

**Submission
No 64**

**INQUIRY INTO FOUNDATIONAL AND DISABILITY
SUPPORTS AVAILABLE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: NSW Teachers Federation

Date Received: 7 May 2025



**AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION
NEW SOUTH WALES TEACHERS FEDERATION BRANCH**

SUBMISSION TO

**Select Committee on Foundational and Disability Supports Available for
Children and Young People in New South Wales
Legislative Council NSW Parliament House**

INQUIRY INTO

**Foundational and Disability Supports Available for Children and Young
People in New South Wales**

Authorised by

**for Maxine Sharkey
General Secretary
AEU NSW Teachers Federation**

7 May 2025

The Australian Education Union NSW Teachers Federation Branch (the Federation) represents teachers, executive teachers and principals in NSW public preschools, infants, primary, secondary and central schools, schools for specific purposes and teachers working in consultant/advisory positions within the NSW Department of Education (the Department). Teachers employed by TAFE NSW and Corrective Services NSW are also represented by the Federation.

Introduction

Federation welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Legislative Assembly's Select Committee on Foundational and Disability Supports Available for Children and Young People in New South Wales.

Federation's policy on Foundational and Disability Supports is articulated in its State Council decision of Annual Conference 2022 "Fulfilling our Public Purpose – Achieving Equity and Excellence through staffing and Early Intervention and State-wide staffing."¹

That decision, in part, as follows:

Governments have a fundamental responsibility to fund, govern and deliver necessary supports. These supports should assist the growth and development of our young people, regardless of location, context or wealth. This should be a regulated, non-profiteering, community entitlement that allows access for all to services that should be supported by governments that guarantee equality and excellence in outcomes for all.

The NSW Teachers Federation holds the position that:

The government delivery of a comprehensive, universal and free public preschool and early intervention education for prekindergarten children could be the greatest educational reform in decades and will have a direct bearing on positive educational and life outcomes for thousands of students.

Ensuring that these services are funded as a separate budget allocation, to ensure timely and suitable supports are accessed, with capital spend infrastructures must be a joint venture between federal and state governments.

¹ Annual Conference attended by over 500 members from the NSWTF

Executive Summary

Federation notes the terms of reference. The submission will focus on the following as they relate to the Inquiry and relevance for public education provision in New South Wales.

Governments and their departments must:

1. Guarantee a free community entitlement to Foundational and Disability Supports collocated on all public primary schools beginning at pre-compulsory school age
2. Ensure culturally respectful early support as an entitlement for Aboriginal children and Torres Strait Islander children
3. Directly fund and deliver Foundational and Disability Supports across specialist education settings where the most serious level of intersectional disadvantage occurs
4. Guarantee Foundational and Disability Supports post school in TAFE and Corrective Services

Federation asserts that early intervention is a moral, social and economic imperative.²

Note: The term *early intervention* may be interpreted in two distinct ways: firstly, as intervention during infancy or early childhood; and secondly, as intervention at the initial presentation of symptoms, conditions, or developmental concerns. In this submission, Federation focuses on the former - emphasising the significance and the social, political, and economic benefits of public preschools and early intervention units. Where Federation refers to other forms of early intervention, this will be explicitly stated.

Disclaimer: The case studies included in this submission have been shared by Federation members to illustrate the real-world impact of delayed access to early intervention and public preschools. While other agencies may be mentioned, Federation has not verified the involvement or capacity of those services. The central focus of this submission is the urgent need for government investment in public preschools as a means of ensuring timely access to education and early intervention for all children to deliver social, economic, and ethical benefits to the communities of New South Wales.

² FULFILLING OUR PUBLIC PURPOSE – ACHIEVING EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE THROUGH STAFFING AND EARLY INTERVENTION AND SYSTEM-WIDE STAFFING, Annual Conference 2022

1. Guarantee a free community entitlement to Foundational and Disability Supports collocated on all public primary schools beginning at pre-compulsory school age

From the outset, Federation affirms its position that all children aged three to five in New South Wales should have access to a public preschool.

This section outlines the core proposals of this submission - what Federation is formally advocating for. Federation has a longstanding history of campaigning for increased investment in public preschools and welcomes the commitment from both sides of government to deliver free, public early childhood education and early intervention for children aged three to five. The provision of high-quality public education in the early years enables teachers to more effectively identify children requiring additional support and to facilitate access to appropriate services.

As identified by Pascoe and Brennan (2017) in the state and territories government-commissioned report, *Lifting our Game*³, children are born ready to learn with about 85-90 per cent of brain development occurring between the ages of 0 and 5⁴.

The first 1000 days are critical.

Government has a responsibility to guarantee a no profiteering and regulated community entitlement that is accessible within every school catchment regardless of location. This systemic infrastructure and service will allow families access to necessary and vital supports for the development of their child/ren.

The NSW Department of Education (2021)⁵ outlines the importance of early intervention as it “promotes each child’s development and meaningful participation in all aspects of their life and represents a small component of the total provision of early intervention in NSW”.

Federation asserts that quality public preschools and early intervention units are a necessary foundation for equity, inclusion, and lifelong learning. ⁶

Federation welcomed the commitment of the Minns Government to establish new public preschools in 2023, resulting in 200 co-located public preschools by 2027⁷.

This pathway to universal access is the necessary investment by government to support the development, growth and pursuit in equality of educational outcomes for all students regardless of location, ability or family context.

It is our policy position that:

“The expanded provision of public pre-schooling must also include needs-based support for children with disability. Such considerations should include, and not be limited to,

³ As cited <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/leadership/lifting-our-game-report>

⁴ As cited <https://www.learningpotential.gov.au/your-child-andneuroscience-2>

⁵ As cited <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/early-learning/early-intervention>

⁶ PUBLIC EDUCATION: THE FOUNDATION OF SOCIAL INCLUSION AND COHESION, *Annual Conference 2024*

⁷ As cited <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/operating-an-early-childhood-education-service/current-service-providers/universal-preschool/100-new-public-preschools>

establishing additional Early Intervention Units and the involvement of other government agencies such as the Department of Health.”⁸

Australian Governments are spending \$15.2 billion⁹ each year on intervention with older individuals to address crises and problems that are preventable.

Early childhood education supported by early intervention makes sense: morally, socially, culturally and economically.

Federation's position is that true equality, excellence and equity cannot be achieved without well-resourced, inclusive public education.¹⁰

Community Entitlement for Public Preschools and early intervention support in the Illawarra Region.

Early intervention and early childhood education can lead to improved language skills, emotional regulation, and cognitive development¹¹. By identifying and addressing developmental delays or health concerns early on, families can ensure that their children receive the resources and support necessary to thrive. This proactive approach helps to prevent more significant challenges later in life, including difficulties in school and increased risk of health issues.

Case study 1

This case study highlights the impact of children missing out on public preschool, leading to delayed diagnosis and access to allied health support. Teachers are not qualified to deliver therapies like speech or occupational therapy, making it almost impossible to meet students' needs without early intervention.

Context: A primary school Assistant Principal working at a school located in the Illawarra region discusses the need for community entitlement for early intervention services. The school's current enrolment is 189 and has 9 mainstream classes, 4 support unit classes K-6 (2 MC, 2 Autism). In 2024, 68% of students were in the bottom quarter of socio-economic advantage according to ICSEA. 90% of students were in the bottom half of socio-economic advantage. 33% of students identified as Aboriginal.

Issue: In the Illawarra region of New South Wales, single parents struggle to access essential services for their children, particularly when it comes to preschool, early intervention and allied health support. Without government coordinated services, parents face significant challenges in securing the support their children need.

⁸ SCHOOLS INFRASTRUCTURE, CAPITAL FUNDING AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING, Annual Conference 2023

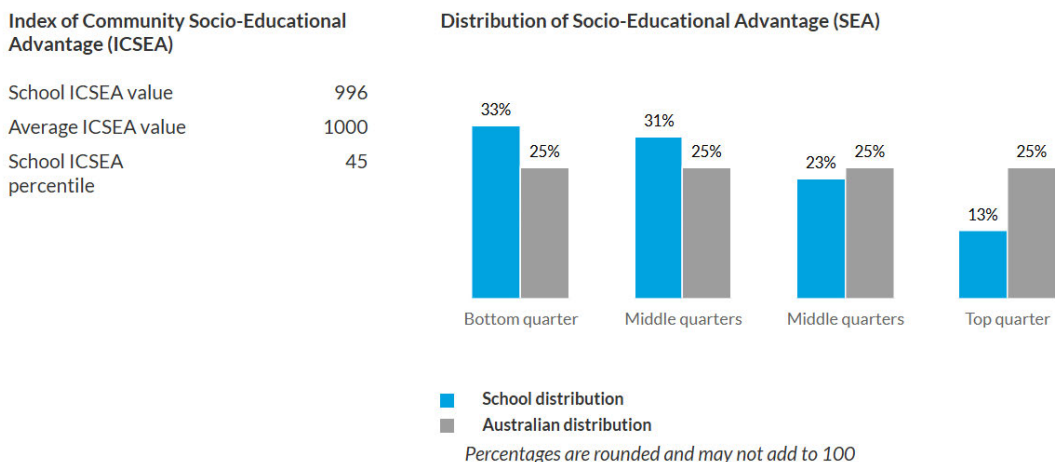
⁹ Teager, W., Fox, S. and Stafford, N. (2019). How Australia can invest early and return more: A new look at the \$15b cost and opportunity. Early Intervention Foundation, The Front Project and CoLab at the Telethon Kids Institute, Australia.

¹⁰ THE PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM – EQUALITY, EXCELLENCE, EQUITY, Annual Conference 2024

¹¹ Information gained from <https://activeability.com.au/early-intervention-support-services/benefits-of-early-childhood-intervention-programs/> and NSW Department of Education, 2024 (see reference)

Figure 1: MySchool (ACARA) 2024 School Profile¹²

Student background



K is a young unemployed Aboriginal woman and a single parent to four children: T in Yr 4 (male), A in Yr 3 (female), J in Yr 2 (female) and a 1-year-old girl. K and the 3 oldest children have been subjected to ongoing domestic violence by the children's father until he was incarcerated. K was also disqualified from driving for a lengthy period. Therefore, the family had great difficulties getting anywhere as they had to walk or access public transport (buses).

The three oldest children all exhibit ongoing, unaddressed mental health issues from exposure to domestic violence. The oldest child suffered severe separation anxiety at morning drop off for several years. This was particularly bad after Learning from Home during COVID lockdown in 2021, his first year at school. All three school age children are being monitored for attendance as they have frequent unjustified absences from school. This includes partial attendance issues due to arriving late in the morning.

T has exhibited signs of anxiety and has behaviour problems in the classroom and playground. The family suffers from food insecurity and T has frequently stolen food from other students' bags. He craves "treats" such as chips, as his mother cannot afford to buy them regularly. T also appears to have receptive (understanding words and language) language difficulties. He finds it challenging to follow instructions at home and at school. He is finding it difficult to access the curriculum and engage in the activities and tasks required for Stage Two students. He is becoming increasingly disruptive in the classroom as he is unable to "access" or understand what the teacher is saying or talking about. His social skills are poor as he has difficulties engaging in reciprocal interactions with others (verbally or nonverbally), to compromise with others and be able to recognise and follow social norms.

If K's family had been able to access early intervention programs, public preschool and allied health services located at their local public school her children would have received timely support. Such services would enable: the building of trusting relationships with students and families to identify and assess their health and wellbeing needs and address barriers to accessing services; and the coordination of appropriate early intervention

¹² My School (2025). March 2025. Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. <https://www.myschool.edu.au/>

assessments and referrals of students and families to services and programs, e.g. speech pathology, occupational therapy, child psychologists.

Impact: In Case Study 1, the absence of a public preschool led to missed early intervention opportunities, resulting in worsening symptoms, more disruptive reactive support in the classroom, and increased costs to government.

The Federation maintains that public preschools must be expanded and co-located with primary schools to ensure universal access for all children. It asserts that every child should have the right to attend a public preschool as part of a broader commitment to universal early childhood education. The Federation also welcomes investment in preschool infrastructure, recognising it as essential to achieving educational equity.¹³

For many families, the absence of local public preschool and accessible allied health services means lengthy commutes to facilities located far from home. This not only consumes valuable time but also places financial strain on families, making it increasingly difficult for children to receive timely support.

The lack of a coordinated service leaves parents feeling overwhelmed and isolated, with little hope of finding the resources necessary for their children's development. Families must be in walking distance to early intervention supports for their entitlement to be realised.

The government must prioritise the establishment of services collocated on all public-school premises. Bringing together early intervention programs, free public preschools, and free allied health services will ensure young people will achieve learning outcomes with necessary supports.

Early intervention supports will ensure closing of learning outcomes gaps that are present, by the age of 8, when required supports have been missing. Through the creation of a single location for these critical services, families will benefit from improved access and support tailored to children's needs as they progress through school.

1 in 7 year 6 schoolboys (Grattan, 2025)¹⁴ are accessing NDIS funding with only 12% of all individuals getting the support that they need. The government needs to make systemic change. The Grattan Institute indicates that a rebalance to the allocation of \$58billion (estimated 2025 budget for NDIS) to ensure more efficient and effective efforts are made to engage in government co-ordinated and state employed foundational services that ensure individuals, their families and communities are supported more effectively.

An estimated 14% of 6-year-olds are accessing NDIS funding. Which is too late. Children should have access earlier and be available as an entitlement to ensure learning gaps do not open and positive long-term impact is guaranteed.

Implementing such an initiative would not only alleviate the logistical burdens faced by parents in the community but also foster a stronger sense of community among families. By providing a collaborative environment where parents can connect and share experiences, the government can help ensure that all children can thrive prior to compulsory school age.

¹³ SCHOOLS INFRASTRUCTURE, CAPITAL FUNDING AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING, Annual Conference 2023

¹⁴ Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DX0ognH0so>

A community expectation that is culturally embedded by the provision of a co-ordinated and funded government service is the notion of pre-compulsory entitlement to early intervention and colocated public preschools. Just as its compulsory to attend school, creating a culture of free and consistent access to pre-compulsory school aged education.

It is crucial for the government to recognize the importance of access to an 'on the doorstep' public preschool and allied health service. By investing in colocated public-school provision, the government can take meaningful steps toward addressing the needs of families and supporting children's development in the Illawarra region and beyond.

Community Entitlement for allied health and disability supports in Far West NSW.

Local public schools in rural and remote areas serve as the hub of regional, rural and remote communities. Recruiting and retaining a specialised and qualified workforce is important in non-metropolitan locations. Waiting lists for cognitive assessments for school aged children, can be up to 18 months in Far West NSW, with some families being forced to seek interstate services.

The digital access divide between nonmetropolitan and rural communities means that access to services via phone or online appointments is not a solution.

Case Study 2

This case study demonstrates that when a need is identified, public resources must be available to provide the early intervention.

Context: *A primary school in a rural school, located adjacent to the Murray River close to Mildura with an enrolment of 180 students. The school has close connections with other local school communities, as well as those in the broader Far West Group of Schools. In 2024, 61% of students were in the bottom half of socio-economic advantage according to ICSEA.*

Issue: A year one student with severe expressive delays was unable to access necessary speech pathology for over 6 months, when the only town speech pathologist was on leave. This resulted in the year one student missing out on the necessary 1:1 therapy to improve his ability to communicate with others and reach anticipated learning outcomes for that year.

Impact: In Case Study 2, the six-year-old student was unable to access speech therapy due to a lack of local services, leading to behavioural challenges and developmental delays that will now require significant school resources to address socially, emotionally, and academically.

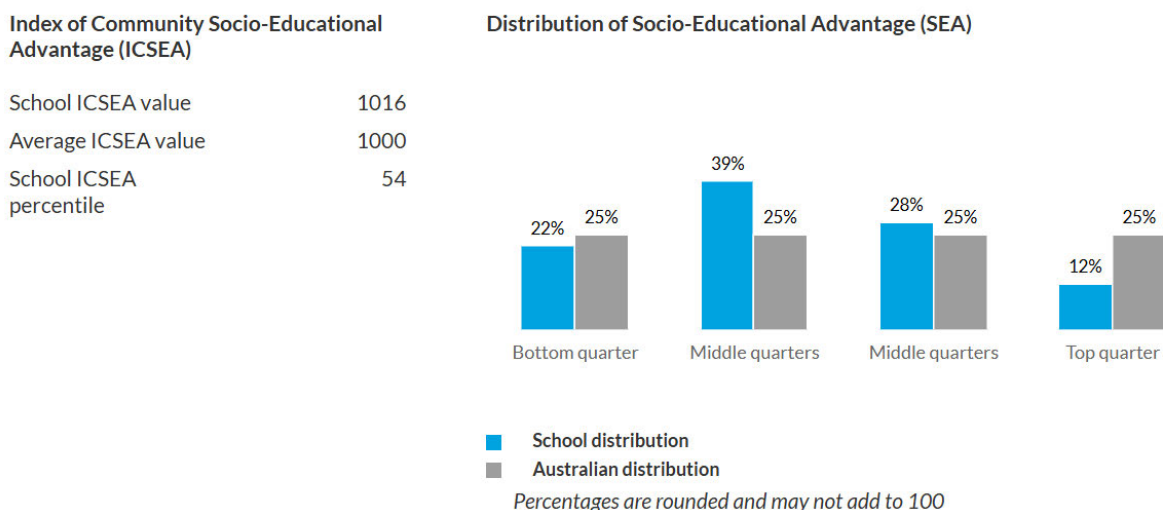
The absence or inconsistency of intervention for a child will result in challenges with their learning and a growing learning outcome gap that widens as they grow up. As a child struggles with their learning from this starting point behavioural issues, disengagement, poor attendance and a decline in mental health begin to present.

For some students, they unfortunately choose to engage in disruptive behaviours to cover up learning shortfalls. The student doesn't want to be seen as needing help or not knowing how to engage in learning. By the age of 6 or 7, without appropriate interventions, this young student will be academically up to 2 years behind his peers. This gap is directly

attributed to a lack of necessary foundational support, that would have allowed him to build skills and confidence in his ability to learn and manage the classroom environment.

Figure 2: MySchool (ACARA) 2024 School Profile¹⁵

Student background



This issue of access is intensified by the distances required to access appointments for basic health services such as early developmental checks, dental and general practitioner visits as well as more specialised services such as mental health support or paediatricians.

While the recently built Health Care facility in town provides care for children and families across the Far Western region, it is expected to service numerous communities, over a 160km radius. With limited public transport options, and higher instances of single parent or lower income families than the state average, travelling to appointments is a major impediment to equitable care.

A teacher colleague, located in rural NSW, spoke of assisting a parent to meet with maternal health nurses on school grounds to enable her children to receive vaccinations and vital developmental checks, that would otherwise have been impossible due to a lack of transport.

Another family at school has two young children who are 4 and 7 years old. They are a family with two parents. The youngest child requires high flow oxygen therapy to manage severe asthma, and the closet machine requires travel over 400km interstate to Adelaide. With no family in town, the whole family must travel, pulling the older sibling out of school. A service that should be a local entitlement is impacting both students educationally, socially and emotionally. Other families at school travel over 550km to Melbourne to access adequate health care.

Many families who cannot afford to fund \$450 per term, per child at the local community preschool are excluded from early learning opportunities. No family should have to pay. Rich or poor. Taxation means services are delivered locally for free for all to access. For a

¹⁵ My School (2025). March 2025. Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. <https://www.myschool.edu.au/>

great number of families, long distance travel isn't financially viable, and children miss out with negative flow on effects to both their education and health outcomes.

2. Ensure culturally respectful early support as an entitlement for Aboriginal children and Torres Strait Islander children.

Every child, regardless of background, deserves access to high-quality, fully funded public education.¹⁶

Access to appropriate early support can significantly enhance educational outcomes, social skills, and overall health, helping to close achievement gaps in a culturally respectful, inclusive and responsive environment. A culturally respectful, inclusive, and responsive environment fosters a sense of belonging and empowers Aboriginal families and Torres Strait Islander families. It enhances learning and development by ensuring that everyone is valued and supported in their cultural identity.

Aboriginal children and Torres Strait Islander children often face unique challenges, including socioeconomic disadvantage and inter-generational trauma. Aboriginal communities have limited access to culturally safe early intervention and allied health services. Early intervention programs can address challenges if they provide tailored support that acknowledges cultural context and are designed to support child, student and family need. Fostering a strong sense of identity and belonging ensures positive developmental and life outcomes.

Entitlement to appropriate programs is vital to strengthening community connections and support systems. When families have access to culturally appropriate services, they are more likely to engage with support and resources that benefit their children.

Culturally safe, co-ordinated early intervention provision to support children and families in Metropolitan NSW.

Case Study 3

The point of this case study is to highlight the importance of culturally safe settings for early intervention. The child in question missed out on early intervention resulting in serious negative consequences.

Context: *A principal in an inner west primary school in metropolitan Sydney discusses the importance of culturally safe and coordinated supports in school communities. The school enrolment is 417 students with a three-class support unit catering students with autism and moderate intellectual disabilities. Students from a language background other than English makes up 46% of the school community and the school has 9% Aboriginal students and/or Torres Strait Islander students enrolled. In 2024, 16% of students were in the bottom quarter of socio-economic advantage according to ICSEA.*

Issue: A single father, recently separated with 4 boys appealed to the school for assistance to support a middle child (Year 4) who was finding it difficult to engage at school. His other children had excellent attendance at school and were engaged in sport and work experience at the local Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC). The Year 4 student's behaviour was often dysregulated on arrival to school. He regularly ran away from home, engaged in

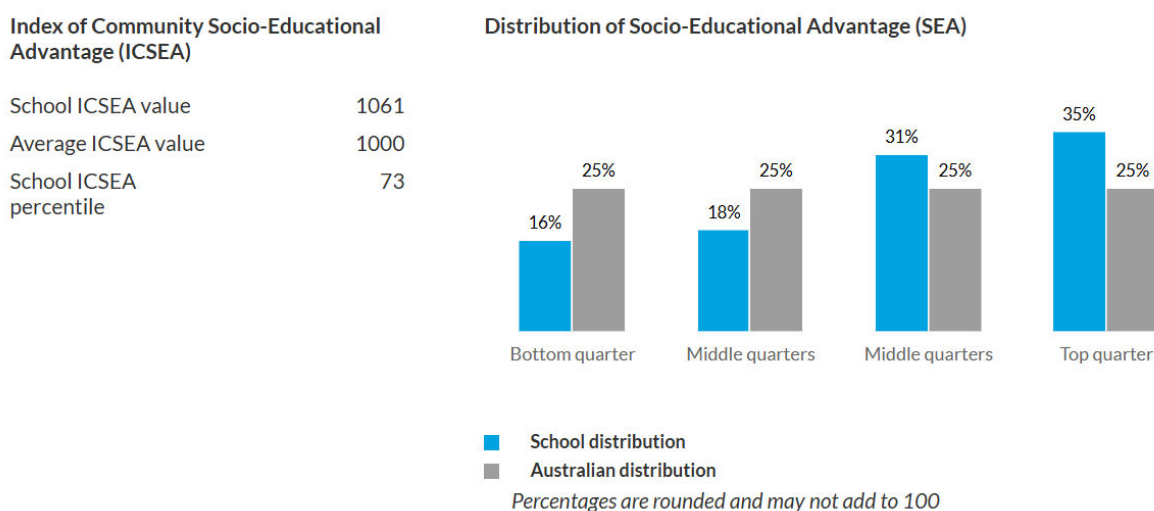
¹⁶ FOR EVERY CHILD: FULLY FUND AND REBUILD THE NSW PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM, Annual Conference 2024

risk-taking behaviours with older youths and was well known to police. By Year 5, his attendance was down to 0%.

Referrals for early intervention family support were refused by NSW Department of Corrections and Justice and NSW Health due to the changing address of the student. The student's habitual movement between his father who was based in Sydney and his mother's home in remote NSW, meant the case could not be allocated to one location. The case was closed.

Figure 3: MySchool (ACARA) 2024 School Profile¹⁷

Student background



Smaller local organisations refused to support the student with counselling or other assistance due to the significance of the issues and the lack of NSW Department of Corrections and Justice oversight. When the child attempted suicide while staying with his mother, the health system was unable to provide follow-up mental health support or share treatment information with local mental health teams when he returned to his father.

Referrals to NSW Department of Education support such as Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer, Aboriginal School Liaison Officer, Home School Liaison Officer and additional student and wellbeing personnel were ineffective. The student movement between school networks across the state and the limitations that existed within the Department of Education resulted in the Sydney school operating alone with an increasingly disheartened father and a child that was never in attendance.

The student never returned to school. They never received treatment for trauma, anxiety or depression. They are now known to be homeless and remain on the case load of the police.

Impact: In Case Study 3, it is suggested that earlier access to quality, culturally safe early intervention services through preschool and school may have potentially mitigated the student's later mental health challenges, noting the reality that the student was unable to access health care.

¹⁷ My School (2025). March 2025. Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. <https://www.myschool.edu.au/>

School staff are often first to detect wellbeing or child protection concerns amongst students and are the first responders in cases where children are being impacted by circumstances at home. Schools are left to manage planning, liaising and assisting families to access other necessary agency support. This depletes time intended for educating.

The necessity for government agencies to work collaboratively for the benefit of vulnerable children is described in the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1988. Chapter 16A *“facilitates collaboration and simplifies information sharing between prescribed bodies, allowing them to support children's safety and wellbeing more effectively”*¹⁸. To realise Chapter 16A, systems must be resourced and coordinated. The funded provision of the necessary structural supports as well as cross government departmental collaboration are the minimum in supporting vulnerable children and their families.

This child and their family needed local timely access to:

- early intervention through specialist NSW Health, allied health and public preschool
- personnel able to guarantee cultural safety such as permanent Aboriginal Education Officer
- codesigned culturally safe, school as community centre, programs
- Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer and Aboriginal School Liaison Officer services
- coordinated cross government department support collocated on the public-school site as an entitlement.

Had this Year 4 student and their family received the necessary support their current situation would not have occurred.

Culturally safe, codesigned early intervention and foundational supports are an entitlement for Aboriginal children and Torres Strait Islander children and their families. Support for individual growth and development contributes to the overall health and resilience of families and communities. Investing in early intervention programs is a necessity in achieving equality in life outcomes for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people.

¹⁸ NSW Department of Education (2024b). Information sharing under Chapter 16A website.

3. Directly fund and deliver Foundational and Disability Supports across specialist education settings where the most serious level of intersectional disadvantage occurs.

Students within specialist settings are societies most vulnerable. They must not be forgotten. Funding frameworks, staffing and infrastructure is a government requirement to support our most marginalised students from preschool to post school education.

Government coordinated programs and services for schools for specific purposes in Metropolitan NSW.

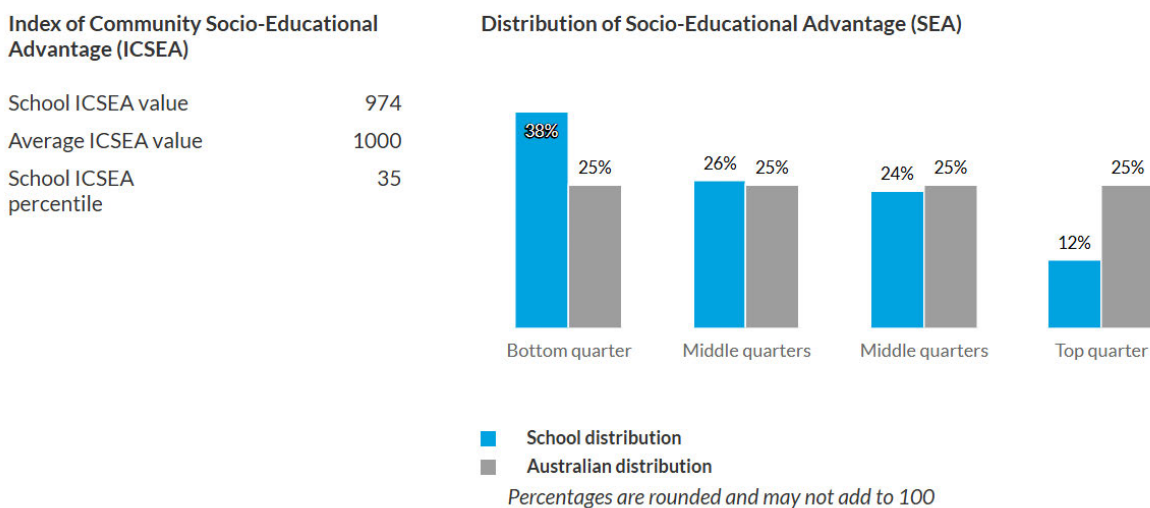
Case Study 4

This case study illustrates the number of agencies a school for specific purposes engages with to meet the needs of their students.

Context: A special education teacher who works in a school for specific purposes discusses the need for foundational and disability supports. The Sydney based school includes three K-6 classes for students who present with a diagnosed mental health support need (Emotional Disturbance or Mental Health, ED/MH¹⁹), two K-6 Autism Support classes, and three classes for students in Years 7-10 who demonstrate challenging behaviours (Behaviour Disorder²⁰). As well as up to three classes for Years 7-12 students who present with a predominately internalising mental health support need. In 2024, 64% of students were in the bottom half of socio-economic advantage according to ICSEA.

Figure 4: MySchool (ACARA) 2024 School Profile²¹

Student background



This specialist setting works on a 4:1 (4 days on site, 1 day at home school) model where students have a shared enrolment between this school and a mainstream home school. Working explicitly on targeted, individualised goals between settings to

¹⁹ Cited <https://education.nsw.gov.au/platoapps/access-request/disability-confirmation-and-support-access/disability-confirmation>

²⁰ Cited <https://education.nsw.gov.au/platoapps/access-request/disability-confirmation-and-support-access/disability-confirmation>

²¹ My School (2025). March 2025. Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. <https://www.myschool.edu.au/>

support the student's learning; access to the curriculum, socio-emotional needs and engagement.

The senior executive role in a mainstream school is to lead and manage a specific area of school operations, focusing on educational programs, student outcomes, staff development, and school resources.

In this school for specific purposes the senior executive operates as an in-school complex case coordinating team, distributing school resources via the school Learning and Support Team (School Counsellors, embedded Occupational Therapist, Student Support Officer and Deputy Principals) and drawing in external supports when they are available.

Families are consulted daily, providing proactive approaches to emerging student and family needs, as well as rapid response to crisis incidents, including linkage to external services such as NDIS Coordinators, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and police Youth Liaison Officers. The Department of Communities and Justice, delegate agencies and the Child Wellbeing Unit are linked in as supports, where needed. Collaboration with the NSW Department of Education's:

- Team Around a School (specifically the Support and Interagency Coordinator, Behaviour Specialists, Learning and Wellbeing Officer and Out Of Home Care Teachers)
- Field Assessment Officers from Child Wellbeing Unit
- Complex Case Support Officers from the Health, Safety & Staff Wellbeing Directorate
- Schools Infrastructure.

This all takes place on top of providing students a place of learning, stability, consistency, safety, connection, fresh starts and unconditional positive regard, as close to their own communities as limited vacancies allow.

The schools deliver on these safeguards and transdisciplinary planning with:

- a staffing entitlement of three Assistant Principals across K-12 (11 classes staffed on the primary model and without a high school load entitlement) and four unique and resource intensive programs.
- no entitlement to non-teaching senior executive.
- a part time School Counsellor entitlement (further limited due to shortages/shared roles)
- an absence of cross-government department resource entitlements to meet complex health, mental health, allied health, health and safety, staff training, professional development and infrastructure needs.

The school executive within this specialist setting is unable to fully focus on educational programs and student outcomes, as their time is overrun by managing the complex needs of students, liaising with services, without suitable supports and structures from the government.

When an infant student started at the school in 2023, their single parent was not in the financial position to engage with the necessary allied health supports. A limited NDIS package was predominantly dedicated to support workers to assist with out of school hours care and further drawn on when frequent suspensions threatened the parent's employment.

The School Counsellor and School Support Officer spent 9 months supporting the parent to access external services, as the school collaborated with the Department of Education's Team Around a School and their mainstream home school to keep the student engaged in education and connected to a consistently safe environment.

The student is soon to reintegrate to mainstream schooling, with a strengthened support team thanks to the Foundational Supports the school was able to investigate and support access to. The student now has an Occupational Therapist, Behaviour Specialist, Speech Therapist, is re-connected to a local GP and through the NDIS Connection Desk, the school are seeking to access a NDIS Coordinator.

The co-ordination of services should not fall on the school staff to facilitate. This should be an entitlement to services that is already provided by the inter-government agency. The school staffing entitlement must primarily be directed at ensuring students are accessing the curriculum and on a path to achieving equality and excellence in their learning outcomes. Success for students in school for specific purposes to be reincluded into their mainstream home school is predicated on teachers being able to close student learning gaps and build resilient learners.

Another student in upper primary, faced continuous suspensions due to physical violence, after having enrolment extended greater than the 18-month re-integrating program. The complexity of need in the absence of an intellectual disability precluded him from other more appropriate settings. This school for specific purposes was his last chance at school enrolment. The complexity of the student's need required an intensive program. The program was implemented for over 12 months, in weekly consultation with the Department's Behaviour Specialist teams.

Through interagency coordination by the school, (not government provided collocated services) and the NDIS Local Area Coordinator the student was picked up by the Community Health Paediatric Vulnerable Populations team, receiving developmental paediatric support to investigate appropriate medication and health supports, as well as access to Family Connect and Support, and other like services and agencies.

The successful school led coordination of cross government agency supports, resulted in consistent student attendance and safe social connection.

The student needed to attend the intervention program that this school for specific purposes provides young people for a longer period than intended due to the absence of a co-located public preschool with on-site transdisciplinary early intervention and family support services.

Impact: In Case Study 4, the high number of agencies involved creates additional strain on teachers. Services should be provided free of charge through NSW Health or NSW Department of Communities and Justice in a public special education school.

The core business of teaching students cannot be prioritised in the absence of the necessary foundational supports. Teachers are picking up the responsibility of sourcing foundational supports and facilitating cross agency coordination. In too many instances our students and families are getting the wrap-around supports through the school staff, too late in their schooling.

Cross government and department resourcing must be co-located on site and include Wellbeing and Health In-Reach Nurse, NDIS Local Area Coordination, Police Youth Liaison

Officer, Paramedics Consult, Paediatricians, psychologists and psychiatrists and Allied Health Teams.

A government implemented, funded and supported suite of services within the school for specific purposes provision is a must if schooling is to be focused on the curriculum and meet its remit as an intervention.

4. Guarantee Foundational and Disability Supports post school in TAFE and Corrective Services.

TAFE and corrective services education provide essential support, offering opportunities for skill development and rehabilitation that can help address educational gaps. By bridging these gaps, TAFE and corrective services play a key role in setting people on a path to success and social inclusion.

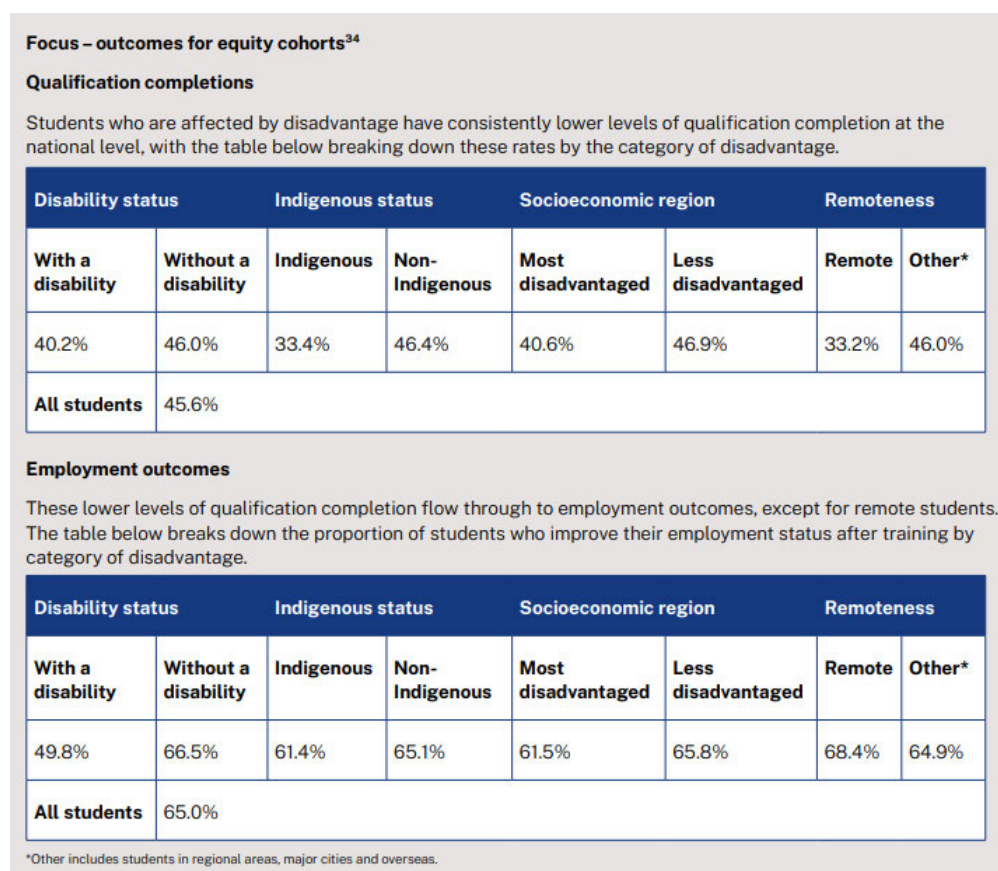
The NSW VET Review Final Report 2024 (pp. 49-50)²² noted:

“That addressing disparities in participation, completions and attainment is crucial to improve social and economic outcomes for these students. Individualised wrap around support is crucial for disadvantaged students to overcome both training and non-training barriers.

Resources must also be targeted to where they are needed most. For example, additional student support services for students affected by high concentrations of disadvantage and to account for the effects of intersectionality in amplifying disadvantage.”

Students who are affected by disadvantage have consistently lower levels of qualification completion at the national level (as seen in Figure 5 below). When early intervention supports for individuals is not in place and readily available, the impacts are life-long.

Figure 5: Focus – outcomes for equity cohorts from the 2024 NSW VET Review Final Report²³



²² NSW VET Review (2024). NSW VET Review Final Report. [NSW VET Review Final Report June 2024](#)

²³ National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). (2023). Student equity in VET (2021) within the 2024 NSW VET Review Final Report.

The importance of foundational supports for 0–8-year-olds and the cost of intervention later in life

In the Handbook of the Economics of Education, Cunha et al (2006)²⁴ states “The returns to investing early in the life cycle are high. Remediation of inadequate early investments is difficult and very costly”.

The evidence is clear – poor investment in foundational supports during the formative period of 0-8 years of age, results in poor lifelong outcomes in several domains including cognitive, behavioural and emotional as well as long-term health and socioeconomic outcomes. Diversity in skills is evident from a very early stage, and such diversity significantly influences socioeconomic outcomes.

The cost of later in life interventions and the difficulty with which it is to seek out and access those interventions incur far greater costs.

Government coordinated programs and services that can support TAFE education

Case Study 5

This case study shows the burden on public resources when early intervention is not delivered. Reactive intervention is more costly and takes longer to achieve improvements.

Context: A TAFE Literacy, Language, Numeracy and Digital specialist teacher based at campuses between Southern Highlands and Canberra discusses the impact the lack of access to foundational and disability supports can have on individuals later in life. In 2024, approximately 75% of student enrolments in classes led by this teacher were from a low socio-economic background. Approximately 68% of students had a diagnosed or imputed disability and 12% identifying as Aboriginal.

Issue: one-to-one interventions for adults is that there is often a sense of shame accumulated from childhood. This combined with years of denial and the need and cost for diagnosis versus life expectancy, as opposed to imputed disability, makes it incredibly difficult for individuals to get the help that they had finally come to admit they need. Compounding the shame is the stigma that one-to-one tutelage means that you are ‘dumb’, the exclusionary nature of one-to-one assistance i.e. being removed from the classroom and that every other student in the cohort was aged 15-17 years of age, far younger than others.

“Today²⁵ I taught our Certificate II in Career Preparation – or Year 10 equivalent. It was the first time I had met this cohort of 16 students. Within minutes I had triaged the class to be about 43% of students with low LLND skills and was already categorising the types and levels of intervention that would be required should some of these students end up in my Certificate III Pathways to Further Study – or Year 11 equivalent – in semester 2. I know we cannot authentically provide the

²⁴ Quoted from [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1574-0692\(06\)01012-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1574-0692(06)01012-9).

²⁵ March 2025

students who need help with any level of meaningful, authentic and intensive intervention due to lack of resourcing and supports.

Within moments of beginning the first activity of the day – a reading passage followed by some short comprehension questions – I had a 15-year-old male student say “Miss, I can’t read”. His handwriting was illegible and, interestingly, I had taught his brother in the same program at TAFE a few short years ago. As the research above states sometimes families that receive no or little interventions early on, unfortunately fall into a generational cycle of limited employment opportunities and access to suitable supports services.”

Course sequence and availability are selected by managers (who are not necessarily teachers) with minimal understanding of the cohort needs and the community because they do not live or work within that community. There is evident blindness to Literacy, Language, Numeracy and Digital interventions to support learners of all abilities especially those that have missed out on early interventions as a young child.

The process for a student to access a Disability Teacher Consultant can be difficult. The simple term *disability* in the teacher’s title immediately throws up psychological barriers for adult learners. There is also the requirement for these students to be explicitly diagnosed.

The NSW VET Review clearly states that: the NSW Government should transition to a system-wide, student-centred approach to student support that prioritises resources on a needs-basis, particularly in areas with high concentration of disadvantage.

Early Contact with the Criminal Justice System

People with disabilities are significantly over-represented in Australia’s criminal justice system, particularly among Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people. This can only be attributed to the lack of foundational and disability supports available and being accessed to bridge gaps in learning, across all parts of the state.

Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people face disproportionately higher rates of incarceration in both adult prisons and youth detention centres. The prevalence of cognitive and psychosocial disabilities is notably high in this population.

Approximately 40% of individuals entering Australian prisons have a mental health condition, with those possessing multiple disabilities, particularly cognitive disabilities, facing the highest rates of contact with the system. This issue is exacerbated for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people.²⁶

Policing, Youth Detention and Criminalization of individuals with Complex Needs

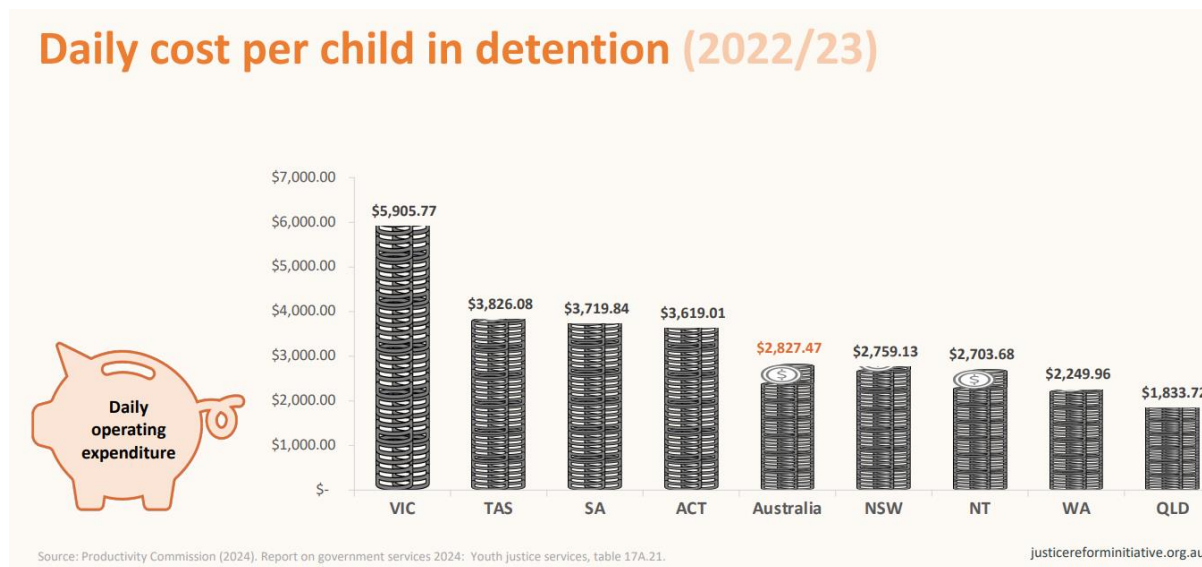
Individuals with cognitive disabilities experience frequent and intense policing, leading to a higher likelihood of criminalization. These factors contribute to a cycle of reoffending and incarceration.

²⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, The health of Australia’s prisoners 2018, Report, 2019, p 164, cited in Royal Commission, 2023.

Children in youth detention often have complex needs and histories of trauma, including abuse and socioeconomic disadvantage. As of June 2022, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youths made up over 51% of the juvenile custodial population in New South Wales, with around 24% having an intellectual disability. Notably, those with severe cognitive impairments were excluded from surveys due to consent issues.²⁷

According to the Productivity Report on government services 2024, the annual cost of incarceration of a juvenile in NSW is \$1,007,082 (Figure 6: Productivity Commission, 2024) and the annual cost for an adult in NSW is \$159,808.

Figure 6: Productivity Report - Daily cost per child in detention (2022/23)²⁸



Clearly, if these costs were redirected into early intervention services, the impact on a child's life would be profound and the annual cost of incarceration drastically reduced.

²⁷ Cited <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report-volume-8-criminal-justice-and-people-disability>

²⁸ Found online at www.justicereforminitiative.org.au

Conclusion

At the point of entering school, Aboriginal children and/or Torres Strait Islander children, families from low socio-economic backgrounds, those who require support for English as an additional language or dialect, individuals that live with disability, and/or families in remote or rural communities, remain overrepresented in the statistics of students who have had little or no pre-schooling or early intervention, and are identified as developmentally vulnerable.²⁹

The research is clear, any intervention beyond early intervention is always necessary, but often too late. The report, *How Australia can invest early and return more*³⁰ outlines the strategic and necessary choice confronting governments at all levels: 'late intervention.' This has become the short-sighted and reactive norm, versus 'early intervention', the evidence-based long-term solution to so many challenges facing our diverse school and TAFE college communities.

"By late intervention we mean the acute, statutory and essential benefits and services required when children and young people experience significant difficulties that could have been reduced or prevented. They are often provided by governments and are expensive.

Early intervention means stepping in early to prevent problems occurring or tackling them head on before they are much more difficult to resolve, while fostering personal strengths and skills children and young people need to thrive."

(Teager, Fox and Stafford, 2019)

Governments have the power to resolve this issue and the implications are clear. The government needs to coordinate a fully funded, comprehensive, non-profit, community entitlement of public preschool, early intervention units and allied health intervention services on a collocated public-school site.

This resourcing is imperative to ensure the delivery of equality and excellence in educational outcomes for all young people. A proactive approach rather than reactive.

²⁹ Cited in <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/education-data-and-research/cese/publications/literature-reviews/review-of-effects-of-early-childhood-education>

³⁰ Teager, W., Fox, S. and Stafford, N. (2019). *How Australia can invest early and return more: A new look at the \$15b cost and opportunity.* Early Intervention Foundation, The Front Project and CoLab at the Telethon Kids Institute, Australia.

References

- Active Ability (2025). The benefits of Early Childhood Intervention Programs in Australia. <https://activeability.com.au/early-intervention-support-services/benefits-of-early-childhood-intervention-programs/>
- Commonwealth Government. (2017, April 28). Your child and neuroscience: Learning potential. Retrieved from [https:// www.learningpotential.gov.au/your-child-andneuroscience-2](https://www.learningpotential.gov.au/your-child-andneuroscience-2)
- Cunha, F., Heckman, J., Lochner, L., Masterov, D. (2006). Handbook of the Economics of Education, Ch 12 *Interpreting the Evidence on Life Cycle Skill Formation*, Volume 1, pp 697-812. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1574-0692\(06\)01012-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1574-0692(06)01012-9).
- Grattan Institute. (2025). Election special: Policy priorities for the next government - Orange Book Event Recording. 15:33 to 21:25 minutes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DX0ognH0so>
- My School (2025). Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. <https://www.myschool.edu.au/>
- National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). (2023). Student equity in VET (2021) within the 2024 NSW VET Review Final Report.
- NSW Department of Education (2018). A review of the effects of early childhood education. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/education-data-and-research/cese/publications/literature-reviews/review-of-effects-of-early-childhood-education>
- NSW Department of Education (2021). Departments information on early intervention. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/early-learning/early-intervention>
- NSW Department of Education (2024a). Benefits of Early Childhood Education. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/information-for-parents-and-carers/every-child-benefits>
- NSW Department of Education (2024b). Information sharing under Chapter 16A. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/regulation-and-compliance/information-sharing-under-chapter-16a>
- NSW Department of Education (2025). Disability Confirmation. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/platoapps/access-request/disability-confirmation-and-support-access/disability-confirmation>
- NSW Government, Young people in custody health survey: key findings, 2015, p 3., cited in Royal Commission, 2023
- NSW VET Review (2024). NSW VET Review Final Report. [NSW VET Review Final Report June 2024](#)
- Pascoe, S. and Brennan, D. (2017). Lifting our Game: Report of the Review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools through early childhood interventions.

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/leadership/lifting-our-game-report>

Productivity Commission (2024). Justice Reform Initiative. Report on government services 2024: Youth justice services, table 17A.2. www.justicereforminitiative.org.au

Royal Commission. (2023). Final Report - Volume 8, Criminal justice and people with disability | Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report-volume-8-criminal-justice-and-people-disability>

Teager, W., Fox, S. and Stafford, N. (2019). How Australia can invest early and return more: A new look at the \$15b cost and opportunity. Early Intervention Foundation, The Front Project and CoLab at the Telethon Kids Institute, Australia.