Education (ACE) providers also make an important contribution to service provision in regional access and in support for equity cohorts. 32 ACE providers are funded by the NSW Government to provide foundational courses and training up to Certificate III level. They support more than 33,000 learners, 20% of whom are students with a disability.

Private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) also play a key role, with in excess of 370,000 government-funded and fee-for-service VET enrolments, and 58,000 apprentices and trainees.

While many of the levers for VET are controlled by the Commonwealth (including regulation, national training products, student loans and significant funding), the NSW Government drives outcomes in VET through:

- major levers regarding the economy, planning, investment and as a major employer (or commissioner) in the skills and sectors that need VET

- major funder for VET overall, for the public provider TAFE NSW, and for major programs. Funding can be used to drive what is delivered, where, by which provider, and any quality or other requirements
- responsibility for apprenticeships, traineeships and associated incentives
- supporting and delivering major programs from VET for secondary school students, to programs in equity, careers, foundational skills and wraparound support
- use of government land, facilities, procurement policy, and investment in systems and technology.

VET is also delivered in secondary schools in NSW, with over 35,000 students engaging in VET subjects for their HSC in 2020. The three main avenues available to students to undertake a VET course while at school are:

- school delivered VET
- externally delivered VET
- school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SBATs).

More than one third of all year 11 and 12 students in NSW public schools studied VET courses as part of their HSC in 2020. Work placement is a key feature of HSC VET courses. In 2021, approximately 9,000 employers provided work placements for more than 32,000 students across the three school sectors.

Focus Area 2: Strengthen trust and respect for the teaching profession and school support staff

Workforce capability for inclusion

VET Teachers in NSW are currently required to hold a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment qualification. This qualification includes content that equips teachers to make learning and assessment adjustments for students with a disability. DoE's Pathways and Transitions team supports schools and teachers with advice on reasonable adjustments under the national standards.

DoE also delivers high-impact professional learning for teachers and school support staff to equip them with the skills and knowledge required to support students with disability. This professional learning includes:

- [Inclusive transition strategies for students with disability](#): This targeted professional learning utilises inclusive pathways resources, programs, and strategies to increase knowledge and understanding of providing equitable pathways for students with disability. It is delivered to careers advisers, transition advisers, learning and support teams, and other staff who support the transition of students with disability. There were 171 participants from 117 schools involved in this training in 2023.
- [Transition Adviser Training](#): Transition Advisers are teachers who collaborate with the local community, industry organisations, and government agencies to deliver programs that will support their school's identified groups of students as they prepare for successful transitions to further education, training, or employment. The Transition Adviser Training program had 23 teachers from 22 schools in 2023.
- [Transition Support Training](#): This professional learning program is for school staff who work with students and aims to support smooth transitions through school into work, further education, or training. This program had 26 teachers from 25 schools in 2023.

The externally delivered Vocational Education and Training (EVET) program includes additional loading/funding for RTOs to support students with a disability who are undertaking VET study. Demand has increased for access and disability provisions under the EVET program, from 375 students in 2022 to 1,938 students in 2023 (a 416% increase) particularly with respect for cognitive access provisions.

Specialist support for TAFE NSW students with disability

To support students with disability TAFE NSW offers a range of supports to assist learners with disability, including:

- guidance on choosing the right course and program of study
- assistance with enrolling
- assistance with fee exemption applications
- development of an individual support plan, including identifying classroom support and assessment modifications

- providing access to learner support, Auslan interpreters, note-takers, or disability assistants
- accessing ergonomic equipment and assistive technology
- assistance with Read & Write - a software program that supports people with dyslexia, and those who need help with reading, writing and spelling
- information on how teachers will plan, deliver and assess a learner's training
- modifying assessment and exam conditions
- mobility orientation
- developing health care plans for life-threatening conditions
- referrals to TAFE NSW services, such as counselling and Work and Development Orders
- guidance and assistance with NDIS workers being on campus for personalised non-educational care supports.

TAFE NSW Disability Teacher Consultants are responsible for establishing and coordinating specialist teaching and non-teaching support services for students with disability, while also performing teaching duties, to achieve optimal student outcomes.

Disability Teacher Consultants actively promote access for students with disability to TAFE NSW courses, maximising enrolments, participation and completions in vocational education and training, leading to successful achievement of student goals and employment for people with disability.

Disability Teacher Consultants:

- coordinate the design and/or modification of inter-disciplinary programs within the TAFE NSW system aimed at supporting students with disability, including special education programs, individual tutorial assistance, educational interventions and the provision of assistive technologies and specialised equipment
- provide support for TAFE NSW teachers of students with disability by advising on needs of the students, appropriate teaching methodologies, assessment/examination and curriculum delivery modifications to meet these student needs

- train educational and non-educational staff in inclusive, accessible teaching, learning and communication strategies and deliver disability awareness programs for staff and community groups
- recruit, train and mentor part-time teachers and specialist support staff, including assistants, interpreters, note-takers and tutors supporting students with disability
- liaise with internal and external stakeholders across learning locations and TAFE NSW sections to ensure effective support services for students with disability are maintained and industry/community needs are met. This includes liaising with Disability Employment Services for students with disability as they finish their course and transition to employment.

TAFE NSW offers an online training to all staff on Disability Awareness and Inclusion

TAFE NSW offers Disability and Access Services to remove barriers to learning for students with disability. The statewide network of support professionals provides advice, guidance and support across multiple channels for students living with disability and medical conditions across multiple channels. Disability and Access Services include:

- provision of assistive technology and equipment
- Disability Awareness Training for inclusive teaching/specialist disability needs
- negotiation, implementation and review of reasonable adjustment provision within Individual Education Plans
- 1:1 and group tutorials
- liaison and referral to teaching sections to provide guidance, advice and support when managing reasonable adjustments and student learning needs.

TAFE NSW also provides multiple channels for learners to access Disability and Access Services

- via telephone when on campus to be connected to a Disability Teacher Consultant
- where there is already a relationship, the learner can contact a Disability Teacher Consultant directly via phone, email or online meeting

- teachers and other staff can contact a Disability Teacher Consultant to request specialist equipment, consultation, reasonable adjustment or other services.

TAFE NSW currently employs more than 80 full time Disability Teacher Consultants across NSW. Where there is not a Disability Teacher Consultant physically located at a campus, learners are supported by a network of professionals accessible via:

- telephone
- online virtual meeting platforms
- travel to another nearby campus where there is a Disability Teacher Consultant or have a Disability Teacher Consultant travel to them.
- Additional support is provided through a network of Disability Assistants, Notetaker/Reader/Writer.

TAFE NSW is currently developing a 2024-2028 Disability Inclusion Action Plan, which will be developed with input from staff, learners and community with lived experience and will focus on the individual, organisation and systemic changes that need to happen to remove barriers for people with disability.

Focus Area 6: Provide meaningful post school pathways

Enhancing access to high-quality vocational education and training (VET)

TAFE NSW

TAFE NSW provides a significant range of post-school options and pathways for learners including students with disability. Around 12% of TAFE NSW students identify as having disability, of whom several thousand indicate that they need additional support to engage with TAFE NSW education and training. TAFE NSW pathways are available in a diverse range of areas including options to coincide with schooling; as an alternative to traditional senior school education; through foundation skills and introductory vocational courses and customised programs.

As for all learners in TAFE NSW, support is also available to strengthen language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills along with access to specialist counselling and other support services. The 2023 National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) Student Outcomes Survey data shows that learners with disability studying at TAFE NSW achieved the following:

- **Attained qualification:** learners with disability studying at TAFE NSW had the highest completion rate of 45.7% compared to NSW community education providers at 42.5% and NSW private providers at 41.3%.
- **Gained employment:** of the almost 60% of TAFE NSW graduates with disability who were not employed before training (57.8%), one third were employed after training (33.9%).
- **Improved employment status:** 77.5% of graduates with disability improved their employment status after training for government funded VET qualification completers at TAFE NSW.
- **Gained extra skills for their job:** 45% of learners with disability acquired new skills relevant to their current jobs.
- **Self-confidence:** 59.1% of learners with disability reported that what had once seemed impossible was now possible; that they felt better prepared for further study or for employment; and more confident in their engagement in the wider community.

Smart and Skilled

Smart and Skilled is the NSW Government-subsidised training system to help people get the skills to find a job and to advance their careers. Learners are provided with an entitlement to subsidised training up to and including Certificate III and government funding for higher-level courses (Certificate IV and above) in targeted priority areas. The vast majority of learners with disability in this program receive instruction from TAFE NSW.

Smart and Skilled supports people with disability to undertake training and join the workforce. There are many mechanisms to support students with disability to undertake post-school vocational education and training (VET) including:

- fee exemptions that are applied for students with a disability and their dependents, meaning they will not pay a fee for training
- additional funding in the form of a price loading based on the need for additional support (“needs-based loading”) to contracted Smart and Skilled training providers to ensure there are reasonable adjustments and supports in place for these students.

Participation for students with disability under the Smart and Skilled program has been significant since it was first introduced in 2015, from 12,282 in 2015 to 13,620 in 2022-23.

From 1 July 2023, the NSW Government expanded support by allowing more than one needs-based loading to be paid per student meeting more than one needs-based criteria. The other types of needs-based loadings are for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and long-term unemployed people. This change recognises that students may have intersectional needs and allows for additional funding to be applied. This means a student with a disability who is also an Aboriginal person or someone who is long-term unemployed will attract more funding for their provider, to ensure appropriate support is available to the student to help them engage and complete their training. DoE is also continuing to provide significant funding for foundation skills training and wraparound services to support these students.

Adult and Community Education (ACE)

Adult and Community Education (ACE) plays an integral role in the education, training and community support of NSW residents in regional, rural and remote locations. ACE providers assist people to overcome barriers to education and employment. Across NSW, 32 ACE providers receive government funding through the ACE program. The program is designed to offer intensive support for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people, including students with disability who may face barriers to training participation, as well as access to pre-vocational and vocational training as a pathway to formal training and jobs.

In the 2022-23 financial year, across the 32 ACE providers participating in the ACE program, 17% of training delivery was to learners with a disability. Young people aged 15-24 with a disability comprised 6.5% of training delivery. DoE is finalising the NSW ACE strategy which will provide focus and commitment to the sector VET and improving disadvantaged learner pathways into ACE.

Apprenticeships and Traineeships

An apprenticeship or traineeship is one of the best ways to get hands-on training and a nationally recognised qualification while being paid. It is an effective way to start a pathway into employment as it gives learners the skills employers need, and a foundation on which to build a successful career and undertake further learning opportunities. An apprenticeship or traineeship can be commenced while at school as a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship (SBAT).

Apprenticeship and traineeship programs can provide additional training and assistance for people with disability. According to NSW data (IVETS), effective 18 January 2024 there are 3,374 apprentices and trainees identified as having a disability in training. This comprises 2,044 apprentices and 1,330 trainees.

When a training contract for an apprenticeship or traineeship is lodged and it is identified the learner has a disability, training advisors located in Training Services NSW offices (located across NSW) will undertake monitoring to ensure the employer and learner are aware of support services available and to check whether extra support that may be required has been provided. Training advisors also confirm that employers are aware of, and have registered for, the Commonwealth Disabled Australian Apprentice Wage Support (DAAWS) program which provides a weekly payment to assist employers of eligible Australian apprentices with disability.

Financial assistance for tutorial, interpreter and mentor services is payable directly to the training provider in respect of an apprentice or trainee with a disability who has been assessed as eligible for DAAWS, and who requires additional assistance with formal training. These apprentices or trainees may attract this form of assistance regardless of whether their employer receives DAAWS.

Training Services NSW offices deliver free workshops for employers and supervisors of apprentices and trainees. The workshops assist in understanding the importance of effective communication in the workplace and address potential workplace bullying and harassment issues. Employers and supervisors are reminded of their duty of care for an apprentice or trainee, (a condition of the training contract), how to recognise changes in a learner's behaviour, monitor conditions such as increased fatigue and to regularly keep in contact with the learner.

Chapter 8 of the accompanying Supervising your Apprentice or Trainee Workshop Participation Handbook is dedicated to employing an apprentice or trainee with disability. Employers are reminded they are required to make reasonable adjustments for apprentices or trainees with disability and ensure that employees with disability have the opportunity to gain employment and participate in work on the same basis as their peers. NSW Anti-Discrimination legislation, incorporating Equal Employment Opportunity, covers reasonable adjustments required in the workplace.

Apprenticeship & Traineeship Roadmap

Training Services NSW has developed an Apprenticeship and Traineeship (A&T) Roadmap 2023-2026. The A&T Roadmap will expand pathways and supports for learners, aligning with their needs and capabilities. The first pillar of the A&T Roadmap will increase the flexibility of the model for a more learner-centred approach including options such as pre-vocational/foundational skills training, literacy, language and numeracy support, alternative training contract duration and multiple exit points throughout the apprenticeship or traineeship. The third pillar will strengthen targeted supports for learners with a disability including onboarding, monitoring, mediation, individualised action plans and working across stakeholders to support mental health and wellbeing.

Bert Evans Apprentice Scholarships

In 2014 the Bert Evans Apprentice Scholarships were launched to assist apprentices in NSW who have experienced hardship and need additional financial support to complete their apprenticeship. The Scholarships support apprentices to progress through to completion of their chosen trade qualification, encourage more apprentices to achieve their goals and make a valuable contribution to their local communities and invest in individual development to support employment outcomes. The Scholarships provide \$5,000 per year over 3 years, for a total of \$15,000. (Apprentices with a disability are one of the equity groups who receive priority consideration for a Scholarship. In 2023, 50 Scholarships were awarded to apprentices aged 25 and under with disability.

1,000 Public Sector Apprentices and Trainees Program

The 1,000 NSW Public Sector Apprentices and Trainees Program provides assistance to public sector agencies to employ an additional 1,000 apprentices and trainees within the NSW Public Sector, over the three years to 30 June 2026. The program offers substantial wage subsidies to attract additional apprentice and trainee roles, support for training to increase the supply of suitable candidates, and improved capacity for agencies to supervise apprentices and trainees.

Apprenticeships and traineeships are well-regarded education pathways into ongoing employment and the program aims to commence a minimum of 5% of these roles with people with disability. The program is actively engaging stakeholder groups that work with people with disability and will be able to assist suitable candidates seeking to pursue an apprenticeship or traineeship.

Educational Pathways Program (EPP)

The EPP is designed to improve education and career outcomes for young people by introducing students to a range of vocational training and employment pathways. This program is highly valued by schools and shows excellent benefits, for example improving the numbers of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SBATs). The program works with students with a disability and to date has engaged approximately 64,000 students, in 149 public secondary schools, across 9 regions, with 57% of schools located in regional, rural or remote areas. The program aims to improve engagement with students with disability in schools.

Regional Industry Education Partnerships (RIEP) program

The RIEP program connects employers with local schools to support student career exploration and development. This includes students with a disability. Over the past three years, RIEP has

delivered 3,248 opportunities for students with a disability to explore careers. More than 960 employers and industry partners have participated in RIEP activities, engaging students from 272 NSW schools.

The RIEP program works closely with the EPP program to facilitate strong industry engagement with sectors in demand in local communities. While students with a disability participate in a broad range of RIEP activities, the program also works with disability service providers and local employers to design programs specifically for these students.

Career and training pathways for Aboriginal students with disability

Training Services NSW Aboriginal Initiatives support skilling and employment outcomes for Aboriginal people through a range of programs, including:

- **Opportunity Hubs:** these hubs provide Aboriginal young people with the confidence and knowledge to follow a supported pathway between school and further education and/or employment. This is achieved by; partnering with schools and local employers and training providers, coordinating local opportunities including employment, mentoring; scholarships internships and volunteer work, matching local opportunities for Aboriginal student's career aspirations that lead to jobs and involving parents in the early years of schooling. There are five Opportunity Hubs across NSW.
- **Elsa Dixon Aboriginal Employment Grant program:** This program adopts a number of strategies to develop and support Aboriginal people through the creation of training and employment opportunities. The program subsidises the salary, development and support costs of Aboriginal employees in public service agencies and local government authorities. Young Aboriginal people with disability still at school can participate in the School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships element (one of four elements of the program). Under this element a one-off payment of \$10,000 is paid to support employment of a school-based apprentice or trainee. Each financial year DoE applies for 50 positions. In 2023 all positions were successfully filled by early December. The Post School element (introduced in 2023) provides \$10,000 up to \$20,000 to support the continuation of employment for a learner (part-time or full-time employment status) who successfully completed the HSC in the previous calendar year.
- **Barrangirra Initiative:** This initiative provides end-to-end support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners through culturally appropriate mentoring to ensure successful retention and completion of training and improved post-training employment outcomes. Young people in particular are encouraged to participate in this support service.

Careers NSW

Careers NSW provides a career support service for anyone looking to enter the workforce, change careers, develop their skills or identify a career pathway. It fills a market gap by supporting equity groups to access individual, in-person or virtual career guidance and information. Despite current low unemployment rates for the general population, equity groups continue to experience barriers to education, training and employment pathways and benefit from individual support post-school. Careers NSW focuses its support on key equity groups including people with disability. The service provides qualified, independent career practitioners and volunteer industry experts meet directly with users to support them into education, training or employment pathways.

Since 2021, Careers NSW has supported:

- 275,000 website users since launch, providing access to Career Practitioners, Industry Expert appointments as well as information on VET training, education and employment
- 6,800 Career Practitioner bookings
- 1,628 Skills Hub specialist bookings
- 740 volunteer Industry Expert bookings
- 42 in-person locations across NSW and virtual services available statewide.

In late 2023, Careers NSW began asking service users in November 2023, if they wish to disclose disability. Currently 2% of service users have disclosed they have a disability. Careers NSW has support in place to assist service users including recruiting specialist careers practitioners, customised training for careers practitioners, assistive technology, accessible in person sites and text-to-voice functionality.

Since 2023, Careers NSW is further focussing its work to better support people with a disability, by working to upskill current career practitioner providers to better meet the needs of people disability. Careers NSW also includes Get Back in the Game, which support disengaged young people aged 15-19 years to re-engage with education, employment or training. Run since 2016, this program provides one on one support and has strong engagement with disadvantaged young people, especially young people with mental health issues. 29% of young people using Get Back in the Game have disclosed a disability.

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