



| NSW Department of Education

# Progress Report: Improving outcomes for students with disability 2022

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# Minister's Foreword

I am pleased to release this fourth annual progress report outlining how the NSW Government continues to improve the education and wellbeing of students with disability across NSW.

In 2022, the NSW public education system has once again demonstrated outstanding resilience and determination in the face of numerous challenges. We continue to work hard to ensure that every student in every NSW public school is supported to learn and thrive, including students with disability. It has also been a year of celebration with many schools marking events in person for the first time in two years. I was privileged to visit many schools across the state and see first-hand the achievements of schools and students.

The Disability Strategy is the NSW Department of Education's blueprint for providing an education system that meets the needs of children and young people with disability, their families, and the broader community. Using this blueprint, the department has identified and commenced new pieces of work which will drive strong educational and wellbeing outcomes for students with disability in NSW public schools.

This year we implemented a number of key initiatives, and we have now delivered the vast majority of commitments from the 2019 Disability Strategy. This includes the release of an Inclusive Education Policy for students with disability, as well as supporting practice materials for school staff. We have also listened and responded to diverse voices and have strengthened our approach to supporting student behaviour and reducing and eliminating restrictive practices. New policies and specialist staff are helping us build on the great work that is already happening to support all students to succeed and thrive at school.

We are committed across the NSW public education system to continuous improvement in how we plan for excellence, use data to inform decision-making, track outcomes for students and continue to develop the evidence base about effective practices to support all students. We are continuing to listen to students and school communities as part of groundbreaking work the department is leading on the Outcomes Framework for students with disability. In terms of an evidence-based approach to physical spaces, we are leading the way by developing a comprehensive inclusive education offering at The Forest High School.

Continuing to build the capacity of teachers and effectively resourcing schools is crucial to improving outcomes for students with disability. We continue to invest in evidence-based resources, building confidence and capability, and strengthening our workforce. This includes

tools and resources to support students with complex needs. We are reviewing resourcing models to better reflect the needs of students with disability.

Students are at the centre of everything we do. We will continue to expand opportunities for students to have a direct influence on education and school policy that affects them. To this end, the department is partnering with the Department of Communities and Justice to improve advocacy support and system navigation for students with disability and their families.

Listening to diverse voices is critical to a responsive and effective education system. I am proud that we have established a [Minister's Teacher Advisory Group](#) to operate alongside the [Ambassador Schools Principal Advisory Group](#), and the [Minister's Student Council \(DOVES\)](#). It is only by working together that we can bring about positive change and improve outcomes for students with disability, now and into the future.

I am committed to improving the learning and wellbeing of students with disability in every classroom in every public school. I look forward to continuing to work in partnership with schools, students, their families and the broader community on this important work.

*Sarah Mitchell*

The Hon. Sarah Mitchell, MLC  
Minister for Education and  
Early Childhood Learning





# Resources to support students with disability in mainstream schools

In 2022, NSW mainstream public schools received the following specific resources to support students with disability, in addition to the base funding for all schools:

**\$334.5 million**

for specialist learning and support teachers and flexible funding in every mainstream school

**\$300 million**

in Integration Funding Support for more than 15,400 students enrolled in mainstream classes who have a confirmed disability and moderate to high support needs.

# NSW public schools

We remain committed to ensuring students with disability can equitably access and participate in the highest-quality education.



**183,000**

(approximately 1 in 5) NSW public school students have a disability. Of these, more than 144,000 students receive adjustments to their learning in addition to the universal resources and strategies.



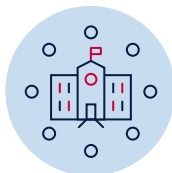
**86%**

of NSW public school students with disability learn in mainstream classes in mainstream schools, 11% learn in support classes in mainstream schools and 3% in schools for specific purposes (SSPs).



**More than 1,900**

learning and support staff across every mainstream public primary, secondary and central school in NSW support students with additional learning and support needs.



**More than 2,000 staff**

work with schools to support student learning and wellbeing including:

- specialist itinerant teachers and assistant principals supporting students with hearing or vision impairment
- assistant principals, learning and support
- support teachers, transition
- transition support teachers, early intervention
- inclusive education coordinators
- NDIS coordinators.



# Delivering on the vision and commitments

We aspire to build an education system in which children with disability thrive academically; develop good physical, mental and emotional health; and gain the skills to live a fulfilling, independent life post-school.

**The Disability Strategy** recognises education has a vital role in shifting awareness and understanding of the lives of all people with disability. It is also about creating equal access to high-quality, individualised education for every student that enhances their ability to lead fulfilling lives after school.

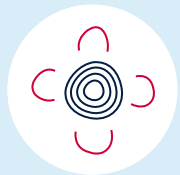
While many of the commitments outlined in the Disability Strategy have been implemented, we continue to concentrate on 4 focus areas:



**Strengthening support**  
Investing in teachers and other support staff



**Increasing resources and flexibility for schools**  
new resourcing models and more support to meet individual student needs



**Improving the family experience**  
Streamlining processes as well as improving communication and access to information



**Tracking outcomes**  
Building an evidence base to measure progress.



## Inclusive education – policy, practice and culture

**Inclusive education** means all students can access and fully participate in learning, supported by reasonable adjustments and teaching strategies tailored to meet their individual needs.

In the NSW public education system inclusive education is achieved through practice. A range of specific factors work together to improve educational, social, and employment outcomes for students. The factors that form the basis of inclusive education include structured transition arrangements, as well as adjustments to curriculum delivery and assessment, staff skills, teaching methods, and physical structures.

The department is committed to delivering inclusive education for all students with disability in mainstream schools and their support classes, as well as schools for specific purposes. Inclusion is embedded in all aspects of school life, and is supported by culture, policies and everyday practices.

# Inclusive learning and play spaces

We remain committed to developing more inclusive approaches to school infrastructure by improving physical environments for students with disability.

Physical spaces must be accessible of all types of diverse student needs, and this needs to be incorporated into the design of new and upgraded schools.

## Integration Program



**Delivered in 2022**

To enable equity and fairness, students need inclusive and barrier-free environments. This year the department delivered \$67 million in projects to improve access to school facilities including installing lifts, ramps, accessible toilets, high-visibility markings and bollards.



**Future priority**

In 2023 the department will deliver \$65 million in projects to improve access to school facilities, responding to the local needs of school communities.

## Spotlight

# The Forest High School Inclusive Education

The NSW Government is investing \$8.6 billion in school infrastructure over the next 4 years, continuing its program to deliver 160 new and upgraded schools to support communities across NSW. This builds on the more than \$9.1 billion invested in projects delivered since 2017, a program of \$17.7 billion in public education infrastructure.



**Under way**

As part of this work, the department is leading the way by developing a comprehensive inclusive education offering at The Forest High School. As a new school through relocation, The Forest High School is being designed as a centre of excellence in line with broader inclusive education ambitions.

The design of the school has been developed and revised through extensive consultation, including with the local community. The department has conducted a review of the project to identify opportunities for change that provide better outcomes for students and the school community.

The Forest High School is designed as a 2-storey high school, with a combination of ramps, stairs and lifts increasing access options for all students. It is also designed to support contemporary learning and teaching methods. Many indoor and outdoor learning spaces will be flexibly laid out, allowing students to work in varied group sizes. The technology and infrastructure incorporated in these spaces will further support a variety of teaching and learning configurations.

The new educational facility has been designed to integrate with the environment. The design works in well with the natural topography and considers maximum connection with outdoor spaces. It seeks to retain as many mature trees and bushland areas as possible, while also providing the needs of a modern high school. Materials have been selected for their natural tones and textures as well as for durability and sustainability. Access to natural light and a subtle use of colour within learning spaces will contribute to a calm learning environment.

Future priorities include the construction of the school and development of change management to ensure the school is developed and operated with inclusive education principles. The department is working with school leaders to ensure relationships will continue to flourish with local disability organisations, and that the school will be able to draw on the expertise of the neighbouring school for specific purpose, Arranounbai School.



# Inclusive cultures

## Inclusive Education Statement for students with disability



**Embedded into core business**

The department is committed to growing inclusive practice, sharing knowledge across the education system, and building the capacity of schools to meet the needs of their students. The [Inclusive Education Statement for students with disability](#) established 6 principles of inclusive practice to guide progress towards this goal:

- 1. student agency and self-determination
- 2. parent and carer inclusion
- 3. social and cultural inclusion
- 4. curriculum inclusion
- 5. workforce capability for inclusion
- 6. system inclusion.

In 2022, the department continued to promote and embed the 6 principles of inclusive practice. The department developed keynote sessions, workshops and short seminars focusing on strengthening understanding of the role schools play in inclusion and the importance of implementing evidence-informed strategies to support students with disability. The principles have been presented and promoted at staff induction conferences, school development days and professional learning events hosted by various professional associations.

## Inclusive Education Policy for students with disability



**Delivered in 2022**

The development of policy is guided by the voice and experience of students with disability and their families, staff and other key stakeholders. They have reported that there is more to be done to improve the learning and wellbeing of students with disability as well as support staff capability. Improving inclusive practice benefits all students, their families and school staff. It fosters a school culture where everyone is valued and welcomed, and all students are supported to reach their fullest potential.

The [Inclusive Education Policy for students with disability](#) became operational at the start of Term 4 2022. The policy clarifies roles and responsibilities for delivering inclusive education. It also clarifies the rights of students with disability and their parents and carers. The release of the policy is accompanied by a range of practice resources to support schools to create more inclusive learning environments.



**Future priority**

The department is developing a monitoring and evaluation framework to enable learning and continuous improvement in strengthening inclusive practice across NSW public schools.

## Inclusive Practice hub



**Delivered in 2022**

In November 2021, the department released an [Inclusive Practice hub](#) including more than 140 practical resources for teachers and school staff. The Inclusive Practice hub was developed in partnership with Deakin University and Monash University. The hub includes guidance on taking an evidence and strengths-based approach to supporting students' learning and wellbeing. More than 40,000 school staff are learning about inclusive strategies through the hub.

The department continued to build on the hub in 2022, releasing additional resources for staff, and promote it across the system. These resources have been co-designed with critical stakeholders including students with disability, their parents and carers, disability and education experts, NSW public school staff, and allied health professionals.

## Inclusive Education Champions Network



**Embedded into core business**

The department continues to share success and examples of quality practice in schools. Established in late 2020, the Inclusive Education Champions Network brings together staff who support the strengthening of inclusive practices at the local level in NSW public schools.

This ever-growing network shares experiences and expertise including examples of inclusive practice. It is also a forum for peer support and discussion.



## Inclusive education coordinators



Delivered in 2022

The recruitment of staff with expertise in inclusive education will better help schools develop holistic support for their students. The department has invested in new specialists to support inclusion, including 5 new inclusive education coordinators to support inclusive practice across the state.

The new inclusive education coordinators have joined more than 2,000 staff who already provide wellbeing and inclusion support in schools. These coordinators have been introduced to strengthen inclusive practice and culture in schools for students with disability. They are leading and coordinating a range of engagement and professional learning activities as well as developing new resources to support staff practice.

## Inclusive executive enhancement



Delivered in 2022

Schools with 7 or more support classes have received increased resourcing for dedicated leadership roles to support the inclusion, learning and wellbeing of students with disability. This responds to requests from schools for more dedicated support to meet students' needs.

This \$14 million investment supports schools to meet the department's commitment to inclusive education and improve inclusive practices within local school communities. In 2022, 64 high schools and 21 primary schools benefited from these new positions.

These roles are part of the school leadership team and will work to improve school culture and develop strategies to better support and include students with disability. Ongoing work is happening to support these new school leaders to have an optimum impact on student outcomes. In August 2022, the department brought together the new school leaders for a 2-day conference on leading cultural change. A community of practice will be established to provide these new leaders a platform for collaboration and capacity building.

## Disability Inclusion Action Plan



Under way

Since November 2021, 3 of the [Disability Inclusion Action Plan](#) 5-year projects have been completed. The department has recently appointed a lead, disability employment and a disability adviser to support continued delivery of Disability Inclusion Action Plan projects.

The department will continue to progress the remaining Disability Inclusion Action Plan projects and ensuring new policies, procedures and behaviours are embedded into governance, decision-making and all business-as-usual activities.

## Disability Standards for Education Review



Under way

The department has continued to engage with the Commonwealth Government and other jurisdictions to implement the recommendations of the [2020 Review of the Disability Standards for Education](#). A cross-jurisdictional group is currently considering how to implement the recommendations.



## Disability Royal Commission



Under way

The [Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability](#) is an opportunity to learn more about how Australian education systems are currently supporting students with disability and to make changes to systems to address any issues. The department is providing support, information and resources to support this important work, and will continue to work with the Commission.



# Inclusive school sports

## Inclusive physical activity



### Embedded into core business

The department provides a range of opportunities for students with disability to become involved in sports across the school sport structure, from participation to elite. Engagement in these sporting events continues to grow.

#### Come and Try Athletics

The Come and Try Athletics days give students with disability the opportunity to experience athletics in an enjoyable, non-competitive setting. Students have the chance to participate in a variety of races on the track, as well as in field events. These days also give teachers the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of how they can adjust athletics to support the participation of students of all abilities.

In 2022, 10 Come and Try Athletics days were held and attended by 108 schools, 996 students and 613 staff.

“Everyone needs to be involved in this. We need to do more of it. We need to get our kids out there and having a go.”

– Ann-Marie McAnulty, Principal,  
Spring Hill Public School

“I want to go back to school to tell all my friends to come next time.”

– Student

## Multi-sports days

Multi-sport days provide students with an opportunity to experience a variety of sports, modified to suit their needs. State and national sporting associations support these events, delivering fun, inclusive and engaging activities to build students' confidence and capacity in sport.

Since November 2021, 30 multi-sport days have been scheduled and 116 schools have registered for an event. This has provided an opportunity for approximately 1,700 students to participate in various sports adapted to meet their individual needs.

“It is one of the must-go-to events of the year. The kids have had a ball. The range of sports provided from golf to boccia to football, they're exposed to many different sports that they've never done before.”

– Peter Repousis, Teacher,  
Fairvale High School

## Statewide boccia knockout competition

Boccia is an exciting sport, inclusive of all students with disability. The statewide boccia knockout competition had 166 schools register and 16 school teams progressed to the state finals in Sydney, which were held on 10 August.

## Statewide tenpin bowling competition

After having a successful debut in 2021, the statewide tenpin bowling competition for students with disability had 246 school teams register this year. This competition was held in Term 4 2022.

## Professional learning in sport and physical activity



### Embedded into core business

There is a strong, positive interconnection between physical activity and students' wellbeing outcomes. Increasing staff confidence in inclusive practices within sport and physical activity is critical to ensuring students of all abilities can participate and succeed.

Since November 2021, 96 schools have completed training in the interconnection between physical activity and wellbeing. Teachers and school leaders continue to develop their understanding of planning, delivering and evaluating an inclusive sport and physical activity program to improve student wellbeing.

In 2022, the department conducted 6 webinars with 95 teachers focused on inclusive physical activity with training, with training tailored to their needs. This training equipped staff with information on how to adapt sport to cater for their students' diverse needs. A professional e-learning course for teachers will be developed in 2023 to support the awareness of strategies that can be implemented to make sport and physical activity more inclusive for students with disability.



### Under way

A school-based exercise program for adolescents with disability, Burn 2 Learn Adaptive, is being developed and evaluated in collaboration with the University of Newcastle. A total of 10 schools have been recruited in the trial, and 12 teachers have completed initial training and are implementing the program in their schools. The trial will examine the effectiveness of Burn 2 Learn Adaptive throughout 2023.





# Inclusive creative and performing arts

The department provides a range of inclusive learning and performance opportunities in dance, visual arts, music and drama programs.

We are continually developing new online resources and delivering workshops on inclusive creative and performing arts for teachers, parents and carers, and students with disability.

Local and state initiatives for professional learning, student workshops and performance opportunities will continue to be implemented with a focus on providing more face-to-face opportunities for teachers and students in 2023.

## Partnership with Nova Employment



### Delivered in 2022

The department continued to partner with Nova Employment to support inclusive practice and broader extracurricular opportunities in creative and performing arts. In 2022, digital and online resources were created to provide ongoing access to teacher professional learning across a range of areas including dance, drama, music, visual arts and performance.

These additional resources supported the involvement of students with disability in high-profile statewide events such as [Schools Spectacular](#) and the [Connections Program](#), as well as smaller local programs.

## Connections Program



### Embedded into core business

Throughout the year, the Connections Program provides teachers and students of all ages and abilities with inclusive teaching, learning and performance opportunities in areas such as music, dance, visual arts, public speaking and drama.

The 2021 inaugural showcase highlighted work produced by 336 students from 22 schools across the state in response to the theme of 'Found Objects'.

In 2022, the theme of the Connections Showcase was 'Ours to Share'. Students from Kindergarten to Year 12 took part in the showcase from 10 to 14 October.

## Shining Stars



### Embedded into core business

[Shining Stars](#) is a creative arts program for Kindergarten to Year 12 NSW public school students with a disability. Shining Stars provides opportunities for students with disability to actively engage in a relevant and meaningful program of study in arts education that reflects their individual needs, interests and abilities.

The Shining Stars program also provides professional learning opportunities for teachers and school learning and support officers who are interested in developing their skills in creative arts education and in learning how to use and teach dance, drama, music and visual arts effectively in the classroom to support students.



# Inclusive early childhood education

## Disability and Inclusion Program



Under way

The [Disability and Inclusion Program](#) provides funding and support to enable children with disability and additional needs in community preschools to participate in a quality early childhood education program on the same basis as their peers. In 2022, the department delivered the Disability and Inclusion Program's Sector Capacity Building Program to promote consistent service delivery.

An external evaluation of the High Learning Support Needs funding and Sector Capacity Building Program is under way. The department will use the experiences of families, community preschool staff and providers to inform continuous improvement initiatives and future program redesign.

## Start Strong



Under way

Through [Start Strong](#) funding, the department continues to support preschool participation and affordability for children aged 3 to 5, with a particular focus on vulnerable cohorts such as children with disability and additional needs.

"I think it all comes back to one thing. I think it all comes back to high expectations. I think it's about believing that everybody can succeed and everybody can make progress."

– Jenni McKeon, Principal, Tumbulgum Public School

## Spotlight

## Knowing, valuing and caring for all students

The NSW Government is committed to building a more inclusive education system. An education system where every student is known, valued and cared for and all students are learning to their fullest capability.

The department's vision is for the NSW education system to be the best education system in Australia and one of the best in the world. This goal has guided our pursuit of creating more inclusive, engaging and respectful learning environments for all students across all NSW public schools.

We are supporting diverse needs by developing policies that enrich inclusive education and ensure all students are supported, safe and connected to learning at their school. This evidence-based approach is firmly grounded in Australian and international research that shows us that exclusionary discipline, such as school suspension is linked to adverse learning and wellbeing outcomes for students.

The NSW public education system offers great examples of inclusive practice, including managing complex classroom environments. However, students with disability are 3.7 times more likely to be suspended. The data makes it clear that more needs to be done to address the disproportionate representation of students with disability.

In 2022, the department has released new policies, framework and procedures to help ensure that best practice is consistent across all NSW public schools. The new policies released include:

- [Inclusive Education Policy for students with disability](#)
- [Student Behaviour Policy and Procedures](#)
- [Restrictive Practices Framework, and Restrictive Practices Reduction and Elimination Policy and Procedures.](#)

These policies will ensure schools are in the best position to help all students reach their full potential across the entire NSW public education system. The department is supporting teachers by putting the right support and resources in place to develop inclusive schools.

The Inclusive Education policy for students with disability and the Student Behaviour Policy and Procedures came into effect at the start of Term 4 2022. The Restrictive Practices Framework and Restrictive Practices Education and Elimination Policy and Procedures will come into effect during 2023.





# Disability Strategy focus 1: Strengthening support

To deliver optimal outcomes for children and young people with disability, schools need strengthened support.

The evidence is clear. Quality teaching is the single most important determinant of a good education. Teachers, school staff and school leaders must be supported to strengthen inclusive practice and personalised planning to meet individual student needs. Support includes evidence-based resources, professional learning, mentoring and supervision.

In 2022, the department provided school staff with training, information and tools to feel confident and capable in delivering high-quality inclusive education. This includes developing policies and resources to support schools to:

- deliver the curriculum in an accessible and inclusive way
- build and champion inclusive practices at a local school level
- take a whole-school approach to supporting positive student behaviour.

## Building staff confidence and capability

### Curriculum planning for every student in every classroom



Under way

The department is equipping teachers with evidence-based strategies to support the full range of students. We have released a new suite of professional learning on curriculum planning for every student in every classroom, developed by teachers and education experts. It is focused on supporting teaching and learning practices for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, high potential and gifted students, students who speak English as an additional language or dialect, and students with disability. This includes the 'Supporting learners with disability' module.

The department will release illustrations of practice on planning for students with disability in early 2023. These models will help teachers and school staff provide the best possible support for students with disability.

### HSC disability provisions



Under way

Adjustments in the HSC are practical arrangements designed to help students who could not otherwise make a fair attempt to show what they know in an examination. The department is undertaking work to better understand the potential barriers faced by NSW public schools and students in applying for HSC disability provisions.

### Adjustment reflection tool



Under way

The department is developing an online tool consisting of evidence-based adjustments to support students in classrooms. The adjustments have been developed by a multidisciplinary panel of education and disability experts and provide practical actions to support inclusion and student learning. The tool is being tested with school users to ensure teachers have the appropriate support to identify and deliver adjustments for students before rollout.

### NAPLAN online



Delivered in 2022

The department provided expert advice to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority to improve the accessibility of NAPLAN online. This year, all schools have transitioned to NAPLAN online. The new online test format has improved the accessibility for students with disability. Some of the accessibility features available in the online platform include:

- support for text to speech readers
- colour themes
- magnification to a larger font size
- keyboard shortcuts.

Adjustments for the paper format continue to be available, including very large print.

## Support the learning of students with complex needs

Students with disability and additional learning needs have diverse needs and can be enrolled in a variety of learning environments with a range of different supports.

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The **Assessment for Complex Learners** project aims to understand and describe what learning looks like for students with complex learning needs and disability, as well as research and trial new assessment tools.

The department began the second phase of the Assessment for Complex Learners project in 2021 and focused on formative assessment tools to support the learning of students with complex learning needs and disability. Developed in collaboration with schools 2 assessment tools are being trialled:

- the **Literacy and Numeracy Precursor Indicators** in more than 320 schools
- the Passport for Learning in more than 75 schools.

This has included developing and delivering professional learning to support educators using the assessment tools, as well as 2 online assessment apps on the Assessing Literacy and Numeracy portal.

The department is also collaborating with the University of Melbourne to understand how both assessment tools link to the Students with Additional Needs (SWANs) assessment tool, as well as the National Literacy and Numeracy Learning Progressions. Findings will inform development of a plan to trial SWANs in NSW schools. The hope is to find a way to develop a holistic yet inclusive system of formative assessment to ensure that schools can understand and support all students' learning.

There is positive feedback from schools on assessment tools. Schools are finding the tools useful, practical, valid and reliable.

"I love that there is no reflection on a child's 'deficit' or 'intellect' in the precursors [Literacy and Numeracy Precursor Indicators] but rather on specific skills – it reflects a 'not demonstrated yet' approach and high expectations that the students will achieve and this is a pathway."

– Teacher, primary school

## Driving change through leadership

### Support for school leaders



#### Embedded into core business

The department continues to ensure all leaders are equipped with the tools and techniques they need to build and maintain inclusive learning environments and school communities. Professional learning, induction programs and conferences include content to ensure new and developing leaders fully understand their roles and responsibilities, including inclusive practice and its practical applications.

### Disability Standards for Education Leaders training



#### Embedded into core business

The Disability Standards for Education 2005 is an important foundational piece for improving student outcomes and experiences. It is critical that all school staff are supported to uphold their legal obligations. The Disability Standards for Education: Education Leaders training has been mandatory for directors, educational leadership, principals, deputy principals, assistant principals and head teachers since July 2020, and continues to be a priority for all new school leaders.

"Tailoring education to fit the child is always going to be essential."

– Rebecca Saunders, Principal, Clarke Road School



## Expanding expertise across the system

### Inclusive Practice in Education Scholarship Program



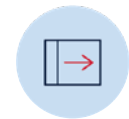
#### Embedded into core business

The department launched a scholarship program in 2019 targeting existing qualified teachers wishing to retrain in inclusive or special education. The scholarship offers a significant professional development opportunity for eligible teachers to study while maintaining their current permanent position.

The [2022 Inclusive Practice in Education Scholarship](#) received 194 applications, and 155 offers of scholarship were made. Of these, 112 scholarships have been formally accepted and will support teachers commencing studies Semester 1 2023.

A total of 356 scholarships have been awarded to teachers to retrain in inclusive or special education since the program was launched. The department will expand the Inclusive Education scholarships to up to 200 teachers per year.

### Early Childhood Inclusive Education Scholarships Program



#### Under way

The [2022-23 Early Childhood Inclusive Education Scholarships Program](#) has been developed to increase the number of early childhood teachers with a postgraduate qualification in inclusive education in the early childhood education sector in NSW.

The scholarships provide financial assistance to scholars who are qualified early childhood teachers to increase the capacity of the early childhood education sector to include children with disability and additional needs in community preschools, mobile preschools and long day care services.

### Grow Your Own – Teacher Training Program



#### Under way

School learning and support officers (SLSOs) obtain valuable on-the-job experience in supporting the learning and wellbeing of students with disability. The department is drawing on this considerable knowledge and experience as part of the [Grow Your Own – Teacher Training Program](#). This program, part of the [NSW Teacher Supply Strategy](#), will provide a supported pathway for SLSOs

to train as teachers. Students will benefit from having teachers experienced working with diverse learning needs.

A pilot will commence in 2023 with up to 100 participants in high demand regional, rural and metro locations. Larger future intakes will launch in 2024 and 2025. The department will work with SLSOs who work in all settings including mainstream schools, their support classes and schools for specific purposes. We are seeking to partner with an initial teacher education provider to deliver the pilot.

### School counsellor and psychologist scholarships



#### Embedded into core business

Every public school in NSW has access to the school counselling service. School counsellors and school psychologists support school staff to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of all students, including those with disability. The school counselling service has grown significantly from 790 to 1,240 full-time equivalent positions in 2022.

The department continues to offer scholarships for teachers and psychology graduates to become school counsellors or school psychologists. As a result of the scholarship programs, 78 teachers and psychology graduates will be eligible to enter the school counselling service in 2023.

School psychologist scholarships will continue to be offered, with 30 psychology graduates taking up scholarships in 2022 to train as school psychologists.

Recruiting for the 2023 scholarships is under way.

### Trauma-informed practice



#### Embedded into core business

In an educational context, trauma informed practice is a strengths-based framework in which education systems, schools and school staff understand, recognise and respond effectively to the impact of trauma on students.

There are currently 220 trauma-informed practice facilitators across the state. From November 2021 to July 2022, a further 5,865 staff completed at least one module and 2,541 staff completed all 4 modules. School development day sessions continue to be highly sought after.

# Encouraging positive student behaviour

## Student Behaviour Strategy



**Under way**

Behaviour support plays a critical role in a student's education and learning outcomes. A number of student cohorts are over-represented in suspension data, including students with disability. To address this, the department is continuing to implement the [Student Behaviour Strategy](#), including through the release of the Student Behaviour Policy and Procedures.



**Under way**

The department has worked collaboratively with the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) using a co-commissioning approach to increase support to children, young people, families and schools, as well as improve educational outcomes. This partnership will see an additional \$2.6 million invested in early support services in 2022-23. The funding will increase existing service delivery of service providers contracted by DCJ to support children and young people at risk of disengaging from school.



**Future priority**

The department will monitor the success of co-commissioned services and continue to explore how government and non-government partners can support it in implementing the Student Behaviour Strategy.

In 2023, the department will commission a formal independent evaluation of the Student Behaviour Strategy. The findings of the evaluation will inform the ongoing implementation of strategy initiatives.

## Student Behaviour Policy and Procedures



**Delivered in 2022**

Suspension rates for vulnerable students in NSW are too high, and disproportionately so for students with disability, Aboriginal students, students in rural and remote areas, students in out-of-home care, and students experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage.

The new [Student Behaviour Policy and Procedures](#) specifically recognise this issue and will require schools to consider such factors when determining how to manage behaviours of concern. The policy and procedures were released on 19 February 2022 for familiarisation and re-released in August 2022 following consideration of further feedback and implementation advice from stakeholders. Implemented from the start of Term 4 2022, they seek to minimise the use of suspension, avoid cycles of exclusion and school disengagement, and provide students and staff with practical, evidence-based alternatives.

## Improving access to behaviour specialists



**Delivered in 2022**

In 2022, the department strengthened system supports to aid schools in behaviour management by recruiting 32 new behaviour specialists to join the 36 behaviour specialists already recruited in 2021. Behaviour specialists provide advice, coordination and build the capacity of schools to manage challenging and complex student behaviour. The department has also made it easier for schools to access specialist advice and support available by enhancing the Team Around a School model.



**Future priority**

From 2023 the number of behaviour specialists supporting NSW public schools will further increase to 200 personnel.



# Reducing and eliminating restrictive practices

## Restrictive Practices Framework, Policy and Procedures



### Delivered in 2022

The department is committed to minimising the inappropriate or unnecessary use of restrictive practices in schools, wherever possible. The [Restrictive Practices Framework, and Restrictive Practices Reduction and Elimination Policy and Procedures](#) were released to schools for familiarisation in Term 4 2022.

Child protection is at the heart of the Restrictive Practices Framework, as well as the associated policy and procedures. Restrictive practices are most often used to support students with disability with the aim of supporting student learning, promoting safety and preventing injury. But their use can also have negative physical and psychological effects on students and staff and damage teacher-student relationships if not applied appropriately. The policy and framework provide clarity on the appropriate and inappropriate use of restrictive practices, to protect the health and safety of all students and staff at school.

Teachers and principals manage a diverse spectrum of student needs every day, including students with disability and additional needs. The new documents provide clear guidance to support school staff, take a student-centred approach to planning, and will protect staff when using restrictive practices.

Since February 2022, the department have engaged in extensive consultation with principals and directors, educational leadership on the framework, policy and procedures. Feedback has informed changes to guidance to make sure schools are supported to plan and use restrictive practices safely.



### Future priority

Schools spent time in Term 4 to engage with the new restrictive practices materials and ensure all staff understand the changes and what they will look like in their school from Term 1 2023. A phased approach to implementation means that schools can undertake key activities each term to align with the new requirements for planning and using restrictive practices in schools and preschools.



## Disability Strategy focus 2: Increasing resources and flexibility

The department has improved the provision of support through Access Requests and Integration Funding Support.

We are currently embarking on a broad program of reform to improve the way schools are supported and funded best meet the needs of students with disability.

The aims of this program are:

- Schools have **effective funding and staffing models** to provide the supports students need.
- Schools are **responsive to student needs**, irrespective of diagnosis.
- **Process and systems enable schools** to manage resources effectively to meet student needs.

# Meeting student needs

The reform program aims to align resources with school effort in making adjustments to meet the functional needs of students with disability, rather than a measure based on a diagnostic label.

This reform builds on the considerable work that has gone into developing the [Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability](#) (NCCD). This national, annual data collection focuses on meeting student needs, not the type or extent of their disability.

Improved information, tools and guidance will support schools to best meet those diverse needs. This work is multifaceted and occurring through a number of projects.

## Low-level adjustment for disability methodology review



**Under way**

The low-level adjustment for disability (LLAD) equity loading is an allocation to support students in mainstream classes who have additional learning and support needs. In 2022, the LLAD equity loading delivered resources to approximately 150,000 students in 2,073 NSW public schools. This allocation enables schools to respond to the needs of all students, including those with or without a formal diagnosis of disability.



**Under way**

A new methodology was applied to calculate the LLAD from Term 4 2022, to take effect in the 2023 school budget. This methodology was finalised following extensive stakeholder consultations, including with principal associations and the NSW Teachers Federation. The new methodology, which schools will transition to fully over the next 2 years, incorporates data from the NCCD, ensuring school resourcing will better reflect school efforts to make adjustments for students with disability.

## Needs-based assessment for targeted disability supports



**Under way**

The Needs-based assessment for targeted disability supports project seeks to ensure that disability supports for students with moderate to high learning and support needs are based on an assessment of students' functional needs by:

- working with schools and experts to co-design a revised process for assessing student need to inform suitability for a range of targeted provisions and support
- revising the current formula for targeted disability funding to remove the reliance on diagnosis, so that students with the same level of functional need receive the same amount of funding
- developing a simplified funding model that is equitable as well as easier to understand and explain, and is aligned to the NCCD.



**Future priority**

The department will continue to develop a revised model for eligibility and allocation of targeted provisions for students with disability with moderate to high needs. The new model and processes will be piloted with a range of schools in 2023, ahead of a planned rollout from 2024.

## Schools for specific purposes supplementary funding

The department has committed **\$37 million annually in additional funding** to 2024 for schools for specific purposes (SSPs). In 2022, the \$37 million was allocated across 117 SSPs.

The funding provides additional resourcing that can be applied flexibly to recruit staff that best meet schools' operational needs and improve student outcomes.



**Under way**

In 2022, the department commenced an evaluation of the program to better understand the funding model that reflects SSPs' operating environment and the way the additional funding has been used across the system. Findings from the evaluation, will be used to inform future funding solutions beyond 2024.



## Expansion of Integration Funding Support in preschools

Integration Funding Support helps schools provide adjustments for students with disability in mainstream classes who have moderate to high learning and support needs.



### Delivered in 2022

In 2022 Integration Funding Support expanded to support children with disability in department preschools. This year, more than \$300 million supported more than 15,400 students including preschool children.

The department has consistently met the 28-day KPI measure for providing an outcome to schools and families for applications. A central team and KPI measure came into effect in 2021 to provide a single point of contact for the additional funding that supports eligible students in mainstream schools.

That central team is currently expanding to provide capacity for extensive consultation and trials to inform the needs-based assessment of targeted disability supports initiative.

“The ethos for our school is that everyone belongs – whether it be from a culturally diverse background or whether it be students who have a hearing impairment, or vision impairment, or any disability. They’re all very much part of the wonderful fabric of this school.”

– Rebecca Simm, Head Teacher, Wellbeing, Blacktown Girls High School

## Streamlining the access request process



### Under way

The department continues to address Recommendations 22 and 24 in the 2017 [Parliamentary inquiry into students with a disability or special needs in NSW schools](#) by improving the access request process.

We are developing systems and processes to support and streamline the provision of additional funding allocations and specialist placements for students with additional learning needs.

The system will support funding reforms and will enable faster access to targeted funding and support. The design process is under way with school representatives and corporate users, with the aim to develop a trial system for testing the policy reforms in 2023.



# Disability Strategy focus 3: Improving the family experience

Personalising the learning process and providing support to a student should involve the school, family and student working together to meet the student’s learning and wellbeing needs.

- This year, the department focused on:
- supporting Aboriginal families to engage with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)
  - expanding information available to parents and carers and providing a better complaints procedure
  - expanding the Before and After School Care program and improving its accessibility to all students.



## Support to access the National Disability Insurance Scheme



### Embedded into core business

The department has established 6 positions to support schools to understand the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), support families with children in (or eligible for) the NDIS, and work with the National Disability Insurance Agency to resolve issues for students who are NDIS participants.

The department has also published a [new resource for schools](#), in consultation with Aboriginal education officers across the department and the [First Peoples Disability Network Australia](#). The resource provides schools with strategies to help Aboriginal families access NDIS-funded disability supports appropriate to their needs and cultural context, and to support NDIS planning.

## Opening our schools to all



### Embedded into core business

The [Share Our Space](#) program gives families and members of the community the opportunity to use school outdoor facilities during holidays for a wide range of activities, including sports and recreation, cultural events and celebrations.

Share Our Space has a number of schools for specific purposes (SSPs) that participate each school holidays. These schools have specialist equipment for children with disability, which are available for community use. In spring 2022, targeted activities included cricket activities for children with vision impairment, laughing yoga and all-abilities athletics.

## Better communication and information

### Improved school community and consumer complaints process



#### Under way

The department is committed to working with students and families to ensure all students are happy and thrive at school. We are working to ensure complaints are effectively managed and resolved promptly.

In line with best practice guidelines and customer-centric approaches, the department is reviewing the [Community and Consumer Complaint Procedure](#) and associated policies.

The [Complaints, compliments and suggestions](#) section on the department website has been enhanced, and professional learning available to school and corporate staff is being assessed.



#### Future priority

The department will pilot a soft skills training package targeted at building staff capability in responding to complaints.

We are establishing a partnership with the Department of Communities and Justice to support advocacy and system navigation for families of students with disability.

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

### Interpreting and translations



### Embedded into core business

To facilitate communication between schools and parents and carers, the department funds the cost of interpreters for those who do not speak or understand English well, are d/Deaf or hard of hearing, or who have a speech impairment. Key department documents are translated in a wide range of community languages. These [translated documents](#) include information about getting ready for school, making a complaint, and support persons and advocates.

## Inclusive learning support information



### Embedded into core business

The department's [Inclusive learning support](#) section continues to be expanded. This hub is a one-stop online resource with information for families and carers of children with additional learning and support needs and disability. New content published in 2022 covers [Early childhood education](#) and [After school pathways](#).

Since October 2021, the section has had 50,000 unique visitors, with 67% of users visiting more than once.





## Access to before and after school care

The Before and After School Care (BASC) program is continuing to expand outside of school hours care (OOSHC) across NSW. As at 30 June 2022, there was a net increase of 192 BASC services and 16,514 BASC places on NSW Government school sites.

In Term 4 2021, the department began discussions with 2 OOSHC providers delivering services at SSP sites to improve our understanding of their requirements, scope the possibility of case study documentation and learn more about the possibilities available.

The department surveyed SSPs to understand the OOSHC requirements of these schools, with 351 responses received and analysed. The BASC program is continuing to design solutions that are accessible and inclusive for all children in NSW.



### Future priority

The department has identified the need to provide greater support to the OOSHC sector to facilitate equitable and inclusive access to these services.

The BASC program will continue to communicate with schools, families and providers to better understand the OOSHC requirements for children with additional needs. Surveys will be conducted to gain further information to support this work.

## Equity Placement Model

The [Equity Placement Model](#) makes access fairer and more equitable for students with high potential who experience educational disadvantage.



### Delivered in 2022

After the department's 2018 review of selective education access, we instituted the Equity Placement Model to help make access to opportunity classes and selective high schools fairer for the following under-represented groups:

- students from low socio-educational-advantage backgrounds
- Aboriginal students
- students from rural and remote locations
- students with disability.

The new Equity Placement Model aims to reduce the gap in participation from these equity students in opportunity classes and selective high schools. A percentage of student places at each school will now be held for students from the 4 equity groups to increase their participation.

The combination of current acceptance rates of students from identified equity groups and the reserved places will ensure selective schools are more reflective of the proportions of equity groups enrolled in NSW public schools.

If there are not enough applications to a particular school from students from under-represented groups, or if these students do not meet the minimum performance requirements, the held places will be offered to general applicants based on their highest performance on the placement test. The changes will be implemented for 2023 enrolments.

## Spotlight

## Resources to support all students

Throughout 2022, the department has continued to work closely with NSW Health, Catholic Schools NSW and the Association of Independent Schools of NSW to support schools in keeping their staff and students safe.

Schools were provided with health-based COVID-smart advice, which encouraged principals and school leaders to consider the risk of COVID-19 transmission when planning activities. Layered measures – such as mask-wearing, rapid antigen testing (RAT), vaccinations, ventilation, hygiene and cleaning – allowed schools to maintain face-to-face learning while prioritising staff and student wellbeing.

Regardless of the setting, where staff or students are at increased risk of serious illness from COVID-19, principals are supported to assess the risks associated with COVID-19 in their schools. Where required, they are empowered to make reasonable adjustments to reduce the risk of both COVID-19 exposure and transmissions including requiring mask-wearing by any staff providing direct education or support students who are at greater risk of serious illness should they contract COVID-19.

Additionally, to balance student's health needs in settings with large numbers of students with moderate to high learning and support needs, without restricting learning and inclusion opportunities, the department:

- [COVID-19 web pages](#)
- [Learning from Home Hub](#)
- [Disability learning and support advice.](#)





# Disability Strategy focus 4: Tracking outcomes

The ability to track outcomes and build an evidence base to measure progress of students with disability is foundational to achieving the vision laid out in the Disability Strategy.

## Tracking outcomes for students with disability

### Outcomes Framework



#### Delivered in 2022

The department has made significant progress in developing the [Outcomes Framework](#) for students with disability. A comprehensive tool to understand the outcomes of students with disability, the Outcomes Framework sets out how the department will monitor progress across high-level domains: learning growth, wellbeing and independence.

In 2022, the department focused on ensuring the Outcomes Framework is grounded in student voice. This involved consultations with students with disability, their parents and carers, and educators to understand what is important to them for inclusion in an Outcomes Framework.



#### Future priority

The Outcomes Framework will be a live document. The department will continue to test, validate and improve it, and use it to drive policy, programs and professional learning to improve outcomes for students with disability.

The department is developing an implementation plan and data plan to support next steps to apply the Outcomes Framework in practice. We will focus on implementing the Outcomes Framework and begin analysing data against its indicators in 2023.

### National Disability Data Asset

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments are working together to develop a National Disability Data Asset.

The [National Disability Data Asset \(NDDA\)](#) aims to improve inclusion and opportunity for people living with disability in Australia. The plan is to link data to better understand the life experiences of people living with disability. Better information can lead to improved supports and services because it illustrates what helps people achieve positive outcomes.

Once finalised, the department's Outcomes Framework can build on the NDDA and Human Services Dataset through linkage to truly understand long term outcomes for students with disability.



#### Delivered in 2022

The department led the early childhood education test case, which was one of 5 NDDA test cases carried out across Australia.

In 2022, the joint department and the University of NSW research team published several reports including a comprehensive research report. The research contains a range of research on developmental and educational outcomes for children with disability or developmental vulnerability. It explores the relationship between the use of early childhood educational supports and the impact on child development and educational outcomes.





## Future priority

The Australian Government Department of Social Services, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare are working in partnership on the next phase of work, to build an enduring NDDA. They will be working closely with state and territory governments and will engage with the disability sector.

The department envisages the NDDA early childhood data asset will continue to be used extensively by different areas of the department to harness the power of linked data to inform policy decision-making.

The department's future priorities and planned work relating to the NDDA include:

- conducting regular refreshes of the NDDA early childhood data asset
- adding new variables and new datasets
- expanding the use cases, so more policy makers can benefit from the data asset
- collaborating with other NSW agencies in joint research projects.

## Nationally Consistent Collection of Data

The **National Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD)** is an annual collection of information about Australian school students with disability. This information is used by education authorities and governments to better understand the needs of students with disability and how they can be best supported at school.



## Embedded into core business

In anticipation of the 2022 NCCD, the department expanded its resources to support the validation, census and post-enumeration processes.

A robust business plan was introduced and implemented to improve the data available to support the department best access the use the dataset. An Access Policy was also introduced to better support and inform the release of any NCCD information.

The department continues work to working on ways to build the evidence base for the NCCD. We engaged Urbis, an independent research company, to develop an evidence base for the NCCD to inform our plan for meeting the needs of children and young people with disability, their families and the broader community.

Further elements of the research included extensive engagement with several schools to better understand how staff engage with NCCD processes at the school level, as well as dual assessments that will highlight whether the adjustments made by public school teachers within the NCCD are relevant, consistent and accurate.

Findings from the research will be used to inform a forward program for 2023, to help strengthen the consistency of the data collected and the support provided to schools.

The department is consulting with other Australian state and territory governments to further improve planning and processes. We also continue to work in partnership with Education Services Australia.

## Bringing schools, students, and parents and carers closer together

Meaningful participation contribute to improved educational, social and wellbeing outcomes for students.

In 2022, the department focused on delivering new ways to bring schools, students, and parents and carers closer together.

The Student and Parent Experience Directorate was created in 2022 to help increase parent and carer engagement in their child's schooling and ensure students' and parents' diverse needs are at the centre of decision-making. The department will identify how experiences for students, parents and carers can be improved and design interventions that drive this improvement.

Key priorities for this work include:

- developing a **parent and carer engagement framework**, released in 2022, and embedding this in the School Excellence Framework
- embedding student engagement in the School Excellence Framework
- establishing an independent, alternative dispute resolution body for complaints
- partnering with the Department of Communities and Justice to support advocacy for families of students with disability.

## Tell Them From Me Survey



## Embedded into core business

Each year, the department seeks feedback from students, parents and carers, and teachers about student engagement, wellbeing and experience at school through the Tell Them From Me Survey.

Across Terms 1 and 2 2022, more than 260,000 students participated in the Tell Them From Me student survey. The department has introduced new features including simplified language, enhancements to design, and speech-to-text functionality to ensure the survey is accessible to as many students as possible.

Parents, carers and teachers provided their insights into the experiences of students with disability in the second snapshot of Tell Them From Me across Terms 3 and 4 2022.

In 2023, Tell Them From Me will be rolled out to revised timelines. There will be new resources for schools, including an enhanced implementation process and e-learning modules, to support engagement with Tell Them From Me in NSW public schools. The Tell Them From Me parent and teacher survey will also be revised to better capture the perspectives of the wider school community.

Ongoing research, including in collaboration with university partners and the Advocate for Children and Young People, will investigate the drivers of student engagement and wellbeing, including for those students with disability.

## My Say My Way

**My Say My Way** developed accessible ways for students with disability to provide feedback on their learning and experiences at school. It was run on a world-leading scale and provided unprecedented insights into the educational experiences of students with moderate and high support needs. The tools developed for this trial address a gap in NSW, Australia, and worldwide, enabling students with moderate and high support needs to have a voice about their education.



### Under way

The department continues to develop tools to capture student voice and measures the wellbeing and engagement of students with moderate and high support needs.

In 2023 and beyond, the My Say My Way suite of tools will be further trialled and rolled out for capturing the voice of students with moderate to high support needs. The aim is for these tools to be available to all students who cannot currently access Tell Them From Me.

## Minister's Student Council



### Embedded into core business

A Minister's Student Council, known as DOVES (Department of Education Student Voices in Education and Schools) was formed in May 2021. The DOVES Minister's Student Council and Steering Committee is made up of a diverse range of students, including students with lived experience of disability, who advocate on behalf of their public school communities from the 9 educational directorates across NSW.

The DOVES are currently working on proposals to:

- equalise gender balance in sports – in particular cross country
- create an awareness campaign on access for young people to health care
- educate fellow students on the dangers of vaping.

The students continue to hold forums for students in the 9 directorates to raise issues with the Minister.

In December 2022, the National Education Ministers forum will discuss a proposal to create a national student body using NSW DOVES as the blueprint.

# Looking ahead

Meaningful change takes a sustained effort, and the department has made promising strides towards building a more inclusive education system. The 4 years since the release of the Disability Strategy has seen priority commitments delivered, and a program of work built to continually progress across the 4 focus areas set out in the strategy.

Major initiatives for 2023 will focus on:

- continuing to design and build The Forest High School as a flagship for inclusive education
- implementing the Inclusive, Engaging and Respectful Schools policy reform
- finalising and implementing the Outcomes Framework for students with disability
- continuing to reform the resourcing system supporting students with disability to focus on needs-based assessment, including trialling a new Needs-Based Assessment Tool in schools
- ongoing design and implementation of the Assessment for Complex Learners.

These major initiatives, alongside the many current priorities and core activities embedded in the department's everyday work, will continue to see the NSW public education system to realise its vision as set out in the 2019 Disability Strategy:

An education system in which children with disability thrive academically; develop good physical, mental and emotional health; and gain the skills to live a fulfilling, independent life post-school.



We acknowledge the homelands of all Aboriginal people and pay our respect to Country.

## For more Information

If you have any questions about this progress report, or to request an alternate version including text-only, **[disability.strategy@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:disability.strategy@det.nsw.edu.au)**

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