

REVIEW OF THE PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES



APRIL 2016

'We have been listening to parents, teachers, students and the community about the challenges in disability education: and we have heard the call for change.'

The Hon. James Merlino MP, Deputy Premier and Minister for Education

'... often it is not individual support that ... [students with disabilities] need, but ... very good classroom structure and organisation, and teacher capacity.'

Parent

'It comes down to training ... actually having a proper framework of understanding, not people shepherding the child through their growing-up years at school.'

Parent

'If you have a physical disability it is often assumed that, of course, you're going to be having difficulty learning. Schools and teachers ... won't look into what could help you achieve the best you can in terms of study outcomes.'

Former student

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Victorian Government's commitment to building Victoria as the 'Education State' recognises that education is the fundamental building block for success in life. This commitment is backed by substantial new investment in needs-based funding and local support for schools. The Education State school reform agenda is geared towards an education system that fosters excellence and equity in equal measure; a system that improves outcomes for every child and young person in every community, regardless of background, circumstances or postcode. A system where all genuinely does mean all.

The scale of this ambition is articulated in the targets that the Government has set for education achievements over the next five and ten years. These targets are ambitious and expansive and embrace the development of the whole child. These targets are for all students, including students with disabilities.

Children achieve better educational and life outcomes when their diverse abilities and strengths are welcomed, understood and supported. The Victorian Government is committed to providing appropriate resources to enable schools to best support all children and young people. This support should enable all Victorian children to maximise access, participation, achievement and wellbeing in school.

As part of the Education State, the Government has committed to inclusive education through the Special Needs Plan for Victorian Schools.

The plan aims to give every child and young person a safe, positive and supportive environment in which to learn that is suited to their individual needs. Some students, including those with disabilities, will need additional support to achieve this aim.

As is the case with all children, students with disabilities have unique strengths, abilities and challenges. The Victorian school system must support students with disabilities to participate, experience and achieve on the same basis as their peers. For example, as part of the Education State reform agenda, the Government is seeking to halve the proportion of students leaving education during Years 9 to 12. Across Australia, students with disabilities have struggled historically to achieve the same school completion rates as their peers, with less than one in four students with a profound disability completing Year 12 in 2012 (ABS 2012). Even students with low-level disabilities complete Year 12 at a rate that is 25 per cent lower than their peers (35 per cent as compared to 60 per cent for students without disabilities). These challenges correlate with poorer outcomes in the labour market later in life. Nonetheless, many students with disabilities are able to succeed at school, as long as the education system, schools and teachers make the necessary adjustments to the way they approach teaching and supporting these students. Under legislation, schools are required to make reasonable adjustments to support students with disabilities to fully participate in school.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The focus of this Review is to investigate how schools can best maximise the learning of all students with disabilities. More specifically, this report is focused on reviewing the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD), which delivers supplementary funding and resources to Victorian government schools to support students with disabilities.

As a result of extensive research and consultation, the Review identified several limitations with the current structure and approach to supporting Victorian students with disabilities. The Review identified 20 key findings and made 25 recommendations with a view to providing better outcomes for students with disabilities. These findings and recommendations are summarised in this Executive Summary, and fall into a number of categories covering a number of issues:

- how to make schools inclusive for students with disabilities
- staff capability and capacity to support students with disabilities
- identification, assessment and planning for students with disabilities
- effective approaches to resourcing schools to support students with disabilities
- accountability mechanisms for achieving outcomes for students with disabilities.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The focus of this Review is to investigate how schools can best maximise the learning of students with disabilities. The Terms of Reference directed the Review to investigate a number of particular points in relation to this broader focus and that it was to provide advice and recommendations on:

1. The current PSD's ability to meet the needs and maximise the learning of all children and young people with disabilities in Victorian government schools.
2. The future capacity of the government school system, including the role of the PSD, to meet the specific needs of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and dyslexia.
3. The feasibility of shifting to a strength-based, functional needs assessment approach for students with disabilities, which is consistent with the directions of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).
4. The efficacy of the current Year 6–7 PSD review process—its purpose, timing, requirements and influence on students' transition from primary to secondary school, and recommendations of alternative models.
5. The program's capacity to support the Victorian Government's commitment to excellence in inclusive education, including an assessment of accountabilities.
6. Advice on operationalising the recommendations of the Review, including transition implications.

There are clear relationships and interdependencies between the above individual Terms of Reference. This is particularly the case regarding the current PSD's ability to meet the needs and maximise the learning of all children in the government school system and the PSD's capacity to support excellence in inclusive education (Terms of Reference 1 and 5). As such, the analysis, findings and recommendations of this Review should be considered holistically.

APPROACH TO THE REVIEW

Meetings were conducted with over 100 individuals across 24 consultations. A range of different perspectives were presented by academics, parents, current and former students, principals and professionals working with children and young people with disabilities. In addition, the Review analysed national and international academic literature, received 170 open-text online submissions from the education sector and community, and conducted an online survey of more than 1400 respondents. The messages the Review heard were clear, consistent and convincing.

FUNDING SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The Victorian Government currently provides funding to all government schools to meet the diverse needs of their student population and maximise their learning and wellbeing outcomes. This funding is formula-based and uses a funding model known as the Student

Resource Package (SRP). The SRP uses a combination of State and Commonwealth funds to finance education services for all children in Victorian government schools. Schools are given autonomy to invest these resources to best support their students. From 2016, schools will receive additional equity (social disadvantage) funding (see Chapter 1).

Schools are expected to use their total SRP allocation to support all students, including students with disabilities. It is estimated that 15 per cent of Victorian government school students (approximately 84,000 students) are identified as learners with disabilities who require some level of 'reasonable adjustment'.¹ The term 'disability' includes partial or total loss of bodily or mental functions as well as disorders, illnesses or malfunctions that result in a person learning or thinking differently from a person without such a disorder or malfunction (*Disability Discrimination Act 1992*).

¹It should be noted in relation to this definition that defining the term 'disability' is a complex and evolving field. This results in challenges when attempting to describe the exact proportion of learners with disabilities. The Department currently uses 15 per cent as an estimate for the number of learners with disabilities who require reasonable adjustments. This estimate is in line with other jurisdictions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As with all students, children and young people with disabilities have a diverse range of strengths and needs. These characteristics influence the level of support, or 'reasonable adjustment' that needs to be made by a school in order to assist a student to participate in schooling on the same basis as their peers.

Participation on the same basis means students with disabilities have access to the same opportunities and choices in admission, enrolment and use of facilities and services offered to other students without disabilities (*Disability Standards for Education 2005*).

Some students with disabilities have complex support needs, others require moderate adjustments to be made, and some students require minimal to no adjustments to support them to participate on the same basis as other students. In recognition of this, not all students with disabilities are supported in the same way or to the same level. However, all Victorian students, including those with disabilities, are supported with government funding under the SRP described above. To effectively support children and young people with disabilities who have moderate to high levels of need, schools may require additional, targeted funding, as detailed later in this chapter.

PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

In recognition of the need for additional support for some Victorian students with disabilities, supplementary resources are currently provided to schools through the PSD.

The PSD is an umbrella name for targeted and general funding initiatives that support students with disabilities, and which form part of the SRP. The PSD's budget comprises a range of funding components totalling \$659 million per annum (2015). PSD funding can be broadly categorised into two groups:

- targeted PSD funding (also known as supplementary funding)
- other PSD funding:
 - general funding to support specialist school settings
 - programmatic funding, for example the Language Support Program (LSP)
 - administrative and assessment funding.

The majority (70 per cent; \$460 million) of PSD funding in 2015 was dedicated to targeted PSD funding. The targeted funding component of the PSD is designed to support children and young people with moderate to high educational adjustment needs.² It has three broad objectives for improving outcomes for students with disabilities: student learning, student engagement and wellbeing, and student pathways and transitions.



² Students with moderate to high educational adjustment needs who are eligible for targeted PSD funding must have a diagnosed physical, intellectual, visual, hearing, behavioural, severe language disability or be on the autism spectrum. They must also be verified as having a certain threshold of need using defined eligibility criteria.

The targeted funding component of the PSD currently provides additional funding for more than 24,000 students with disabilities with moderate to high educational adjustments in Victorian government schools (or 4 per cent of all government school students) and funding is distributed to more than 90 per cent of government schools.

The targeted PSD component has six levels of funding support that are intended to mirror a student's level of support need. Schools determine how their total budget funding (including the PSD) is used to support each student, investing in, for example, specialist teaching or allied health staff, teacher professional learning, specialised resources or Education Support (ES) staff.

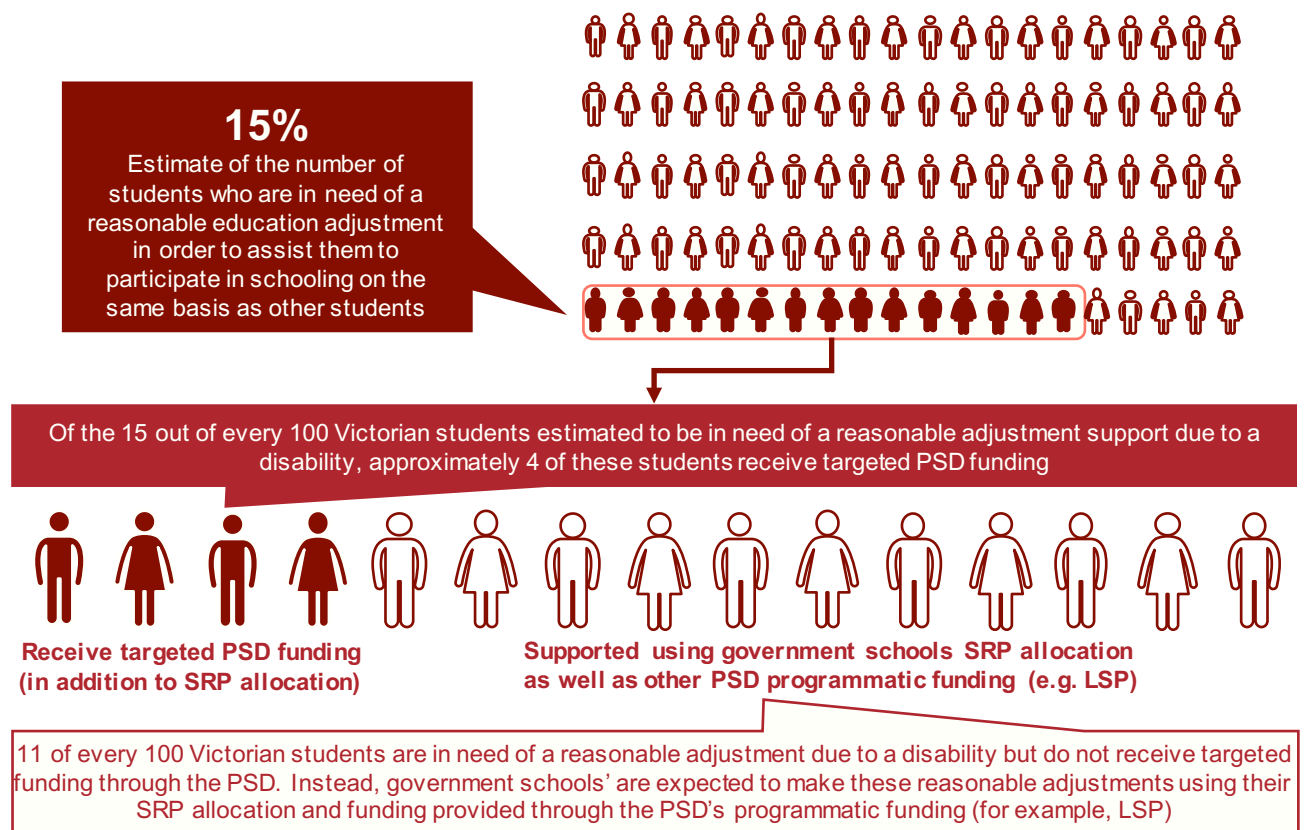
To be eligible for targeted funding, students must have a diagnosed physical, intellectual, visual, hearing, behavioural or severe language disability, or be on the autism spectrum. Entry is based on a three-step process involving an initial assessment to establish eligibility, the PSD Educational Needs Questionnaire (ENQ) to profile the student's educational needs, and a central verification process by the Department and independent professionals. The central verification process determines eligibility based on one of the seven diagnosed disability categories noted. Once eligibility is established, the ENQ is verified to determine the student's funding level.

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In addition to targeted funding, the PSD also includes broader programmatic funding, which is allocated to schools using a specific formula. One of the most substantial programs (from a funding perspective) within this broader group is the LSP, which provides additional resources to teachers in order to support students with language difficulties (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.2).

Figure 1 summarises how Victorian students in need of reasonable adjustments are supported.

Figure 1: Students requiring reasonable adjustment and their support mechanisms



Source: Department of Education and Training, 2015

A CASE FOR CHANGE TO THE PSD

There have been significant periods of reform in approaches to support and funding for students with disabilities in Victoria. Since being implemented in 1995, the PSD has undergone several reforms as community expectations about how students with disabilities should be supported in schools have changed, from an expectation that students with disabilities have the right to attend government schools to an expectation of genuine inclusion.

A key strength of the current PSD is that it provides valued funding to support a cohort of students with disabilities and moderate to high educational adjustment needs. However, according to the literature, and views of parents, schools, people with disabilities, the public, and non-government agencies, there are a number of opportunities to improve the design and operation of the current program. In addition, there is a need for broader reform of the Victorian school system in order to strengthen inclusive school practices and support all students with disabilities, including those not currently receiving targeted funding through the PSD.

Victoria's education system, and in particular the systems of support for students with disabilities will undergo change in the near future as a result of national and state-based reforms:

- the rollout of the NDIS
- the Government response to the Victorian Schools Funding Review (Bracks Review)
- the implementation of the Special Needs Plan for Victorian Schools
- the ongoing development of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCDSSD)
- the broader reforms to the Victorian education system proposed through the Victorian Government's Education State agenda.

The breadth of these reforms provides a unique opportunity for the next step in Victoria's journey to develop a fundamental and long-term reform agenda for students with disabilities. This will ensure that funding provides a comprehensive level of support to students with disabilities to enable them to participate in their local government school and maximise their educational outcomes.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY FINDINGS

This report has been structured according to the Terms of Reference for the PSD Review. This chapter provides a detailed summary of the focus, findings and recommendations discussed throughout Chapters 3 to 8 of this report. The key topic areas that have been covered are:

- excellence in inclusive education (Term of Reference 5)
- maximising learning of students with disabilities (Term of Reference 1)
- managing transition to secondary school (Term of Reference 4)
- meeting the needs of students with autism and dyslexia (Term of Reference 2)
- a new approach to support and resourcing (Term of Reference 3)
- policy into practice—operationalising reform (Term of Reference 6).

It should be noted that some of the overarching challenges and proposed solutions intersect with and impact multiple topics and Terms of Reference. Where this occurs in relation to specific key findings and recommendations, cross-references to other chapters have been noted.

CHAPTER 3: EXCELLENCE IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION (TERM OF REFERENCE 5)

Chapter 3 examines policy and guidance around promoting inclusive education, in particular the role of school leaders, teachers and ES staff in building a culture of inclusion and promoting student learning outcomes. Inclusive education is observed when, with adequate support, all children, irrespective of their different needs, are able to learn together in mainstream classrooms in their local communities (UNESCO 2015).

The Education State is about excellence and equity in equal measure, knowing that the highest performing jurisdictions focus on both. The Victorian Government has committed to delivering inclusive education and creating a safe, positive and supportive environment in which all students can learn. The Review found evidence that inclusive schools have a number of positive impacts on academic and personal achievement for students with disabilities, as well as their peers and teachers (Foreman et al. 2015, Mitchell 2015).

Using best practice definitions, the Review found evidence that Victorian Government schools are not consistently as inclusive as they could be. For example, while most students with disabilities are accepted for enrolment at the first school to which they apply, there is evidence that some schools explicitly or subtly refuse to enrol students with disabilities (VEOHRC 2012).

The lack of a coherent and visible policy framework has meant that it has been difficult to develop a culture of inclusion within schools. There is currently limited guidance material for schools and teachers in relation to promoting inclusivity, and a lack of consistent training and professional learning for teachers and ES staff. In addition, there has been limited opportunity for specialist expertise to be provided to schools to support the delivery of inclusive education.

Building an inclusive education culture requires principals and other school leaders to take the lead in driving inclusive practices in the classroom. An inclusive environment will assist schools to meet the learning and social developmental needs of students with disabilities. However, to implement effective practice, clearer guidance is required on what is meant by inclusive education and how it is to be achieved. Additional training and specialist expertise should be provided to schools on best practice in delivering inclusive education.

Hattie (2003) identified teaching quality as the single most important in-school variable influencing student achievement. The Review found that there is considerable scope to develop teachers' capacity to support students with disabilities. In particular, the Review found that teachers are likely to require training in how to make reasonable and evidence-informed adjustments to teaching practices to effectively include students with disabilities. The Review also found that while there is an inclination

for schools to use PSD funding to hire ES staff, there is a lack of understanding among teachers and principals on how to use these staff to maximise student participation and learning (Punch 2015; VAGO 2012).

There are opportunities to build staff capability to support students with disabilities to achieve learning outcomes. To begin addressing this issue immediately, the Review recommends that current disability-relevant professional learning be more comprehensively rolled out and promoted across the state. At the same time, it is recommended that a workforce capability strategy be developed, which would include a detailed analysis of the skills and capabilities of the teaching workforce, and would develop specific measures to address any gaps.

The development and implementation of a policy framework that defines inclusive education, and identifies Government expectations, targeted initiatives, objectives and indicators for success, is recommended. This would ensure that all schools have a consistent understanding of their roles and responsibilities to make education inclusive for students with disabilities. The development of indicators of success and the requirement for schools to routinely report on these measures will enable the government school sector to continue to improve its approach to inclusive education based on evidence of what works.

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CHAPTER 4: MAXIMISING LEARNING OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (TERM OF REFERENCE 1)

Chapter 4 examines approaches to maximising the learning of children and young people with disabilities in Victorian government schools, as well as the accountability and reporting mechanisms required. It presents several findings and recommendations relating to identifying students with disabilities and their learning needs, improving overall outcomes for students with disabilities, and PSD reporting and accountability.

Overall, some progress has been made in moving towards a strength-based, person-centred approach to designing supports and learning plans for students with disabilities. However, there is scope to build on existing initiatives and improve collaborative efforts to promote student learning. Stakeholders reported that schools do not consistently apply individual support planning processes, which are intended to set and monitor each student's goals and measures of success.

More broadly, there are issues with PSD accountability structures and mechanisms, both in terms of measuring the progress of individual students against their own learning plan, as well as identifying the outcomes obtained as a result of PSD funding. This is compounded by a lack of data on the outcomes of students with disabilities, meaning that success cannot be measured or analysed at the school or system level.

In the absence of adequate transparency and accountability, there are shortcomings in the way performance of students with disabilities is monitored and reported, resulting in there being little evidence to demonstrate the PSD's efficacy in raising student outcomes. Improved data collection, linkages and analysis would support enhanced planning, reporting and accountability, leading to improved outcomes for students with disabilities.

A new funding model that supports students with disabilities to participate in government schools and includes output reporting on the activities undertaken, would improve the Department's ability to monitor the use of funding. Developing a set of outcome measures and indicators for students with disabilities against which schools are required to report would improve school accountability. Under this new funding model, schools would be required to demonstrate how any additional funding benefits student outcomes. At the same time, the Department needs to take a more active role in reviewing and analysing information and identifying system-wide strengths and weaknesses, and areas for targeted focus and improvement. This solution needs to ensure integration and alignment with the broader Education State reform agenda outlined earlier.

CHAPTER 5: MANAGING TRANSITION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL (TERM OF REFERENCE 4)

Chapter 5 examines the formal process for reviewing the appropriateness of PSD funding during Year 6 or equivalent in specialist schools. The Year 6–7 review aims to assess changes to students' needs and abilities, to provide effective education and support during secondary school, and to make sure PSD funding is targeted to those students with highest need.

The Year 6–7 review determines whether or not the student will receive targeted funding once they begin secondary school, as well as the level of this support. Approximately 2,000 students undertake the Year 6–7 review each year, with approximately 20 per cent of those students reviewed (in any given year) having improved to the extent that they no longer meet the eligibility criteria for the PSD.

While stakeholders generally accept that a review process is necessary, the Year 6–7 review is perceived by some to be complex, time-consuming and untimely, and intended to withdraw funding. Stakeholders point to the challenges the Year 6–7 review poses and that transition to secondary school can be a challenge for students with special needs, with particular concern about the potential lack of support available for students who are no longer eligible for targeted funding through the PSD. In particular, some

stakeholders argued that cessation of funding support at the point of transition to secondary school means that schools have reduced access to resources to support these students at a time of increased need.

The Review acknowledges stakeholder and Government concerns about the challenges of the Year 6–7 review and that transition to secondary school can be a particularly difficult time for students with disabilities. On balance, the Review found that formal appraisal of PSD eligibility is still required and there would not be significant benefits in moving the timing of the review to either Year 5 or Year 8. Students' needs change over time as they learn skills and mature, and the Year 6–7 review is a key process in ensuring and maintaining alignment between funding and student needs.

However, additional interim support for students who are no longer eligible for targeted funding would assist with the transition to secondary school, particularly as part of a coordinated multi-disciplinary approach.

In the longer term, the Review considers that a new funding model should be developed to eliminate the need for a formal, single-point-in-time review of funding eligibility. This could occur through the adoption of a strength-based, functional needs approach to assessing eligibility, which would involve more comprehensive monitoring and tailoring of support to student needs, including frequent assessment.

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CHAPTER 6: MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM AND WITH DYSLEXIA (TERM OF REFERENCE 2)

Chapter 6 considers the capacity and capability of the current school system to support students on the autism spectrum and students with dyslexia. Overall, the Review identified a number of opportunities to improve the capacity of schools to support these students.

Schools do not consistently use evidence-based interventions when trying to support the learning needs of students with autism or dyslexia. There is scope to improve the awareness of all schools

and teachers about evidence-based approaches to support students with autism or dyslexia and how to use these in the classroom. This could be achieved by providing more ongoing disability-specific training to lift workforce capability. Ongoing learning opportunities and training would support teachers to better understand and teach students with autism or dyslexia. An increase to the LSP component of the PSD could provide schools with greater flexibility within their budget to access disability-specific training and implement appropriate strategies. A key advantage of investing in teacher development is that this would benefit all students with disabilities, whether or not they attract targeted funding.



CHAPTER 7: A NEW APPROACH TO SUPPORT AND RESOURCING (TERM OF REFERENCE 3)

Chapter 7 examines the suitability and effectiveness of the current approach to providing funding for students with disabilities. The literature reviews and the stakeholder consultations identified a number of weaknesses with the current approach to funding students with disabilities through the PSD. Much of the feedback received from stakeholders was critical of the process used to determine the level of funding under the targeted funding component. Concerns were expressed that the current process is costly, inconsistently understood and applied by schools, and has resulted in inequitable funding outcomes. The Review identified a number of opportunities to refine the process for allocating funding to government schools. A refined funding model would enable students with disabilities to achieve better outcomes through a more effective system of support.

The chapter outlines the features of a proposed revised funding approach for students with disabilities. The proposed new approach is based on three tiers of funding, where students with the greatest need are supported through targeted funding and students with lower levels of need are funded through a formula. It addresses the challenges identified with the current model and leverages opportunities from emerging reforms in the disability and education sectors. A key feature of the approach to targeted

funding is the use of a strength-based, functional needs assessment to determine both eligibility and the level of funding to be allocated for students with the greatest need.

The literature reviews and the stakeholder consultations identified significant scope to improve the eligibility, assessment and support planning process for students with disabilities. The current eligibility criteria are not consistent with best practice approaches, which base eligibility on an individual's functional needs, rather than on whether or not a student meets diagnosis-based criteria. Some stakeholders were concerned that the assessment process is not understood or applied consistently by schools. An inconsistent approach to the understanding of and approach to the assessment process means that there is no certainty that two students with the same disability and the same educational needs in different schools will receive the same level of support.

The combination of the development, testing and refinement of a strength-based, functional needs assessment tool, a personalised support profiling tool, and a process for completing personalised planning, will be fundamental to ensuring that all students with disabilities are supported consistently, regardless of the school they attend. This solution, when taken together with the recommendations made below, which relate to resourcing and accountability, will significantly improve the identification, assessment and planning for all children and young people with disabilities.

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CHAPTER 8: POLICY INTO PRACTICE— OPERATIONALISING REFORM (TERM OF REFERENCE 6)

Chapter 8 provides a high-level overview of the key steps and timelines required in order to improve the ability of Victorian government schools to support students with disabilities. The Review identified a number of areas where there is significant opportunity to better include and support students with disabilities in Victorian government schools in order to maximise their learning outcomes. Several suggested reforms are focused on how the current design and operation of PSD could be improved, while other

recommendations are broader and relate to improving the overall functioning of the government school system through a range of initiatives, including the investigation of a new approach to funding.

It is not possible to address all of these issues at once, and reform will be most effective where it is embedded within the Education State agenda rather than being pursued in isolation from the broader reform program that is underway. The recommendations made throughout this report will be prioritised and implementation sequenced, including the need for whole-of-government consideration and co-ordination.



Figure 2 provides a high-level summary of how these reforms can be progressively implemented to help make Victoria the Education State. The end goal of these reforms is an inclusive government school system that supports students with disabilities to maximise their learning outcomes.

Figure 2: Transition to inclusive schools that support students with disabilities to maximise their learning outcomes

2016: Operationalisation Strategy and leveraging existing resources

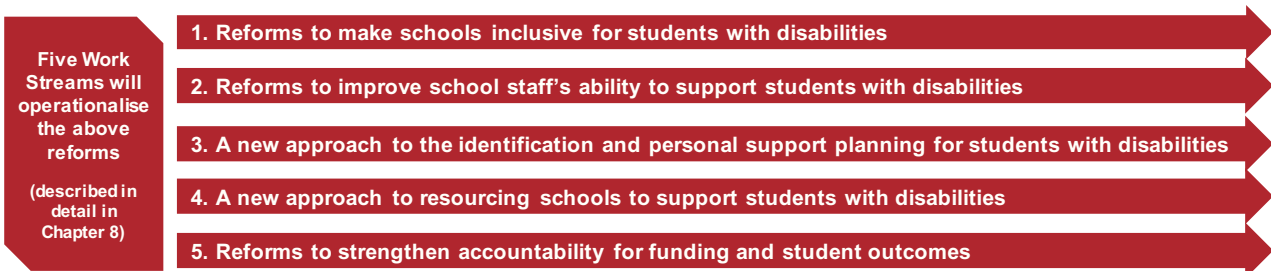
- Develop detailed implementation plan and communications plan
- Develop necessary policies, strategies and guidelines
- Expand access to and awareness of current training on working with students with disabilities
- Develop accountability measures
- Develop functional needs assessment tool and begin developing new funding approach

2017: Trial and implement changes

- Implement actions of the workforce capability strategy
- Implement actions under the Inclusive Education Policy Statement and Framework
- Release and promote personalised learning and support guidelines
- Trial and refine functional needs assessment tool and funding approach
- Implement transitional funding arrangements

2018 onwards: Inclusive government schools support students with disability to achieve

- Continual monitoring of outcomes for students with disabilities
- Statewide implementation of new approach to assessing student need and a new approach to allocating PSD funding



Source: Department of Education and Training, 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In responding to the six Terms of Reference, the Review identified 20 key findings and made 25 recommendations on how Victoria can improve outcomes for students with disabilities in inclusive schools. These recommendations focus on how the Victorian government schools could better support students with disabilities. The Review recommendations align with broader Education State reforms where every Victorian has the opportunity to succeed in life.

Table 1: Summary of key findings and recommendations

Chapter 3: Excellence in inclusive education (Term of Reference 5)

NO.	KEY FINDINGS	NO.	RECOMMENDATIONS
1	Currently, there is no clear inclusive education policy or framework that articulates how the Department plans to provide inclusive education for students with disabilities.	1	Develop a clear inclusive education policy and framework, as well as guidance and support materials for staff working with students with disabilities. This guidance on inclusive education should articulate a vision and set the necessary expectations and direction for educating students with disabilities in Victoria.
2	An inclusive culture within schools has clear benefits, not only for students with disabilities, but for other students and teachers as well. Building an inclusive culture requires principals and other school leaders to take the lead in driving inclusive practices in the classroom, so that schools are able to meet the learning and social developmental needs of students with disabilities.	2	Develop a new Inclusive Schooling Index that enables schools to self-assess and measure inclusivity.
3	There is no disability-specific workforce capability strategy and although there are a range of existing professional learning opportunities, there remains a lack of consistent disability-specific professional learning for most school leaders and teachers. This means that the education workforce is often not well equipped to provide an inclusive environment or to respond to the differing needs of students with disabilities.	3	Develop an Inclusive Education Workforce Capability Strategy to ensure that teachers and teaching staff can better access the necessary professional learning, including evidence-based pedagogy and curriculum, to fully support the participation and achievement of students with disabilities.
		4	Further develop and rollout existing professional learning opportunities relevant to disability and inclusive education practices at a system, school and classroom level, to build workforce capability to support all students with disabilities.
		5	To assist with capability building, leadership development and the implementation of a workforce capability strategy, undertake a feasibility study into the potential for a 'Victorian Inclusive Education Institute', possibly as part of the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership or Victorian Deaf Education Institute.

Chapter 3: Excellence in inclusive education (Term of Reference 5) cont.

NO.	KEY FINDINGS	NO.	RECOMMENDATIONS
4	Currently, there is a lack of specialist expertise and support for schools to deliver inclusive education. This can make it difficult for schools to implement strategies to maximise the learning of students with disabilities (see Chapter 4).	6	Consider how to harness the new regional reforms and resources, particularly the multi-disciplinary teams as part of the Learning Places agenda, to better access the expertise and knowledge in each local area.
		7	Develop options to support specialist schools and special developmental schools to become 'centres of expertise' to support local mainstream schools to implement inclusive education.
5	Clearer role descriptions and targeted training for Education Support staff would lead to better outcomes for students with disabilities.	8	Provide guidance in relation to the role (including the extent to which they are used) and training requirements for Education Support staff to optimise the use of this key resource and better influence academic and behavioural outcomes of students with disabilities.
6	Principals and teachers are not consistently aware of how and when to most effectively use and support Education Support staff in the classroom and as part of a broader collaborative student support structure.		



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chapter 4: Maximising learning (Term of Reference 1)

NO.	KEY FINDINGS	NO.	RECOMMENDATIONS
7	Multi-disciplinary teams are needed to support strength-based and learner-centred approaches that apply to all children and young people in educational contexts, including evidence-based intervention responses to meet the needs of individuals with additional needs.	9	Develop a new collaborative multi-disciplinary approach to support all students with disabilities, which considers Team Around the Learner and Response to Intervention models.
8	The existing approach to Individual Learning Plans is inconsistent, cumbersome and fails to adequately record the progress of individual students. This is, at least in part, due to the lack of systemic guidelines on their use and how the progress of students with Individual Learning Plans should be measured.	10	Develop guidelines on personalised learning and support planning to assist schools with early identification of, and response to, students with disabilities. These guidelines should consider strength-based, person-centred approaches to maximise learning outcomes and the engagement and wellbeing of students with disabilities in schools. The guidelines should set out a process to plan and monitor achievement, engagement and wellbeing outcomes for the individual.
		11	Develop and trial a new personalised support-profiling tool that identifies strengths and functional needs for all students with disabilities.
9	There is a lack of accountability and transparency for outcomes for all students with disabilities, including those students supported under the PSD and for the use of targeted PSD funding provided to schools.	12	Develop and implement a stronger system of accountability for outcomes for all students with disabilities that includes improved data quality and data collection, analysis of data, and reporting and transparency. For students this would include measures for achievement, engagement and wellbeing, and for schools this would include greater accountability and transparency for the use of funds.
10	A lack of available data on the performance and outcomes of students with disabilities undermines efforts to strengthen accountability. This gap means success cannot be measured and analysed at the school level or across the system in relation to student outcomes and the impact of support. Improved data collection, linkage and analysis would enable enhanced planning, reporting and accountability at the school, area, regional and state level.		

Chapter 5: Managing the transition to secondary school (Term of Reference 4)

11	The Year 6–7 review is currently required to reassess eligibility into the PSD and there would not be significant benefits in moving the timing of the review to a Year 5–6 or Year 7–8 review.	13	Consider providing interim funding for students transitioning from Year 6 who are no longer eligible for targeted PSD funding, to provide additional support as part of a coordinated multi-disciplinary approach.
		14	Design and implement a new funding model, based on functional needs, that removes the requirement for the Year 6–7 review process.

Chapter 6: Meeting the needs of students on the autism spectrum and with dyslexia (Term of Reference 2)

NO.	KEY FINDINGS	NO.	RECOMMENDATIONS
12	Stakeholders report that there is variable use of evidence-based intervention approaches within Victorian government schools to respond to behaviours of concern related to students on the autism spectrum.	15	<p>Make available ongoing autism-specific training and access to specialist support and expertise, particularly in relation to evidence-based approaches to respond to the specific learning needs of students on the autism spectrum, for example through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expanding the role of autism-specific schools to include greater outreach and support (see Recommendation 7) • including allied health professionals or specialist teachers with expertise in autism in the new area multidisciplinary teams to support schools and individual students • developing specific resources and teacher support material for supporting students with autism and high-level communication, social and behavioural challenges • establishing partnerships with non-government organisations that provide support for students with autism.
13	Stakeholders report that students on the autism spectrum who are not supported under targeted PSD funding are not consistently well supported in their specific needs by all schools.	16	Consider providing additional resourcing to schools to better meet the educational needs of students with autism, dyslexia and learning disabilities who are not eligible for the PSD, for example through the expansion of the Language Support Program.
14	The built environment plays an important role in supporting inclusive education for students with disabilities, including students on the autism spectrum.	17	Continue the rollout and implementation of the Special Needs Plan commitments to require all new schools to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities and the delivery of the \$10 million Inclusive Schools Fund for existing schools.
15	Best practice support for students with dyslexia includes early identification and differentiated teaching approaches. An investigation into an early years screening program is currently underway as part of the Special Needs Plan.	18	Complete the investigation into an early years screening program for learning disorders.
		19	Raise awareness and encourage schools and teachers to participate in the available online training on supporting students with dyslexia.
16	Stakeholder feedback suggests that students with dyslexia are not consistently supported in schools. Some teachers require professional development to be able to adapt their teaching for students with dyslexia.	20	Develop and implement a dyslexia and learning difficulties strategy, including providing ongoing disability-specific training to lift workforce capability to understand and teach students with learning difficulties and dyslexia.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chapter 7: A new approach to funding and support (Term of Reference 3)

NO.	KEY FINDINGS	NO.	RECOMMENDATIONS
17	The current approach to assessing eligibility for funding through the targeted PSD component is costly, inconsistently understood and applied by schools, and results in inequitable funding outcomes.	21	Develop a new tiered funding model based on a strength-based functional needs approach to meet the needs of all students with disabilities, which includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • base funding - allocated to all schools for all students • teaching and learning loading - allocated to schools to support students with disabilities who require reasonable adjustments • targeted funding - allocated to schools to support students with disabilities and high education adjustment needs.
18	There are a number of benefits from aligning the approach taken to assessing student needs to the approach used under the evolving NDIS. This would assist parents and families to navigate services and supports in and out of school, reduce the administrative burden for families, carers and students, provide a holistic approach to meeting the health and education needs of students with disabilities, and may make the assessment process more efficient.	22	Develop a formal relationship with the National Disability Insurance Agency to ensure maximum alignment with the NDIS as it evolves, including consistency and sharing of information and professional insight where possible.
19	Implementation of a strength-based, functional-needs approach in the process of assessing eligibility and determining funding amounts would improve the capacity of the future disability funding model to meet the needs of students with disabilities.	23	Develop and implement a strength-based, functional needs approach to assessing student need, to support the achievement and participation of students with disabilities.

Chapter 8: Policy into practice—operationalising reform (Term of Reference 6)

20	Successful implementation will require clear and integrated stages of work and specific timelines and accountability arrangements, including adequate resources and oversight.	24	The Department to provide sufficient resources to develop and implement the recommendations in the Review, including oversight and coordination through a Department-wide steering committee.
		25	Undertake regular consultations with the education sector and the community to inform the development and implementation of the reforms and prepare all stakeholders for the changes.

1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The Victorian Government is committed to building Victoria as the Education State where every Victorian has an opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills that will shape their lives. This commitment includes the promotion of inclusive education through the Special Needs Plan for Victorian Schools (the Special Needs Plan). Inclusive education is observed when, with adequate support, all children, irrespective of their different needs, are able to learn together in mainstream classrooms in their local communities (UNESCO 2015). The Special Needs Plan aims to give every child and young person a safe, positive and supportive environment in which to learn that is suited to their individual needs.

As one of the many significant commitments outlined in the Special Needs Plan, a comprehensive review of the PSD in Victoria was announced in July 2015. The scope of this Review was to investigate how schools can best support students with special needs, including those with autism and dyslexia.

This report documents the method, stakeholder inputs, research, analysis, key findings and recommendations of this Review.

1.1 CONTEXT

The Victorian Government recognises the right of every child to a high-quality education. Children achieve better educational and life outcomes when their diverse abilities and strengths are welcomed, understood and appropriately supported. The Victorian Government is committed to providing appropriate resources to enable schools to support all children and young people to maximise access and participation and achieve merit and personal wellbeing.

As is the case with all children and young people, students with disabilities have unique challenges, strengths and abilities. In Victoria, students with disabilities have not achieved the same school completion rates as their peers. This correlates with poorer outcomes in the labour market. However, many students with disabilities are able to succeed at school when their schools and teachers make the necessary adjustments to the way in which they approach teaching and supporting these students. Under legislation, schools are required to make reasonable adjustments to support students with disabilities to fully participate in school.

'It is only through each and every Victorian reaching their full and unique potential that we as a state will be able to reach ours. It's a simple thing but a profoundly important thing.'

The Hon. Daniel Andrews MP, Premier

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Over the last 15 years, there has been a steady increase in the number of children and young people identified with disabilities who require additional support from targeted education programs, schools and teachers to ensure that they maximise their learning. There are approximately 576,007 students in 1,528 Victorian Government schools (DET 2015). Of these, it is estimated that approximately 15 per cent are learners with disabilities who require some level of additional support or reasonable adjustment.³ This support may range from quality differentiated teaching to high levels of attendant care support. These learners are in need of reasonable education adjustments to assist them to participate in schooling on the same basis as other students.

1.1.1 PARTICIPATING ON THE SAME BASIS

The Victorian Government seeks to ensure that students with disabilities are able to participate on the same basis as other students. Participating on the 'same basis' means that a student with a disability has 'opportunities and choices which are comparable with those offered to students without disability'.

³ The term 'disability' includes a range of partial or total loss of bodily or mental functions as well as disorders, illnesses or malfunctions that result in a person learning or thinking differently from a person without such a disorder or malfunction (Disability Discrimination Act 1992). Defining the term 'disability' is complex and evolving. This results in challenges when attempting to describe the exact proportion of learners with disabilities. The Department currently uses 15 per cent as an estimate of the number of learners with disabilities who require reasonable adjustments, based on its data collections and the estimates of other jurisdictions.

This includes opportunities and choices in relation to admission or enrolment in a school, participation in courses, and use of facilities and services (Australian Government 2010; *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*; *Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth)*). The Government recognises that supporting these students on the same basis requires reasonable adjustments to be made. Reasonable adjustments come in many forms, including, for example, infrastructure adjustments, the use of ES staff, or adjustments in teaching approaches or styles to adapt to the strengths and needs of particular students.

1.1.2 HOW STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES ARE SUPPORTED IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

All Victorian government school students, including those with disabilities, are supported with government funding under the SRP. As noted in section 1.1, it is estimated that approximately 15 per cent of Victorian students are identified learners with disabilities who require some level of additional support (reasonable adjustment). As with all students, students with disabilities have a diverse range of strengths and needs. These characteristics influence the level of support or reasonable adjustment to be made by a school in order to assist a student to participate in schooling on the same basis as other students.

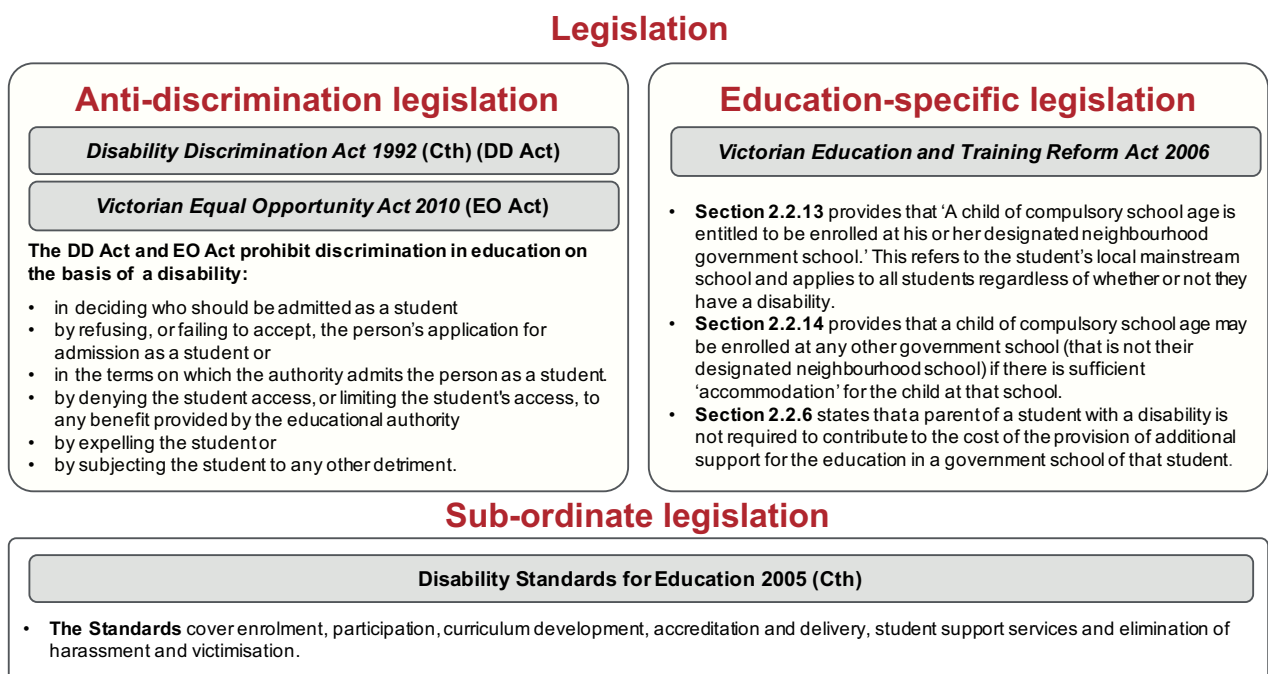
Some students with disabilities have complex support needs, others require moderate adjustments to be made, and some students require minimal to no adjustments to support them to participate on the same basis as other students. In recognition of this, not all students with disabilities are supported in the same way or to the same level.

1.2 LEGISLATIVE OBLIGATIONS TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The Department acknowledges its legislative obligations to be inclusive in nature and reasonably accommodate the educational needs of students with disabilities.

These obligations are to be found under both State and Federal disability discrimination legislation and the *Education Training and Reform Act 2006* (Vic) as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Legislative framework for Victorian students with disabilities



Source: Department of Education and Training, 2015

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.2.1 DISABILITY ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LEGISLATION

Under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic), *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) and *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Cth), it is unlawful to discriminate against students with disabilities in their education. The definition of 'disability' under this legislation is broad and covers physical, intellectual, mental and medical impairments, including disorders or malfunctions that result in a person learning differently (that is, learning disorders).

It is unlawful to either directly or indirectly discriminate against students with disabilities. Direct discrimination is when a student is treated unfavourably because of their disability. Indirect discrimination is where a requirement, condition or practice is applied to all students equally but where its application is likely to have the effect of disadvantaging students with disabilities.

In order to comply with this legislation, education providers must make reasonable adjustments to enable a student with a disability to participate in their education on the same basis as a student without a disability. This legislation does not require education providers to make reasonable adjustments that would cause 'unjustifiable hardship'. The concept of 'unjustifiable hardship' takes into account a broad range of factors (for example, the effect of disability on the person in question, the potential benefit of the reasonable adjustment, and the estimated cost of the reasonable adjustment).

Importantly, the obligation to provide reasonable adjustments applies to all students with disabilities, regardless of whether or not they are funded under the PSD.

The *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Cth) provides guidance regarding the responsibilities of educational authorities under disability discrimination legislation in relation to consultation, enrolment, participation, curriculum development, accreditation and delivery, student support services, and elimination of harassment and victimisation.

1.2.2 EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFORM ACT 2006 (VIC)

The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic) (ETRA) clearly establishes that every student has an entitlement to attend their designated neighbourhood government school. The designated neighbourhood school is generally the government school that is nearest the student's permanent residence (section 2.2.13). This entitlement applies to all students regardless of whether or not they have a disability. In addition, ETRA explicitly states that parents of students with disabilities are not required to contribute to the cost of additional support for the education of their child in a government school (section 2.2.14).

Additionally, section 2.2.14 of the ETRA provides that a child of compulsory school age may be enrolled at any other government school (that is not their designated neighbourhood school) if there is sufficient 'accommodation' for the child at that school. Again, this section applies

to all students of compulsory school age regardless of whether or not they have a disability.

The ETRA therefore promotes inclusion by setting out in legislation that students with disabilities have the same entitlement to educational opportunity as students without a disability, and thus they should be supported in such a way that promotes equal opportunity.

1.3 VICTORIA'S REFORM JOURNEY—1980S TO PRESENT

The last three decades have seen a reform journey (in Victoria, nationally and internationally) in relation to how children and young people with disabilities are supported in society. Three decades ago, there was an almost exclusive focus on ensuring that a small group of children and young people with medicalised disabilities could access Victorian health services, buildings, be part of the community and live at home. This rather limited focus on accessibility has evolved to the current expectation of participation, wellbeing and learning achievement for all children and young people with disabilities on the same basis as their peers.

1.3.1 REFORM SINCE THE 1980s

Since the 1980s, there have been two significant periods of reform around approaches to support and funding for students with disabilities in Victoria.

From accessibility to inclusion (1982 to 1990s)

The *Integration in Victorian education: report of the Ministerial Review of Educational Services for the Disabled* (1984), also known as the Collins Report, outlined the beginnings of a substantial reform agenda. The introduction of 'integration' in Victorian schools in 1984 marked the beginning of a significant cultural shift that placed Victoria at the forefront of national practice. Integration established the presence of children and young people with disabilities in local neighbourhood schools, and provided a place for all children and young people within the government school system. Its aim was to maximise access and enrolment of students with disabilities in mainstream schools.

Establishment of Program for Students with Disabilities and Impairments (1995)

In 1992, the Victorian Auditor-General delivered the *Integrated Education for Children with Disabilities* report. This was followed by a report by Cullen and Brown (1992), *Integration and Special Education in Victorian Schools—A Program Effectiveness Review*. These reviews led to the establishment of a centralised Program for Students with Disabilities and Impairments in 1995, to increase rigour and state-wide consistency to funding provided to schools to support identified students with disabilities.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

From integration to promoting inclusion (2000 to 2015)

The early 2000s saw a shift from integration to promoting inclusion, and the *Better Services, Better Outcomes* (2001) report, based on a review of educational provision for students with disabilities in Victoria by Dr Luanna Meyer. This report shifted the focus from 'access'—bringing children and young people with disabilities into the system, to 'participation'—with the aim of maximising genuine and full participation in the life of the school. A forward pathway was identified outlining the changes in culture, funding and workforce required to build on the previous reforms.

In 2002, the renamed PSD represented substantial reform to funding to achieve targeted and consistent resourcing to underpin school practice. In 2006, the Government response to the *Promoting Inclusive Education— Ministerial Working Group Report* was published, providing a clear statement of intention and systemic strategies to provide a strong foundation to build inclusion in schools.

In 2012, the Victorian Auditor-General's *Programs for Students with Special Learning Needs* report and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission's *Held Back: The Experiences of Students with Disabilities in Victorian Schools* report were both delivered. These reports reflected feedback received from families and disability advocates, and highlighted the administrative requirements of PSD eligibility processes and dissatisfaction with the lack of support for students with disabilities not included in the PSD. The reports also called for greater accountability for support and outcomes for students with disabilities to ensure that students were making progress towards their educational goals. Further, the reports found that the majority of teachers who would be at some time responsible for teaching students with disabilities did not have the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to respond to the students' learning needs.

A consistent theme over the years has been that there are many students with disabilities requiring support, and work was needed to be undertaken to achieve a new approach to school resourcing and support that enabled schools to recognise and meet the needs of all students with disabilities in schools.

Victoria’s reform journey since the 1980s is summarised in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Inclusive schooling—Victoria’s reform journey

Phase of disability reform in Victorian schools	Key policy documents	Impact
1982 – 1992 Integration	1984 Collins Report 1992 VAGO Report: Integrated Education for Children with Disabilities 1992 Cullen Brown Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning of cultural shift that placed Victoria at the forefront of national and international practice. • Established <i>presence</i> of children and young people with disabilities in mainstream schools. • Establishment of a centralised Program for Students with Disabilities and Impairments in 1995.
2000 – 2015 Promoting inclusive education	2001 Better Services Better Outcomes 2006 Promoting Inclusive Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moved the thinking from integration to inclusion. • Focus progressed from access to participation in the life of the school. • In 2002, the renamed Program for Students with Disabilities was implemented. Substantial reform to the program and its criteria occurred in 2004. • Substantial reform to funding was undertaken to achieve targeted and consistent resourcing to underpin school practice and manage growing demand pressure. • In 2006, the LSP was introduced to deliver formula funding to schools to address the needs of students with language disability.

				
1984 Collins: Integration in Victorian Education	1992 Cullen Brown: Integration and Special Education in Victorian Schools	1992 VAGO Report: Integrated Education for Children with Disabilities	2001 Department of Education and Training: Better Services, Better Outcomes	2006 Promoting Inclusive Education

Source: Department of Education and Training, 2015

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.3.2 THE NEED FOR FURTHER REFORM

The PSD has, since its inception, delivered significant funding and resourcing to schools. This funding has supported the growing number of students with disabilities with moderate to high educational adjustment needs to participate and achieve in education on the same basis as their peers. The PSD has provided the additional resources to support eligible students with disabilities in learning, engagement and wellbeing, and student pathways and transition.

The program's design and administration reflect the requirement of a funding program of this scope to deliver state-wide consistency of approach, with public and explicit program eligibility criteria and funding levels. All Australian education jurisdictions have a form of targeted funding for disability requiring eligibility criteria and attributing a level of resource, all with their own strengths and challenges.

While previous reform periods have led to lasting improvements and the PSD has strengths and provides valued targeted funding to support over 24,000 students, the Review found that there are a number of significant and long-standing problems and concerns about the PSD from parents, schools, people with disabilities, government and non-government agencies. These concerns are explored in the body of this Review.

1.4 EDUCATION STATE: SCHOOL REFORMS

The Victorian Government has a commitment to making Victoria the Education State by building an education system that produces excellence and reduces the impact of disadvantage. The Government's agenda provides clear direction for teachers, schools and their partners. It recognises that success in learning and life considers the whole child or young person and is about improving outcomes for every student, in every classroom, in every community. This agenda begins to address a historical absence (despite previous reforms) of an explicit and comprehensive policy framework for inclusion in Victoria. This has meant that there has been a lack of shared understanding of the rights and learning needs of students with disabilities.

Four key elements of the Education State agenda provide important context for students with disabilities. These include a focus on the whole child, the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO), significantly enhanced regional and place-based support and a focus on addressing disadvantage and need.

1.4.1 THE EDUCATION STATE— FOCUS ON THE WHOLE CHILD

Progress towards achieving the Education State is represented through ten ambitious but achievable system-wide targets which strive to develop the whole child and reflect the goals of the Education State, including:

- Learning for life
- Happy, healthy and resilient kids
- Breaking the link
- Pride and confidence in our schools.

The goals relate to all students, including those with disabilities. The targets recognise that education is about more than traditional academic pursuits and includes excellence in the arts, critical thinking, resilience, creativity, and health and wellbeing. These targets raise expectations for all students, including students with disabilities.

The Education State agenda focuses on inclusion and collective responsibility and stems from the belief that with the right support, every student can succeed.

Schools will be better supported to achieve this for all students in 2016 as the new Victorian Curriculum continuum is extended to capture students working towards levels A to D (for those students working towards Foundation level of the new curriculum).

The recommendations of this Review seek to deliver excellence in inclusive education and provide better outcomes for students with disabilities, which is likely to support the achievement of all Education State

school targets. Schools that are more capable of supporting and meeting the needs of students with disabilities will (by benefiting from potential efficiencies) be better able to focus their efforts more evenly towards educating all students. Implementation of the recommendations of the Review may also contribute directly to achievement of the targets in relation to resilience, breaking the link, and pride and confidence in schools, depending on the nature of the measures ultimately adopted for these targets.

1.4.2 FRAMEWORK FOR IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES

The FISO provides schools with an evidence-based approach to school improvement that will help schools to focus their effort where it is most needed. The key elements of the framework are:

- an improvement model with four statewide priorities, including six high-impact, evidence-based improvement initiatives on which to focus efforts
- an improvement cycle for continuous improvement
- improvement measures to assess progress and success.

The improvement model is structured around four priorities that are known to have the greatest impact on school improvement and which will support the achievement of the targets. The four priorities are:

- excellence in teaching and learning
- professional leadership
- positive climate for learning
- community engagement in learning.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Each priority has four dimensions. Six of these dimensions have been identified as improvement initiatives on which to focus effort because of the strong evidence for their high impact on student outcomes when implemented with fidelity and intensity. The new local area teams in the regions will play a crucial role in supporting schools in the implementation of their chosen high-impact improvement initiatives.

The improvement cycle uses an evidence-based model that will help schools implement more effective continuous improvement.

The improvement measures include data sets that assist schools in implementing the improvement cycle, and provide a common evidence base for schools' self-evaluation, strategic planning, performance and development processes, and reviews.

The four priorities apply to all students, including students with disabilities. One of the six high-impact improvement initiatives details setting expectations and promoting inclusion as key to a positive climate for learning. The FISO model is displayed in Figure 5.

Figure 5: FISO model

Priority	Improvement initiatives
Excellence in teaching and learning	Building practice excellence
	Curriculum planning and assessment
Professional leadership	Building leadership teams
Positive climate for learning	Empowering students and building school pride
	Setting expectations and promoting inclusion
Community engagement in learning	Building communities

Schools will work across their communities to implement a shared approach to supporting the health, wellbeing, inclusion and engagement of all students, including setting behaviour expectations, building teachers' understandings of positive classroom behaviours and engagement practices and ensuring students have the tools and skills to develop positive and self-regulating behaviours.

Source: Department of Education and Training, 2015

1.4.3 LEARNING PLACES: A NEW REGIONAL STRUCTURE AND OPERATING MODEL

As part of its commitment to making Victoria the Education State, the Government committed to a new regional structure involving 17 areas within the existing four regions, along with a significant boost to investment in regional staffing to support schools, early years services and the training system.

This commitment, called *Learning Places*, will see approximately 150 additional staff join the Department's regional services teams. Such a significant investment offers an opportunity to reorient regional structures to help better understand and respond to local context in the communities the Department and schools serve.

A key feature of *Learning Places* is the establishment of multi-disciplinary teams in each of the Department's 17 areas. Through these teams, schools, early childhood services, vocational education services, learners and their families will have access to a range of experts—from executive leaders to curriculum and assessment expertise, and a dedicated health and wellbeing workforce—all working together to ensure that a holistic, focused and complementary set of skills and resources are deployed to those most in need. Senior Education Improvement Leaders will be at the centre of these multi-disciplinary teams, collaborating across and within teams to determine

what support is needed where, and driving coordinated action to ensure that schools take the most effective and strongly evidenced approaches to improvement.

Area teams will receive additional support from two new regional divisions—Early Childhood and School Support Division and School Improvement Division—which will provide strategic support to implement priority early childhood and school education policy and reform projects.

Area teams will be better placed to provide more expert advice and support on complex issues, and facilitate a stronger, more place-based and joined-up approach to child and learner outcomes. They will facilitate local networks, developing relationships and partnerships to support successful transitions between ages and stages of the learning continuum, and encourage collective responsibility for all learners in the community. They will be the primary point of contact on a day-to-day basis for services and the local community, with resources and capabilities to mobilise appropriate levels of responsiveness and support.

Area teams will have 'soft boundaries' so that resources can be flexibly directed where they are most needed and support available as demands for services peak. Soft boundaries will enable the Department to be more responsive across regions, not limited by hard geographic or programmatic borders.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Learning Places acknowledges that large-scale improvement requires strong partnerships and cross-sector collaboration. The 17 areas align with the existing Department of Health and Human Services areas, which will enable better coherence of action and effort. It will facilitate the linking of local services, particularly those that can effectively address child and learner disadvantage. Strong partnerships with and between schools, including through principal-led networks will be a focus of the area teams.

The *Learning Places* operating model is designed to support and drive the implementation of the FISO to deliver better student outcomes at the local level. *Learning Places* will also facilitate collaborative exchange between schools through school networks, actively encouraging the sharing of best practice and connecting schools so that they can support each other. There will also be a stronger focus on evaluating the impact of both the additional resources in regions and the new evidence-based strategies.

Playing a primary role in leading the multi-disciplinary teams will be the Senior Education Improvement Leaders, who will collaborate closely with Education Improvement Leaders and other staff to ensure that the collective expertise of the team is brought to bear on improving outcomes for students. New managers in each of the 17 areas—titled Manager, Health and Wellbeing and Specialist Support Services—are also being

created to provide line management for visiting teacher, nursing and specialist children’s services staff in area-based multi-disciplinary teams. To support even stronger collaboration across programmatically aligned staff, three positions—Disability/PSD Coordinators, Senior Wellbeing and Engagement Officers, and the new Health and Wellbeing Support Officers—will be located alongside the visiting teacher, nursing and specialist children’s services staff in area-based teams, and also report to the Manager, Health, Wellbeing and Specialist Services. Staff in these teams will have a strong professional practice relationship with the Manager, Inclusion, Access and Participation, the new Health and Wellbeing Coordinator and the Professional Practice Leaders in each region.

Collectively the *Learning Places* reforms are expected to make a significant long-term contribution to the coordination of services and supports for all students, including students with disabilities.

Learning Places will guide regular, consistent, evidenced-based discussion to understand how collective efforts and new ways of working are impacting on student outcomes.

The focus on building and investing in regions has some implications for this Review. These have been considered in Chapter 3.

1.4.4 FOCUS ON ELIMINATING THE IMPACT OF DISADVANTAGE AND NEED

New funding initiatives

As part of the Education State reform agenda, schools have received additional funding to improve equitable outcomes for all students. The SRP provides Equity Funding where additional funding is required to compensate for additional learning needs. Equity Funding includes Social Disadvantage and Catch Up funding. These initiatives and their purpose are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: New Education State funding initiatives to address disadvantage

New funding initiative	Purpose
Equity (Catch Up)	The Catch Up loading provides additional resources and support to government secondary schools to address specific challenges for students entering secondary schools who have not met the national NAPLAN minimum standard for reading in Year 5. Students funded under the PSD attending mainstream schools will be eligible for a reduced Catch Up loading (\$1000 in 2016). Students from specialist schools will not receive Catch Up loading.
Equity (Social Disadvantage)	Social Disadvantage funding will provide an individual loading for students from disadvantaged backgrounds that will increase with the density of disadvantage at the school. The loading will allocate funding based on parental occupation, parental education and the level of concentration of disadvantage in a school.

These initiatives fund all students meeting the criteria for need. For eligible students with disabilities, this targeted funding for disadvantage and need is in addition to targeted funding received under the PSD.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Other disadvantage-focused initiatives

LOOKOUT Centres and Navigator are two Education State reforms to help students stay engaged with learning.

- LOOKOUT Centres have been designed to lift educational outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care through a coordinated approach to overseeing a student's Individual Education Plan in partnership with the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Health and Human Services.
- Navigator is a two-year pilot program that helps disengaged students, aged 12 to 17 years, to re-engage with schooling or another education or training pathway. Navigator services will be provided by community agencies that will seek out disengaged students and provide them with the support needed to return to education or training. These initiatives recognise that there are many reasons children and young people experience barriers to education and lifelong learning. Whether related to living in out-of-home care, feeling disconnected, having a disability or a combination of barriers, these initiatives emphasise strong partnerships and coordinated services to enable every child and young person to reach their potential.

The Review considers that there is an opportunity for the Department to learn from these initiatives and to align the multi-disciplinary and collaborative approaches being recommended in this Review as detailed in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.3).

1.5 THE PSD REVIEW

The PSD Review was asked to provide advice and recommendations on:

- the PSD's ability to meet the needs and maximise the learning of all children and young people with a disability in Victorian government schools
- the future capacity of the government school system, including the role of the PSD, to meet the specific needs of students with autism and dyslexia
- the feasibility of shifting to a strength-based, functional needs assessment approach for students with disabilities, which is consistent with the direction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme
- the efficacy of the current Year 6–7 PSD review process, its purpose, timing, requirements and influence on students' transition from primary to secondary school
- the program's capacity to support the Victorian Government's commitment to excellence in inclusive education, including an assessment of accountabilities
- advice on operationalising the recommendations of the Review, including transition implications.

While the PSD provides Victorian government schools with supplementary funding to support students with the greatest needs, the PSD Review focused

on strategies and practices to better assist the learning of all students with disabilities. The PSD Review explored ways to add value to, and extend, the PSD's past achievements. It also makes recommendations to strengthen the capacity of schools, teachers and programs, and maximise the learning of students with disabilities in inclusive learning environments.

Guiding principles for the PSD Review

In this context, the following principles guided the Review:

- the school education system should be inclusive for all students with disabilities
- the school education system should maximise learning of all students with disabilities through high-quality instruction
- school education and services for students with disabilities should draw on contemporary evidence-based practice
- the approach to supporting students with disabilities should be family-friendly, holistic, seamless, and align with the national disability reform agenda
- the approach to supporting students with disabilities should assist schools to meet their legal and educational obligations to all their students, staff and visitors.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.5.1 METHODOLOGY

The Review involved a five-stage approach that focused on solutions and drew on a wide range of available information, including earlier reviews and reports relevant to students with disabilities.

1: Expert advice and guidance

The Review engaged a range of experts, including strategic advisers and academic experts who acted as critical friends and provided advice. There was a project board and an advisory panel, including parent and student advocates, school principals and disability professionals. The role of these two groups was to provide feedback on the review to ensure successful project outcomes (Appendix A).

2: Review of national and international literature

The Review commissioned eight comprehensive literature reviews. The literature reviews covered the latest national and international research and expert perspectives on inclusive education practices, schooling experiences and the learning needs of students with autism or dyslexia. Key learnings from these reviews are included throughout this report (Appendix B).

As well, the Review considered a range of earlier reviews and reports related to students with special needs in Victorian schools and the PSD. Visits were made to other Australian education jurisdictions and New Zealand to explore their current approaches, and reform directions and best practice within their context. While this Review draws upon all this literature, evidence and experience, the way forward for Victoria needs to reflect Victoria's own context.

3. Consultations with key agencies and experts

In-person, external stakeholder consultations were conducted with over 100 participants representing 24 organisations (Appendix C). Dr Graeme Innes, former Australian Disability Discrimination Commissioner, facilitated each three-hour consultation session. De-identified transcripts were created using real-time captioning during consultation sessions and were coded against the Review's Terms of Reference by expert coders. Consultations were also undertaken within the Department to test the feasibility of reforms.

The mix of stakeholders informing the Review's evidence base included principals and teachers (and their professional associations), students (past and present), parents and carers, education unions, professional advocacy groups, members of the public, Departmental staff, other government departments and agencies, academic and professional experts, disability professionals, and allied health professionals.

4: Online submissions

Submissions were received from the public (Appendix D) and an online survey was undertaken to determine the attitudes of key stakeholder groups towards potential policy options (Appendix E).

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

5. PSD Review report

This report to the Minister for Education, including advice and recommendations arising from the Review, is the final stage of the Review.

1.5.2 READING THIS REVIEW

The research and analysis for the final report is divided into six main chapters as follows:

- Excellence in inclusive education (Chapter 3)
- Maximising learning (Chapter 4)
- Managing the transition to secondary school (Chapter 5)
- Meeting the needs of students with autism and dyslexia (Chapter 6)
- A new approach to funding and support (Chapter 7)
- Policy into practice—operationalising reform (Chapter 8).

For each of the areas of focus, the discussion includes the issues identified through stakeholder feedback (including survey, submissions and interviews) and research and analysis. Based on this evidence, findings and recommendations have been made.

Table 3: Structure of the Review

Chapter	Title	Relevant Term of Reference	Key topics covered
3	Excellence in inclusive education	The program's capacity to support the Government's commitment to excellence in inclusive education, including an assessment of accountabilities (Term of Reference 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government policy Workforce development Specialised expertise and support
4	Maximising learning	The PSD's ability to meet the needs and maximise the learning of all children and young people with disabilities in government schools (Term of Reference 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student identification Outcomes Accountability
5	Managing the transition to secondary school	The efficacy of the current Year 6–7 review process, its purpose, timing, requirements and influence on students' transition from primary to secondary school and, from that assessment, recommendations of alternative models (Term of Reference 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 6–7 review
6	Meeting the needs of students with autism and dyslexia	The future capacity of the government school system, including the role of the PSD, to meet the specific needs of students with autism and dyslexia (Term of Reference 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students with autism and dyslexia
7	A new approach to funding and support	The feasibility of shifting to a strength-based, functional needs assessment approach for students with disabilities, which is consistent with the directions of the NDIS (Term of Reference 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eligibility Functional needs NDIS alignment New funding model
8	Policy into practice—operationalising reform	Advice on operationalising the recommendations of the Review, including transition implications (Term of Reference 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation



2. PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

2.1 OVERVIEW OF THE PSD

The Department provides a range of policies, programs and resources for schools to support the delivery of high-quality schooling for all students. Resources are provided through the SRP as well as targeted supplementary initiatives such as the PSD for students with disabilities. Schools are given autonomy to invest these total resources in such a way as to best support their students. This includes, for example, investing in specialist teaching, allied health support, or specific early identification and intervention programs.

The PSD resources assist schools to meet their obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) for students with moderate to profound disabilities. They do not, however, limit the way schools can provide support for a student with a disability, which is explored further in Section 1.2 on legislative obligations.

2.1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE PSD

The resources provided by the PSD aim to support schools achieve three broad objectives for specific students with disabilities (see Table 5 for categories and criteria).

7. Student learning: support and improve the learning of students
 - Key performance indicators include reporting through the Victorian Curriculum framework, NAPLAN and school-based assessment.

8. Student engagement and wellbeing: support the access and participation of students in an inclusive schooling system
 - Key performance indicators include attendance, retention and student school satisfaction survey.
9. Student pathways and transitions: support transitions for students, into, through and post school
 - Key performance indicators include: attendance, retention and On Track data.

2.1.2 COMPONENTS OF THE PSD

The PSD includes several targeted and general funding initiatives that support students with disabilities. The PSD's budget includes a range of funding components totalling \$659 million per annum (2015). PSD funding can be broadly categorised into four groups:

- targeted PSD funding (also known as supplementary funding)
- funding to support schools in specialist settings
- programmatic funding, for example, LSP
- administrative and assessment funding.

PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

A detailed description of the PSD funding component categories is displayed in Table 4.

Table 4: PSD funding component categories

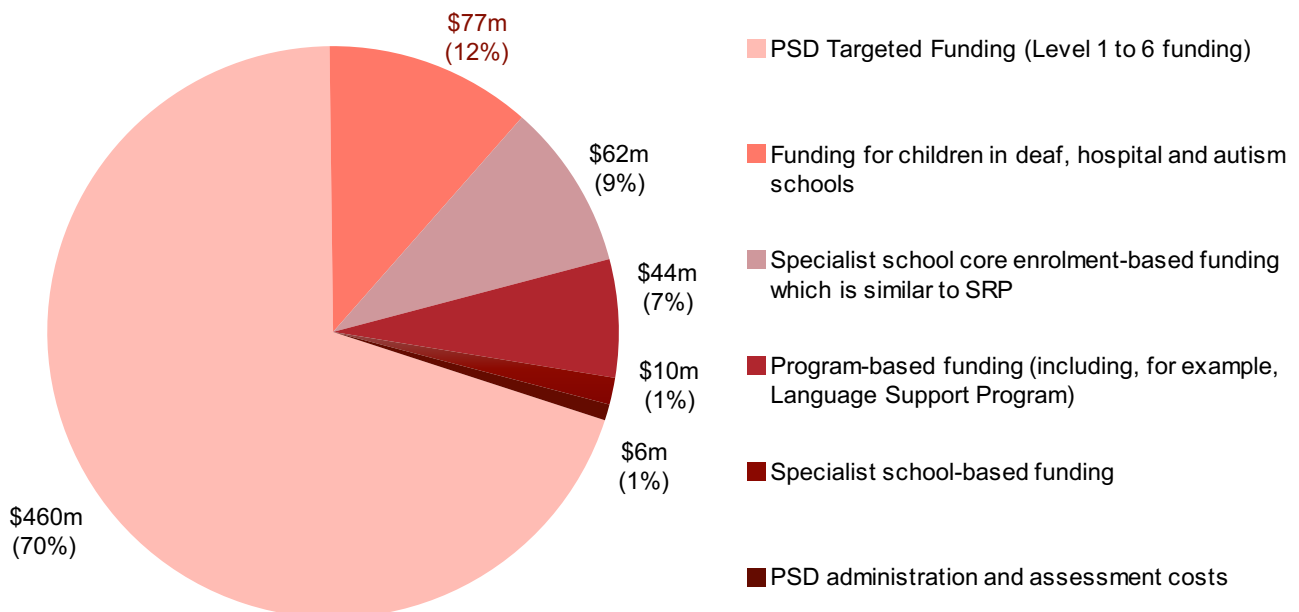
Funding category	Description
Targeted PSD funding	<p>Targeted PSD funding aims to provide schools with greater flexibility to support students with disabilities through a per-student supplementary funding allocation. This supplementary funding is provided in addition to other SRP student-based, school-based and targeted funding allocations⁴.</p> <p>Approximately 70 per cent (\$460 million) of PSD funding in 2015 was allocated through the targeted PSD funding component.</p>
Funding to support specialist schools and settings	<p>Specialist schools and settings receive funding through the PSD to meet core operating costs. This funding is analogous to the student-based and school-based funding allocations that mainstream schools receive through the broader SRP components. The specialist schools and settings funded through the PSD include deaf settings attached to regular schools, specialist schools, hospital schools and specialist autism schools.</p> <p>Approximately 22 per cent (\$149 million) of PSD funding in 2015 was allocated through funding components that aim to support specialist schools and settings.</p>
Programmatic funding	<p>Funding to support programs including the LSP, Language Units, Medical Intervention Support and Early Education Program.</p> <p>Approximately 7 per cent (\$44 million) of PSD funding in 2015 was allocated through the programmatic funding components.</p>
Assessment and administration funding	<p>Funding for contracted service providers for assessment services and the administration and management of the program.</p> <p>Approximately 1 per cent (\$6 million) of PSD funding in 2015 was allocated for the purpose of providing statewide assessment services and administration of PSD applications.</p>

⁴ For more details on the framework and formulae underpinning funding allocations through the SRP, see the Department SRP guide at www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/finance/Pages/srpguide.aspx

The majority (70 per cent; \$460 million) of PSD funding in 2015 was dedicated to targeted PSD funding. A more detailed breakdown of PSD funding allocations in 2015 is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: PSD budget allocation, 2015

Total = \$659m



As a part of the Victorian Government's Education State reform announced in September 2015, the PSD will be provided with an additional \$10.4 million to meet ongoing increased demand. However, it is worth noting that demand, while still increasing, has slowed.

PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

2.1.3 PROGRAMMATIC FUNDING: LANGUAGE SUPPORT PROGRAM

While targeted PSD funding supports individual students according to a multi-stage assessment, needs identification and verification process, the PSD also includes programmatic funding. This funding is allocated by formula to schools. One of the most substantial programs (from a funding perspective) within this group is the Language Support Program (LSP).

The LSP is allocated to government schools on a formula basis. This formula takes into account the number of children enrolled at the school and estimates of the school's socioeconomic characteristics. Specifically, the funding is provided to

schools through the SRP, and is calculated based on numbers of students by 'stage of school' between Prep and Year 9, and a further allocation is provided for schools with a high Student Family Occupation (SFO) index.

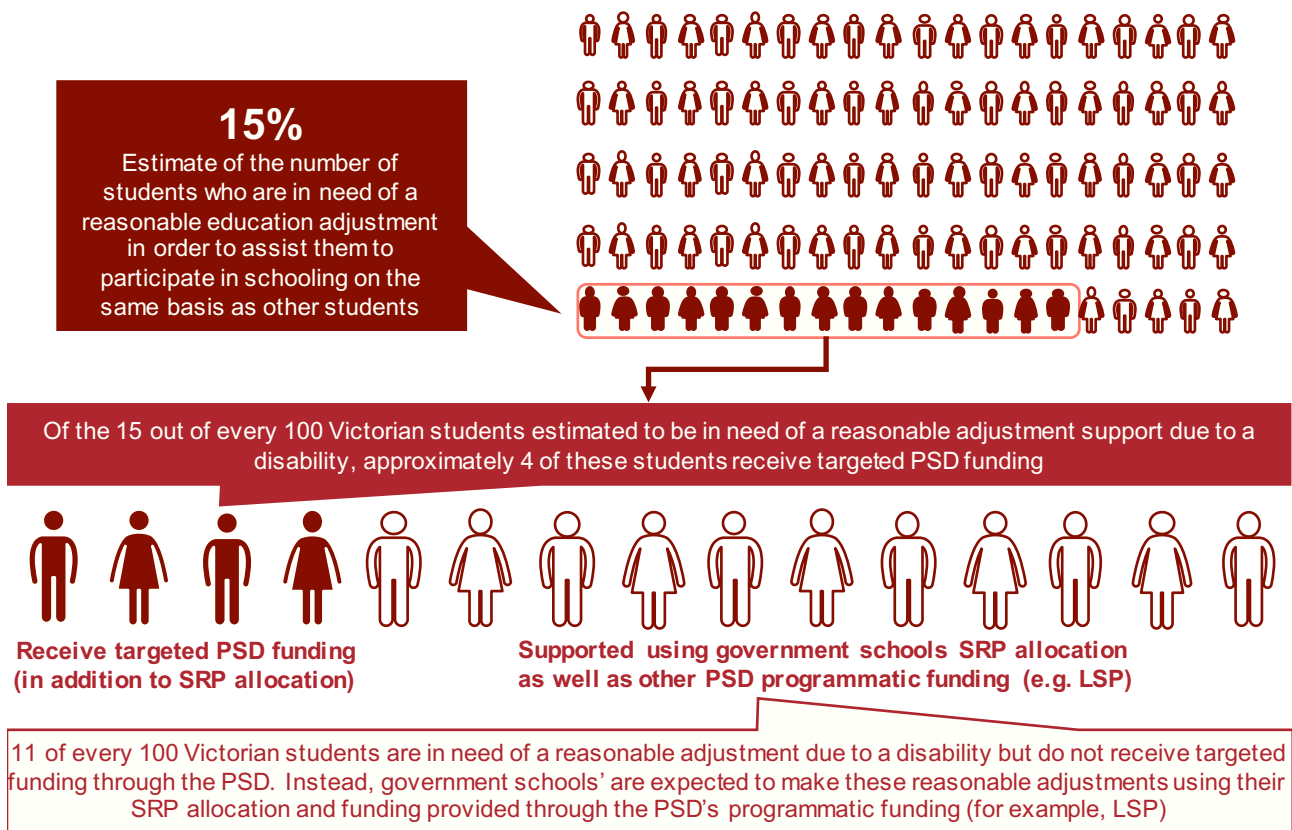
The LSP provides additional resources to schools to support them to meet the needs of students with language difficulties. Its purpose is to develop the capacity of schools and teachers to provide appropriate programs and learning experiences that will improve the oral language skills of children and young people. Children and young people with very severe oral language disabilities and high support needs are also eligible for targeted PSD funding.



2.1.4 HOW STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES ARE SUPPORTED IN VICTORIA

To summarise, Victorian students with disabilities are supported in government schools either through one or a combination of targeted funding, funding for specialist schools or programmatic funding (for example, LSP). Figure 7 summarises how students in need of reasonable education adjustments are supported.

Figure 7: Students requiring reasonable adjustment and their support mechanisms



Source: Department of Education and Training, 2015

PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

2.2 TARGETED PSD FUNDING

The PSD provides targeted supplementary resources to support the provision of school-based education programs for students with disabilities with moderate to severe needs. These supplementary resources are provided under the student-based funding component of school funding. This section provides an overview of the eligibility, allocation and assessment process for the targeted funding component of PSD. It also provides an overview of the statewide distribution of students currently being supported through targeted PSD funding.

The PSD has six levels of funding (see Table 5) allocated to schools through the SRP, with the amount increasing at each level. The level of funding is determined by the verified Educational Needs Questionnaire (ENQ). The total funding amount required each year for the targeted PSD program (\$460 million in 2015) is calculated based on the number of students eligible for the PSD and the level of funding support each student attracts through the ENQ. Targeted PSD funding is subject to growth in demand by any increase in one or both of the number of eligible students and number of students attracting higher levels of funding support.

In planning for all students with disabilities, schools consult with their family (and the student, where appropriate) in the context of a Student Support Group (SSG) which is mandatory for all students identified under the PSD. Schools determine how total funding (including the PSD) is used to support each student.

Targeted PSD funding resources can be used in a number of ways to support students, including providing:

- teaching staff
- specialist staff (for example, Special Needs Coordinator, occupational therapists, speech pathologists)
- teacher professional learning
- specialist equipment/materials, including assistive technology
- ES staff.

2.2.1 ACCESSING TARGETED PSD SUPPORT AND ALLOCATING RESOURCES

The targeted PSD funding component provides schools with a supplementary funding allocation for each eligible student. This funding is provided in addition to other SRP student-based, school-based and other funding allocations received by the school.

To access PSD support, schools are responsible for submitting an application containing evidence that addresses the PSD eligibility criteria. If an application meets the eligibility criteria of the PSD, an allocation of additional funding based on the verified ENQ will be provided as part of the SRP. Entry is based on a three-step process. This involves an initial assessment, the ENQ and verification

by the Department and independent professionals. The process determines and verifies:

- eligibility for targeted PSD funding
- the level of PSD funding to be provided in accordance with a student's level of educational need (for eligible students).

In recognition of the differing strengths and support needs of students with disabilities, the PSD uses an escalating support scale to determine how much additional targeted support (funding) to provide to students with moderate to severe disabilities. Students assessed to have comparatively higher support needs are allocated a higher level of funding than students with comparatively lower support needs. The 2016 Disabilities Levels of Support are displayed below.

Figure 8: PSD targeted funding levels



Source: Department of Education and Training, 2015

PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The steps in the process for entry to the targeted PSD funding are described in detail below.

2.2.2 INITIAL ASSESSMENT

The initial assessment involves the collection and submission of evidence to demonstrate eligibility of at least one of seven disability categories. These seven categories of disability are based on guidelines set by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Each category of disability has a number of associated criteria that outline the thresholds that need to be met for eligibility. These thresholds are designed to identify students with moderate to high educational support needs.

Demonstrating eligibility against the criteria can require collection of statements from a number of medical and allied health professionals or external assessment services. For instance, the criterion for Intellectual Disability requires the student to undergo an IQ assessment from a registered psychologist, receive a standardised teacher assessment of adaptive behaviour⁵, as well as demonstrating a history and ongoing expectation of learning difficulties.

The seven PSD disability categories and the associated eligibility criteria for each are outlined in Table 5.

⁵ Adaptive behaviour scales measure the personal and social skills of individuals from birth through to adulthood. Tests of adaptive behaviour and language are standardised assessments administered by qualified professionals including psychologists.

Table 5: PSD categories and criteria

Category	Criteria
1. Physical disability	<p>A) A significant physical disability AND/OR B) A significant health impairment AND C) Requires regular paramedical support.</p>
2. Visual impairment	<p>A) Visual acuity less than 6/60 with corrected vision OR B) That visual fields are reduced to a measured arc of less than 10 degrees.</p>
3. Hearing impairment	<p>A) A bilateral sensory-neural hearing loss that is moderate/severe/profound AND B) The student requires intervention or assistance to communicate</p>
4. Severe behaviour disorder	<p>A) Student displays disturbed behaviour to a point where special support in a withdrawal group or special class/unit is required AND B) Student displays behaviour so deviant and with such frequency and severity that they require regular psychological or psychiatric treatment AND C) The severe behaviour cannot be accounted for by: Intellectual Disability, Sensory (vision, hearing), Physical and/or Health issues, Autism Spectrum Disorder or Severe Language Disorder AND D) A history and evidence of an ongoing problem with an expectation of continuation during the school years.</p>

Category	Criteria
5. Intellectual disability	<p>A) Sub-average general intellectual functioning which is demonstrated by a full-scale score of two standard deviations or more below the mean score on a standardised individual test of general intelligence</p> <p>AND</p> <p>B) Significant deficits in adaptive behaviour established by a composite score of two standard deviations or more below the mean on an approved standardised test of adaptive behaviour</p> <p>AND</p> <p>C) A history and evidence of an ongoing problem with an expectation of continuation during the school years.</p>
6. Autism Spectrum Disorder	<p>A) A diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder</p> <p>AND</p> <p>B) Significant deficits in adaptive behaviour established by a composite score of two standard deviations or more below the mean on an approved standardised test of adaptive behaviours</p> <p>AND</p> <p>C) Significant deficits in language skills established by a comprehensive speech pathology assessment demonstrating language skills equivalent to a composite score of two standard deviations or more below the mean.</p>
7. Severe language disorder with critical educational needs ⁶	<p>A) A score of three or more standard deviations below the mean for the student's age in expressive and/or receptive language skills on TWO of the recommended tests</p> <p>AND</p> <p>B) The severity of the disorder cannot be accounted for by hearing impairment, social emotional factors, low intellectual functioning or cultural factors</p> <p>AND</p> <p>C) A history and evidence of an on-going problem with the expectation of continuation during school years</p> <p>AND</p> <p>D) A non-verbal score not lower than one standard deviation below the mean on one comprehensive intellectual test, with a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between verbal (VIQ/VCI) and non-verbal (PIQ/VSI/PRI) functioning (VIQ/VCI:PIQ/VSI/PRI)</p> <p>AND</p> <p>E) Demonstrated critical educational needs equating to PSD funding levels three and above as determined by the validated results of the Educational Needs Questionnaire.</p>

Source: Program for Students with Disabilities – Guidelines for schools 2016

⁶ Students with a severe language disorder who are not eligible for support under the PSD are supported through LSP funding.

PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

2.2.3 PSD EDUCATIONAL NEEDS QUESTIONNAIRE

Following the initial assessment of eligibility, schools are required to complete the PSD ENQ. The questionnaire is a tool to establish the level of resources that will be provided to the school for all eligible students. The purpose of the ENQ is to identify the abilities and competencies of each student against 11 indicators: mobility, fine motor skills, receptive communication, expressive communication, challenging (excessive behaviour), safety, hearing, vision, self-care, medical and cognitive skills.

As an example of the ENQ scoring process, the descriptors for the ENQ mobility indicator are illustrated in Figure 9. A student with no mobility impairment would be allocated a score of one, while a student that is not mobile due to an overriding medical condition would be allocated a score of eight.

The scores against each indicator are documented in the application, which is completed by the school and submitted to the Department for review.

Figure 9: Scoring guide for the ENQ mobility indicator

<p>ENQ scoring example:</p> <p>Mobility</p> <p>Score</p>	1 = No impairment
	2 = Walks short distances independently
	3 = Walks aided (walker, crutches, assistance of a person)
	4 = Propels own wheelchair, bears weight for transfers
	5 = Propels own wheelchair, total assistance with transfers
	6 = Uses electric wheelchair
	7 = Unable to propel wheelchair
	8 = Not mobile due to overriding medical conditions

Source: Department of Education and Training, 2015

2.2.4 REVIEW OF APPLICATIONS

Applications for PSD funding are reviewed by the Department's Resources Coordination Group, which comprises regional representatives and consulting professionals. The Resources Coordination Group:

- ensures that all relevant documentation has been provided
- determines if the application meets the eligibility criteria for the PSD
- requests additional information if necessary
- ensures that the ENQ indicators reflect the information in the documentation provided.

The Department then determines the level of support for each eligible student based on the ENQ scores. As noted earlier in this chapter, the Department utilises an escalating support scale of six levels to determine how much additional targeted support (funding) to provide to students with moderate to severe disabilities. Level 1 is composed of students with comparatively lower needs, while Level 6 is reserved for those students with the comparatively highest degree of need.

The PSD includes processes to review students' needs to assess the appropriateness of funding over time. A reappraisal of the funding level can be submitted by a school at any time if a student's support needs increase. A critical review point is Year 6 or the equivalent in specialist schools. At this point, students in receipt of Levels 1 to 4 targeted PSD funding are reassessed through the process described above. Chapter 5: Managing transition to secondary school provides further detail about this review process.

PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

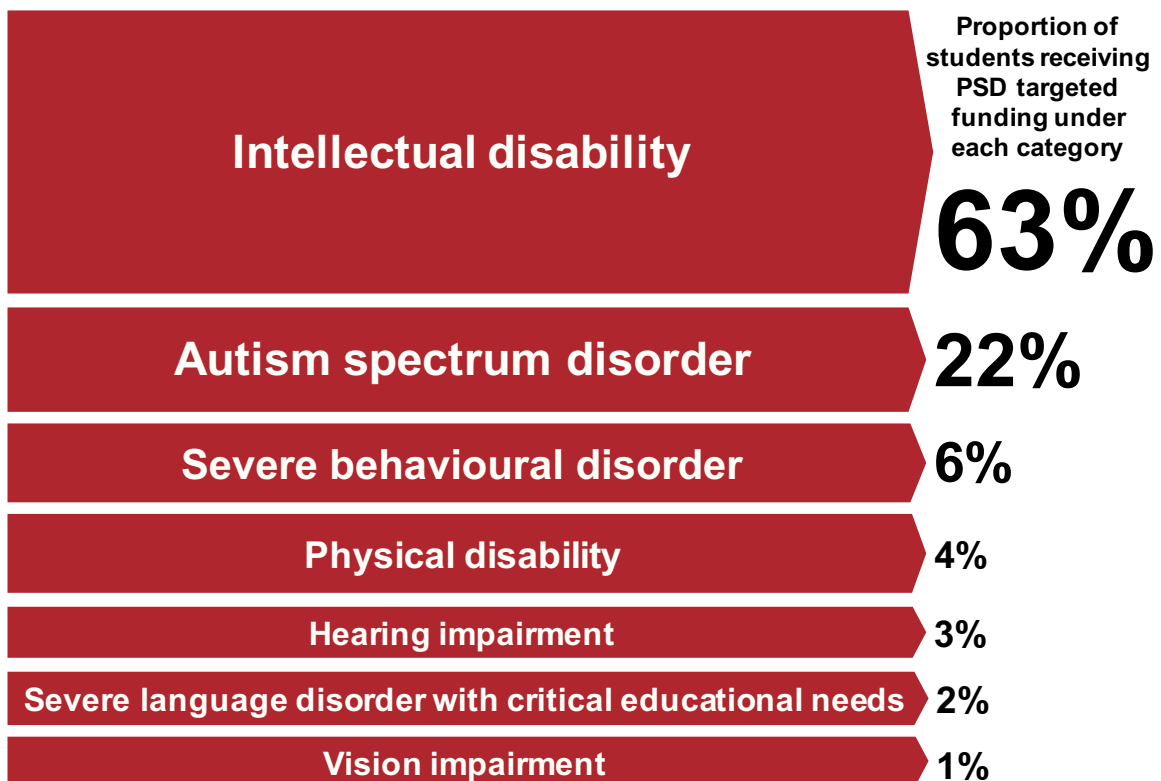
2.2.5 STUDENTS WHO RECEIVE TARGETED PSD FUNDING

The PSD provides targeted funding for more than 24,000 students in Victorian government schools (or 4.2 per cent of government school students). Of these students in receipt of additional support through the PSD in 2015, 11,265 (47 per cent) attend specialist schools and 12,671 students (53 per cent) attend mainstream schools. These students

and the associated funding are broadly distributed, with more than 90 per cent of government schools receiving some amount of targeted PSD funding.

In 2015, 85 per cent of students eligible for PSD funding were supported under the Intellectual Disability (ID) or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) categories, with the distribution of support for students in each category shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Proportion of students eligible for targeted PSD funding receiving support under each category of disability, 2015



Source: Department of Education and Training, 2015

2.2.6 TARGETED PSD STUDENT NUMBERS ACROSS VICTORIA

For the past 15 years, there has been a steady increase in the number of children and young people with disabilities in line with population growth. Population growth is now the main driver of PSD growth. Even with growth in absolute terms, targeted PSD student numbers represent a stable proportion of the total government school enrolment, totalling just over 4 per cent, which is expected to continue.

While approximately 4 per cent of students enrolled in government schools receive targeted PSD funding, the enrolment of students who qualify for PSD funding under any category in different types of schools varies. Under the PSD, the

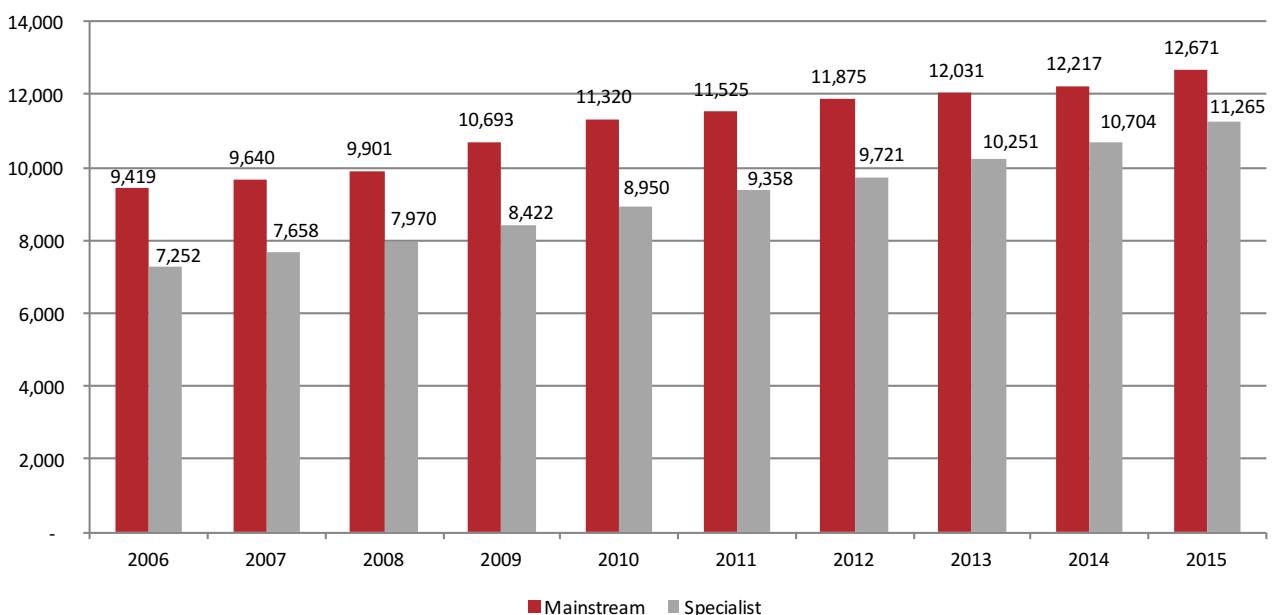
average enrolment rate for each school type is:

- primary schools—2.52 per cent
- primary/secondary schools—2.83 per cent
- secondary schools—1.71 per cent
- special schools—virtually all children.

In each of the individual non-special schools, enrolment rates of students who qualify for targeted PSD funding varies from the three average rates shown above. Some schools have far higher and some far lower targeted PSD rates.

Targeted PSD enrolments in both Victorian Government special schools and mainstream schools have also been steadily growing, as shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Targeted PSD numbers by school type and year



Source: Department of Education and Training, 2015

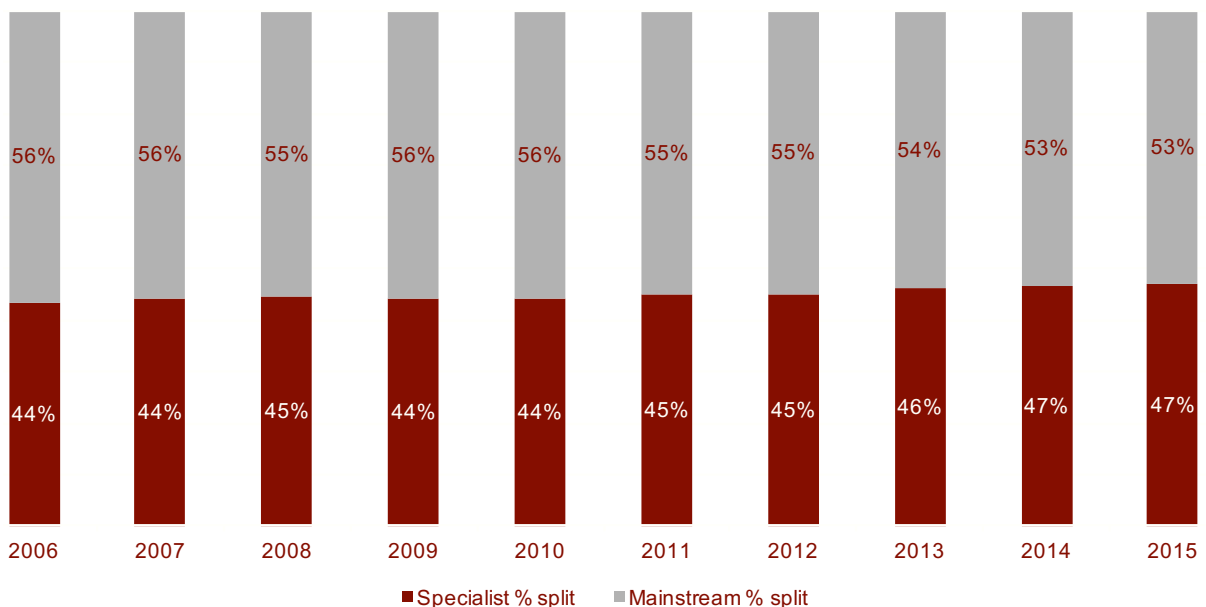
PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Despite the overall increase in student numbers, the proportion of students receiving targeted PSD funding and attending mainstream schools has declined. Between 2006 and 2014 the proportion of students receiving targeted PSD funding and attending mainstream schools declined from 56 per cent to 53 per cent. This decline has been offset by an increase in the proportion of students receiving targeted PSD and attending specialist schools (see Figure 12).

Variability in targeted PSD enrolment across mainstream government schools

While there has been strong growth in enrolment rates of PSD students in mainstream government schools, the rates across individual schools varies considerably. Some schools (both primary and secondary, regional and metropolitan) have no targeted PSD students, while others report that up to 20 per cent of their students are targeted PSD enrolments.

Figure 12: Proportion of students receiving targeted PSD funding by school type and year



Source: Department of Education and Training, 2015

While some natural variation in PSD enrolment rates is to be expected, particularly for small primary schools with small PSD groups, some schools may be disproportionately attracting or discouraging students with disabilities, which is a view held by many stakeholders.

Low rates of enrolment in some government schools may be partly driven by the local availability of local special schools. However, it also appears that factors such as selective-entry may have an adverse, unintended consequence for students with disabilities as selective entry secondary schools have low rates of targeted PSD enrolment.

Schools with a reputation for being most responsive to the needs of students with disabilities may also have higher rates of enrolment. Some schools may be more effective at assisting and achieving good outcomes in targeted PSD assessment for their students. A select group of primary and secondary non-specialist schools have very high rates of targeted PSD student enrolment. These schools' disability model/s could inform practice in other schools.





3. EXCELLENCE IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The Terms of Reference directed the Review to evaluate the PSD's capacity to support the Victorian Government's commitment to excellence in inclusive education (Term of Reference 5). This chapter examines:

- what 'inclusive education' means
- further detail on the policy and guidance relating to inclusive education available to schools and teachers
- building an inclusive culture within schools
- measuring inclusiveness
- workforce capability
- the use of specialist expertise
- the role of ES staff.

The Terms of Reference also directed the Review to assess the current PSD's ability to meet the needs and maximise the learning of all children and young people with disabilities in Victorian government schools. There is a degree of overlap between this direction, and consideration of the PSD's capacity to support excellence in inclusive education. The Review considered the ability of the PSD to maximise learning in Chapter 4. However, the analysis, findings and recommendations of the two chapters should be considered jointly.

'I would say that if you are talking about inclusion in education, it is the responsibility of regular schools, of all schools, to take responsibility for all learners within their environment, and not to segregate and exclude them in any way.'

Teacher

'We want a system where, whatever school gate a parent walks through, they know that school is ready to include their child with a disability.'

Dr Graeme Innes, former Australian Disability Discrimination Commissioner

EXCELLENCE IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

3.2 OVERVIEW OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

3.2.1 DEFINING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Before analysing the capacity of the PSD to support excellence in inclusive education, it is important to define what is meant by inclusive education.

The complexity of defining inclusive education was recognised by UNESCO in *Education For All 2000–2015: Achievements and Challenges*. The report suggested that inclusive education is observed when, with adequate support, all children, irrespective of their different needs, are able to learn together in mainstream classrooms in their local communities (UNESCO 2015).

Similarly, Giangreco et al. (2010) suggest inclusive education is when the following occur together continuously and with consistency:

- all students are welcomed in general education settings
- disability is recognised and welcomed within the paradigm of human diversity
- appropriate reasonable adjustments are available, regardless of disability or severity
- students are educated in classes reflecting the naturally occurring proportion of students with and without disabilities
- students, regardless of their developmental or performance levels, are educated with peers in the same groupings available to those without disability rather than with younger students
- students with and without disabilities participate in shared educational experiences while pursuing individually appropriate learning outcomes with necessary supports
- progress and growth for students with disabilities are specifically measured.

The Review has been guided by the above descriptions.

3.2.2 WHY INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT

The literature examined in this Review found that inclusive education settings have positive outcomes for students with and without disabilities. These positive outcomes are related to academic achievement, as well as social and communication skills. Inclusive education settings are also found to be beneficial for teachers and their development (Foreman 2010).

Schools are legally required to make reasonable adjustments to cater for all students. The SRP funds schools on an enrolment basis, and provides targeted funding based on a range of student and school factors. In addition, funding provided to schools under the PSD assists them to meet their legal obligations to ensure that students with moderate to high disabilities can access and participate in education on the same basis as other students.⁷ The PSD facilitates this process by providing targeted and programmatic funding to government schools to be used in supporting students with disabilities in the school system.

⁷ As noted in the Introduction, 'on the same basis' means that a student with disability must have opportunities and choices that are comparable with those offered to students without disabilities. This applies to admission or enrolment in a school, participation in courses or programs, and use of facilities and services (Australian Government, 2005).

Policy framework surrounding inclusive education

Victoria's Education State is based on excellence and equity for all children and young people, and the fundamental belief that, with the right support, all students can learn and succeed. This vision is extended and explicit in the Government's Special Needs Plan, which sets out a clear commitment to inclusive schooling and a set of supporting initiatives, including:

- ensuring that all new schools will be built to accommodate the diverse needs of students
- a \$10 million Inclusive Schools Fund for existing schools
- a requirement for all teachers to have completed a special needs component as part of their professional learning as a condition of registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching
- working with initial teacher education providers to ensure that the next generation of teachers are prepared to teach in inclusive education settings by completing training on teaching students with disabilities as part of their tertiary studies
- a new dedicated Principal Practice Leader to work exclusively with the Department and schools in relation to restraint and seclusion, improve the management of challenging behaviours and provide advice and foster best practice for supporting students with behaviours of concern.

EXCELLENCE IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Chapter 1 outlined the four state-wide priorities of the FISO, which will help to foster inclusive education:

- excellence in teaching and learning
- professional leadership
- positive climate for learning
- community engagement and learning.

The FISO also includes a high-impact initiative to prioritise setting expectations and promoting inclusion as a key to a positive climate for learning. The Education State agenda and key priorities of the FISO provide the high-level policy setting for further developing inclusive education.

3.2.3 OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

This section draws on analysis of literature and stakeholder feedback to identify opportunities to strengthen the policy framework on inclusive education.

In 2012, the Victorian Auditor-General reviewed the PSD and, despite legislative requirements, found evidence that inclusive education was not common practice in all Victorian schools. Many schools were not implementing Department policies consistently or effectively, and the quality of support to students with special learning needs was not equitable (VAGO 2012).

Similarly stakeholders reported a view that inclusive education practices are fragmented across schools and that broad Departmental initiatives around inclusion are not consistently matched by school knowledge and practice. For example, stakeholders reported that there is a lack of understanding of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) and *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Cth) in many schools.

Stakeholders identified that the Department does not currently have a clear policy framework supporting inclusive education for students with disabilities. This has contributed to a lack of a shared understanding of the learning needs of students with disabilities, the legal and other obligations, and has led to inclusive education practices being fragmented and inconsistently applied across schools.

Finding 1

Currently, there is no clear inclusive education policy or framework that articulates how the Department plans to provide inclusive education for students with disabilities.

Recommendation 1

Develop a clear inclusive education policy and framework as well as guidance and support materials for staff working with students with disabilities. This guidance on inclusive education should articulate a vision and set the necessary expectations and direction for educating students with disabilities in Victoria.

3.2.4 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY AND FRAMEWORK

A policy that clearly articulates a vision for inclusive education could provide the necessary clarity of direction on the way Victoria educates students with disabilities in inclusive learning environments for schools, education professionals and families of students with disabilities. A supporting framework for inclusive education, aligned with the FISO, is needed to support the implementation of inclusive education practices in schools and to build the capacity of schools to deliver an inclusive education for all students with disabilities. Such a framework may include:

- Policies and guidance which are designed to build and support a culture of inclusion:
 - guidance on best-practice, evidence-based approaches to supporting diversity
 - resources and materials to support pedagogy for students with disabilities, based on universal design for learning and response to intervention.
- Strategies to promote workforce capability such as:
 - providing access to quality training for teachers and school communities on supporting students with disabilities
 - leadership induction and support.
- Measures for assessing the degree of inclusivity in schools such as an inclusive school index to enable assessment and reporting.
- Enablers and tools such as:
 - personalised learning and support profiling and planning tools and resources for schools
 - the intelligent use of IT platforms that support schools to deliver inclusive education without adding to workload and administrative burden
 - flexible funding to enable schools to tailor their responses and evidence-based interventions to their specific student population and their needs.

An inclusive education framework should include the development of guidance and assessment, reporting, teaching and learning strategies and support materials for staff working with students with disabilities, including evidence-based pedagogy.

While some schools do have their own inclusion policy, they generally do not currently have a tool to measure and assess their inclusiveness. In the United Kingdom, all schools are provided with an Index for Inclusion that offers schools a supportive process of self-review and development. It draws on the views of staff, school leaders, students and parents/carers, as well as other members of the surrounding communities (Booth and Ainscow 2000 and 2002).

EXCELLENCE IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

A new Inclusive School Index could in effect be a profiling instrument that allows schools to determine where they are in their journey towards building or maintaining an inclusive school culture. It could also identify the type of evidence that is required to formulate these judgements. The development of a comprehensive, evidence-based Index could cover key domains of school operation and key data sets.

This is an approach that could be used in Victoria to help promote inclusiveness in schools. The Index could include a set of materials to guide schools through a process of inclusive school development, such as a guide to instructional and change leadership specifically directed at improving inclusive schooling. It could help to build supportive communities and foster high achievement for all staff and students.

3.3 INCLUSIVE CULTURE

3.3.1 IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSIVE CULTURE WITHIN SCHOOLS

Evidence gathered through the literature reviews clearly shows that fostering an inclusive culture within a school community contributes to the success of an inclusion program. This section provides an overview of this aspect of the literature review and stakeholders' views on the current level of inclusivity in Victorian government schools before identifying some opportunities for improvement.

The culture of every school is likely to be different, so it is impossible to make definitive statements about the culture of all or individual schools. However, stakeholders reported that while generally teachers are supportive of principles of inclusion, some teachers are anxious about working with children who have a wide range of diverse learning needs. In its 2012 report, *Held Back: The experiences of students with disabilities in Victorian schools*, the Victorian Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Commission found that while most students with disabilities are accepted for enrolment at the first school to which they apply, there are instances where schools either explicitly or subtly refuse to enrol students with disabilities (VEOHRC 2012). This view is supported by stakeholders who reported that some cultural barriers to enrolment of students with disabilities in mainstream schools still exist.

3.3.2 BENEFITS AND RISKS OF INCLUSIVE CULTURE

Local, national and international research indicates that building excellent inclusive approaches in Victorian schools is a key to providing an education system that will benefit all students to the highest degree (Mitchell 2015).

Foreman (2015) suggests that there are a number of benefits in relation to skill acquisition and social outcomes (for students with and without disabilities, as well as teachers and principals) from inclusion and an inclusive culture in mainstream school settings.

- The majority of studies confirm that inclusive practices are associated with positive or neutral impacts on academic achievement.
- Students with disabilities may demonstrate gains in curriculum areas when they are educated in inclusive settings, partly due to students in mainstream schools spending up to twice as much time on academic skills as opposed to students in specialist settings.
- Typically developing students benefit from the presence of students with disabilities in the classroom due to learning opportunities and experiences that might not otherwise be part of the curriculum.

- Social competence and communication skills improve when students with disabilities are educated in inclusive settings.
- Inclusive settings may raise the work-related aspirations of students with disabilities.
- Teachers experience professional growth and increased personal satisfaction as a result of working in inclusive settings (Foreman 2015).

Foreman's research, however, also suggests that there are some risks and considerations associated with inclusion in education. These include, for example:

- students on the autism spectrum are more likely to be bullied in mainstream settings than in specialist settings
- some students with disabilities are more likely to feel isolated and stigmatised in mainstream settings.

Based on the available evidence, the Review considers that these risks and barriers can be addressed at the school and class level, for example, through skills training and capacity building and the broad approach to reform recommended in this Review.

EXCELLENCE IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Research highlights the importance of school leaders, teachers and staff in creating a culture and environment of inclusive education, as Foreman's (2015) review of available research suggests.

- Teachers' attitudes are a major factor in successful programs of inclusion. Although many teachers are initially reluctant to support inclusion, they become confident in their abilities through support, experience and professional learning. Teachers who have a positive sense of self-efficacy in relation to collaboration have more positive attitudes towards inclusion.
- Training, experience with inclusive education, and students' particular disabilities can impact on teacher attitudes. Training and experience assist teachers in successful implementation of programs of inclusion.
- However, increasing knowledge of legislation and policy relevant to inclusion, and improving levels of confidence in becoming inclusive teachers would not necessarily resolve pre-teachers concerns about having students with special needs in their classes.
- Teachers play a critical role in facilitating friendships between students with disabilities and their peers without a disability.
- Support from other teachers is a powerful and necessary resource to empower teachers to problem-solve new instructional challenges.
- Teaching assistants can be trained to increase the interactions between students with disabilities and their peers in mainstream settings.
- Principals tend to be more supportive of inclusion than classroom teachers. A generally positive school culture will impact on positive attitudes to students with disabilities (Foreman 2015).

3.3.3 BUILDING INCLUSIVE CULTURE

Stakeholders supported reforming the way Victoria educates children and young people with disabilities, and the importance of building a culture of inclusive education in the system and in schools. Aligning with the Education State agenda, leaders in regional and area structures could take a lead in professional learning, dissemination of evidence-based practice, and sharing of resources. Similarly, a leadership development strategy requires that effective school leaders set the vision for their schools and foster the school's learning culture. This could include working with the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership to create a course for educational leaders and principals to increase understanding of inclusive education policies and procedures.

Stakeholders consider that championing and leadership of inclusive practices would support building an inclusive culture in schools. Schools could provide staff with support to be more inclusive, such as participation in professional learning, collaboration with specialists, and engaging and collaborating with carers and parents of students with disabilities. Additionally, excellence in inclusive practices should be acknowledged and recognised, by showcasing schools that demonstrate excellence.

Finding 2

An inclusive culture within schools has clear benefits, not only for students with disabilities, but for all students and teachers. Building an inclusive culture requires principals and other school leaders to take the lead in driving inclusive practices in the classroom, so that schools are able to meet the learning and social developmental needs of students with disabilities.

Recommendation 2

Develop a new Inclusive Schooling Index that enables schools to self-assess and measure inclusivity.

3.4 WORKFORCE CAPABILITY

Teaching quality is the single most important in-school variable influencing student achievement (Hattie 2003). Increasing teaching quality will enable improved outcomes for students with disabilities currently in Victorian government schools. This section provides an overview of the current workforce capability in relation to supporting students with disabilities and potential areas for improvement.

3.4.1 CURRENT REQUIREMENTS FOR TEACHERS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

It is widely accepted that teachers have a significant impact on the educational outcomes of their students. At a national level, the *Professional Standards for Teachers* have been adopted by all states and territories, which require teachers to be able to provide inclusive education programs and to:

- develop teaching activities that incorporate differentiated strategies to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities (Descriptor 1.5)
- design and implement teaching activities that support the participation and learning of students with disabilities and address relevant policy and legislative requirements (Descriptor 1.6)
- establish and implement inclusive and positive interactions to engage and support all students in classroom activities (Descriptor 4.1) (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2015).

EXCELLENCE IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The Special Needs Plan commits the Victorian Government to supporting teachers in Victoria to engage in professional learning activities to improve the quality of teaching for students with disabilities in every classroom. To achieve this commitment, all new teachers are required to have completed a special needs component in their tertiary studies with an initial teacher education provider. Existing teachers are also required to engage in relevant professional learning activities as part of their preparation to renew their registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching.

3.4.2 SUPPORTS AVAILABLE TO BUILD WORKFORCE CAPABILITY TO INCLUDE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Currently the Department provides a number of training packages to build awareness of the legal expectations in relation to students with disabilities.

The Department's Legal Division provides face-to-face training and presentations on legal obligations in relation to students with disabilities for school principals and other staff, such as allied health staff, through the Bastow Institute. This training has been found to be a particularly effective approach to building workforce awareness of how legal obligations work in practice in schools.

There is also an online training module that the Department recommends all school staff complete about their legal obligations under the Disability Standards for Education and Disability

Discrimination Act, called 'Disability Standards for Education (DSE) eLearning'. This training is available for all schools and state-funded kindergartens. This course has also been modified on a publically accessible website to provide families and the public with the same information that schools have to enable shared understanding of legislative responsibilities.

Despite the training available on legislative requirements, stakeholders reported concern over a perceived lack of training and professional learning for leadership and staff on practical and evidence-based approaches for supporting students with disabilities in the classroom. Stakeholder views were that this perceived absence of training limits the success of inclusive education practices in schools. Ultimately, teachers need to be equipped to engage with all their students, to identify and address each student's needs and strengths.

Stakeholders identified that pre-service training should be structured to meet employers' standards and requirements, and understanding the instructional requirements of students with disabilities is essential. As part of the Special Needs Plan, the government is working with initial teacher education providers to ensure that all new teachers have completed a special needs component as part of their tertiary studies. To support existing teachers, the Special Needs Plan website also provides details of range of professional learning opportunities relevant to teaching students with disabilities currently offered by the

Department, for example the ABLES Online Professional Learning portal, the Victorian Deaf Education Institute Professional Learning Program, and the Managing Challenging Behaviours online course.

In addition, peer group support was identified as important for existing teachers, particularly for sharing flexible teaching practices to suit diverse student needs. Peer group support also assists in developing teacher confidence and wellbeing.

3.4.3 ENHANCING WORKFORCE CAPABILITY TO PROVIDE AND PROMOTE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

A number of themes emerged as suggestions for better supporting teachers to provide and promote inclusive education. There were two broad approaches, one focused on providing all teachers with better training and the other on the need for more specialist assistance. This section focuses on building capacity in the broader workforce.

Quality teaching facilitates inclusive practices. Good pedagogical practice includes teaching strategies that build a learner's cognitive, emotional and social capabilities and, where necessary, uses specific teaching strategies or adjustments, such as Braille mobility training for a student with a visual impairment.

Professional learning refers to the intended and unintended learning experiences that lead to growth and change in teacher knowledge and understandings, capabilities, beliefs and attitudes. Professional learning can be profound and beneficial to building the capability of all education staff and influencing practice, particularly when it contributes to a school-wide approach to improvement.

The broader school culture and leadership is also fundamental. A multi-purpose approach to school improvement requires the school to build a culture of professional learning, underpinned by excellence in teaching and learning, professional leadership, a positive climate for learning and community engagement and learning.

An Inclusive Education Workforce Capability Strategy would identify ongoing professional learning needs and opportunities that will help build teachers' knowledge, capabilities and attitudes to improve the educational outcomes for children and young people with disabilities. The Strategy would also address priority capability issues including evidence-based pedagogy and teaching strategies such as universal design for learning, and the legislative framework to ensure that students with disabilities have the same rights to enrol, participate and access the curriculum at a school as students without disabilities.

EXCELLENCE IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The Strategy would need to align with broader workforce capability building initiatives in the Department to support the Education State reforms and provide further support to teachers to meet the requirements arising from the Special Needs Plan to have undertaken relevant professional learning activities as part of their preparation to renew their registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching.

Finding 3

There is no disability specific workforce capability strategy and although there are a range of existing professional learning opportunities, there remains a lack of consistent disability-specific professional learning for most school leaders and teachers. This means that the education workforce is often not well equipped to provide an inclusive environment or to respond to the differing needs of students with disabilities.

Recommendation 3

Develop an Inclusive Education Workforce Capability Strategy to ensure that teachers and teaching staff can better access the necessary professional learning, including evidence-based pedagogy and curriculum, to fully support the participation and achievement of students with disabilities.

Recommendation 4

Further develop and roll out existing professional learning opportunities relevant to disability and inclusive education practices at a system, school and classroom level, to build workforce capability to support all students with disabilities.

Recommendation 5

To assist with capability building, leadership development and the implementation of a workforce capability strategy, undertake a feasibility study into the potential for a Victorian Inclusive Education Institute, possibly as part of the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership or Victorian Deaf Education Institute.

3.4.4 LEADERSHIP IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

To assist with capability building and implementation of a workforce capability strategy, and using the Victorian Deaf Education Institute and the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership as proofs of concept, a feasibility study could investigate the establishment of a Victorian Inclusive Education Institute. The institute's primary functions could include:

- offering cross-sector professional learning opportunities for the early childhood and school education workforce
- commissioning research that leads to evidence-based pedagogical practice and improved student wellbeing
- investigating technology that facilitates quality inclusive education
- supporting communities of practice at all levels (that is, schools, networks, regions) to ensure that Victorian schools are at the forefront of innovative inclusive education practice
- collaborating with universities and not-for-profit advocacy groups to advance inclusive education knowledge and skills.

The purpose would be to grow the capacity of Victorian schools to achieve excellence in the education of students with disabilities as well as other marginalised or potentially marginalised children and young people from diverse linguistic backgrounds (including those with an indigenous ethnicity), those who are gifted or talented, and those with a diverse sexual orientation and/or identity. Subject to the outcomes of a feasibility study, the institute could be an initiative that creates a mechanism for building workforce capability to maximise the outcomes for all students with disabilities in Victoria.

3.5 SPECIALIST EXPERTISE AND SUPPORT

The Department has a group of Student Support Services Officers (SSSO) available to provide specialist support to students and schools. SSSOs are professionals, and include:

- guidance officers and psychologists
- social workers
- visiting teachers
- speech pathologists
- curriculum consultants.

SSSOs work as part of an integrated health and wellbeing team within networks of schools, focusing on providing group-based and individual support, workforce capacity building and the provision of specialised services.

Most regions also have a Visiting Teacher Service with specific expertise including sensory (deaf/hard of hearing and blind/vision impairment) and physical disabilities.

As outlined in detail in Section 1.4.3, the Government has recently committed to a new structure called *Learning Places*. A key feature of *Learning Places* is the establishment of multi-disciplinary teams in each of the Department's 17 areas. Through these teams, schools, early childhood services, vocational education services, learners and their families will have access to a range of experts—from executive leaders to curriculum and assessment expertise, and a dedicated health and wellbeing workforce—all working together to ensure that a holistic, focused and complementary set of skills and resources are deployed to those most in need.

EXCELLENCE IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

3.5.1 OPPORTUNITIES TO BETTER UTILISE SPECIALIST EXPERTISE AND SUPPORT

Stakeholders suggested using the expertise of specialist staff, and provided examples, such as creating specialist and mainstream schools clusters, including expert assistance from special schools. To promote sound knowledge about inclusive education in schools, stakeholders suggested that professional, in-school support was essential, including opportunities for specialist teachers in schools to assist in planning learning and coaching teachers and ES staff. Use of allied health expertise also has an important role to play in this process. A focus on health, wellbeing and engagement outcomes builds the foundation for learning outcomes.

Stakeholders reported a lack of Departmental support for schools to implement inclusion, as well as a lack of resources and leadership. It was suggested that expert help should be made available to assist schools to build capacity, and that such resources should be shared and coordinated to implement inclusive education.

Stakeholders suggested that a classroom teacher should work with specialist support staff in a more formalised TAL approach, where the teacher is part of a team that coordinates multiple services required by an individual learner who has additional and often complex needs. This practice would assist with interventions to improve the learning outcomes, monitor interventions and vary teaching practice according to individual learning needs and progress. Research confirms schools need teachers skilled in differentiating learning so they are able to engage with children who may learn in different ways from a different baseline, and are able to effectively use curriculum resources and assisted technology. The Abilities Based Learning and Education Support (ABLES) research from 2009 to 2011 (Griffin et al. 2010) concluded that to be effective in an inclusive setting, teachers must be able to assess the skills and abilities students are beginning to develop, identifying the point when a student is most 'ready to learn', and be able to match teaching strategies to student needs. These are high-order skills that many teachers may not possess.

Case study: Katandra school as a 'centre of expertise'

Katandra School is a special education setting for primary school students who have an intellectual disability. Thanks to a new approach, the specialised skills of Katandra staff are having a positive impact beyond the classroom.

In a peer coaching/support program, Katandra staff share their extensive knowledge and experience with teachers at mainstream schools where students with an intellectual disability, engagement difficulties and/or behavioural concerns have been identified.

The Katandra Project provides a visiting 'coach' and support resources that increase the confidence and capacity of teachers to support students with additional needs enrolled in mainstream schools, which better utilises the expertise of Katandra's specialist teachers.

The impact of the project has shown immediate outcomes with improvements in student learning and overall engagement levels. For example, the project has also resulted in students staying at their mainstream school rather than transferring to a special school.

Katandra's ground-breaking approach was recognised at the Victorian Education Excellence Awards in October 2015, where they were awarded the Outstanding Inclusive Education Award.

Building on the Katandra example, consideration could also be given to how best to support special schools and special development schools to become 'centres of expertise' and expand their role to support local mainstream schools to implement quality teaching and learning practices that support students with disabilities.

Finding 4

Currently, there is a lack of specialist expertise and support for schools to deliver inclusive education. This can make it difficult for schools to implement strategies to maximise the learning of students with disabilities (see Chapter 4).

Recommendation 6

Consider how to harness the new regional reforms and resources, particularly the multi-disciplinary teams as part of the *Learning Places* agenda, to better access the expertise and knowledge in each local area.

Recommendation 7

Develop options to support specialist schools and special developmental schools to become 'centres of expertise' to support local mainstream schools to implement inclusive education.

EXCELLENCE IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

3.6 EDUCATION SUPPORT STAFF

ES staff are commonly referred to as integration aides and teacher aides. ES staff are a significant source of support to schools, teachers and students, and are frequently employed using PSD funding. The Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2013 expressly states that ES staff should not be performing the duties of a teacher. Despite this, stakeholders reported some concern that not all ES staff are adequately qualified to support students with disabilities to learn, and that this has become the 'default' use of PSD funding.

Research indicates that current practice is for the role of ES staff in schools to support student learning (although not being responsible for 'teaching'), rather than being limited to administration and support. However, there has been some criticism in the literature that ES staff are not appropriately trained to support the educational needs of students and that a lack of training has potential to cause adverse outcomes in student learning, social inclusion and student independence. For example, students interviewed in the studies indicated that the need for an aide can be a source of embarrassment and can reduce opportunities for independent social interaction. The requirement for students to have an aide in the classroom can also result in-class segregation from peers. Evidence suggests that aides focus on task completion more than engagement in learning. The informal way in which ES staff are recruited is also problematic,

particularly as they may be relied upon as the school's primary strategy for inclusion (Punch 2015).

Some researchers see the over-reliance on ES staff as a simplistic response to the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream schools. However, there are several reasons why ES staff are employed, including that schools are unsure of the nature of assistance required for students, advocacy from parents and teachers for the use of an aide, to assist teachers with the management of classrooms as a whole, especially in large classrooms where specific students with disabilities need additional one-on-one support to undertake tasks, and to offer specialist assistance to teachers who may lack training in how to teach and support students with disabilities.

3.6.1 OPPORTUNITIES TO BETTER UTILISE EDUCATION SUPPORT STAFF TO MAXIMISE LEARNING

An over-reliance on ES staff could be addressed through better utilisation of other para-professionals to minimise the dependence on integration aides. For example, Punch (2015) recommends that teachers with expertise in special education support and advise school staff, including teachers, ES staff and the school community in general. The special education teachers should assist other teachers to develop personalised learning and support planning, and ensure that there is appropriate differentiation and adjustments in the curriculum and

instructional approaches for all students with disabilities. Punch (2015) proposes a team-around-the-learner approach, recommending that other specialist professionals, such as speech pathologists and occupational therapists, be used as part of a team.

The Review notes that there appears to be a consensus across the literature that schools can improve the way they use ES staff. Evidence suggests that clearer role descriptions and targeted training for ES staff can and do have positive effects on academic outcomes. Additional training for mainstream teachers in how to work collaboratively with and support ES staff may also improve outcomes. In terms of job training, the research indicates that ES staff should receive training in managing challenging student behaviours and how to carry out teacher-prepared plans for the student. In terms of how ES staff are allocated, an ES staff pool could be established from which the school can draw to address time-limited student needs.

Parents interviewed have differing perceptions of the usefulness of ES staff, with some holding the role of ES staff in high regard and others concerned about the aides' lack of training and knowledge of specific disabilities. There were some parents who were concerned about the over-reliance on aides, but many saw aides as being necessary for inclusion. Stakeholders advocated for a shift in the use of ES staff so that they could better assist the teacher in the classroom. A review of the literature indicated that

schools can improve their use of ES staff by better defining when and how ES staff should be utilised in supporting students with disabilities. This should include having clearer job descriptions and qualification requirements for ES staff, as well as tailored training in, for example, managing challenging student behaviours (Punch 2015). Stakeholders also raised the issue of employing unqualified staff in education support roles.

The Review considers that students with disabilities have complex needs that require evidence-informed practice, professional advice and assisted support and that, properly deployed, ES staff have an ongoing and important role to play.

Finding 5

Clearer role descriptions and targeted training for Education Support staff would lead to better outcomes for students with disabilities.

Finding 6

Principals and teachers are not consistently aware of how and when to most effectively use and support Education Support staff in the classroom and as part of a broader collaborative student support structure (see Chapter 3).

Recommendation 8

Provide guidance in relation to the role (including the extent to which they are used) and training requirements for Education Support staff to optimise the use of this key resource and better influence academic and behavioural outcomes of students with disabilities.

EXCELLENCE IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Case study: Wallarano Primary School's use of Education Support staff

Wallarano takes a teamwork approach to teachers and ES staff, which contributes to the school's capacity to assist students with additional needs to achieve results where the focus is on the growth of the students rather than only the achievement of set outcomes.

ILPs are in place for all PSD students and these ensure that any adjustments to the daily curriculum are recorded and discussed with staff and parents. Effective teaching approaches and strategies relevant to a variety of learning needs are discussed at shared planning sessions, where teachers and ES staff work to plan the implementation of an inclusive and personalised curriculum. Teachers then provide ES staff with a detailed weekly work program which includes ES staff taking small, explicit teaching groups, such as guided reading, reciprocal teaching, speech therapy, literature circles, numeracy and oral language activities. The ES staff regularly work with the higher achieving students, which frees up the classroom teachers to work with groups who require more support.

Teachers and ES staff liaise with visiting psychologists and visit special setting schools to talk with the teachers to ensure the delivery of best practice for students at Wallarano.

Wallarano focuses on professional learning to build capability for its ES staff, who are trained in Bridges Literacy, Bridges Numeracy, GRIN and Hear Builder programs. As well, the ES team are trained as speech pathology assistants and use this knowledge to support the implementation of programs designed by the speech pathologist to assist students in their expressive and receptive language and social skill development. The ES team and teachers are always in the playground at playtimes and lunchtimes, to ensure that all children are playing happily and confidently. They help children develop a sense of belonging and social/play skill development by starting up games with groups of children and modelling how to play with others.

The Wallarano study highlights that taking a teamwork approach has the potential to benefit students with disabilities and enable staff to learn new skills from professionals with a variety of specialist skills.

3.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter examined policy and guidance around promoting inclusive education, in particular the role of school leaders, teachers and ES staff in building a culture of inclusion and promoting student learning outcomes.

An inclusive education system is beneficial to students with and without disabilities, as well as teachers. It promotes positive academic, social and employment outcomes for all students and increased professional learning for teachers.

The lack of a coherent and visible policy framework and guidance material for schools and teachers in relation to promoting inclusivity in education has meant that it has been difficult to develop

a culture of inclusion within schools. There is also a lack of specific training and professional learning for teachers and ES staff, and specialist expertise provided to schools, in relation to the delivery of inclusive education.

Building an inclusive education culture requires principals and other school leaders to take the lead in driving inclusive practices in the classroom, so that schools are able to meet the learning and social developmental needs of students with disabilities. To do so, clearer guidance is required on what is meant by inclusive education and how it is to be achieved, and additional training and specialist expertise should be provided to schools and teachers.





4. MAXIMISING LEARNING

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The Terms of Reference directed the Review to assess the current PSD's ability to meet the needs and maximise the learning of all children and young people with disabilities in Victorian government schools. This chapter examines:

- approaches to maximising the learning of children and young people with disabilities in Victorian government schools
- accountability and transparency mechanisms required to maximise learning outcomes.

4.2 CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS TO MAXIMISE LEARNING OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

4.2.1 IMPORTANCE OF MAXIMISING LEARNING OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

There is an opportunity to strengthen the provision of education to all students, especially those with disabilities. People with disabilities find themselves amongst the most disadvantaged in the Victorian community, socially and culturally isolated and, by comparison with others in the community, at an unfair disadvantage.

'The PSD on some occasions meets the needs and may maximise the learning for those children who have been flagged and meet the criteria for the PSD. However, there are significantly more children whose needs may be more complex or are experiencing difficulties that are not necessarily permanent impairments or a transient condition. These children and young people are often not accessing appropriate educational programs within government schools.'

Student Service Support Officer

MAXIMISING LEARNING

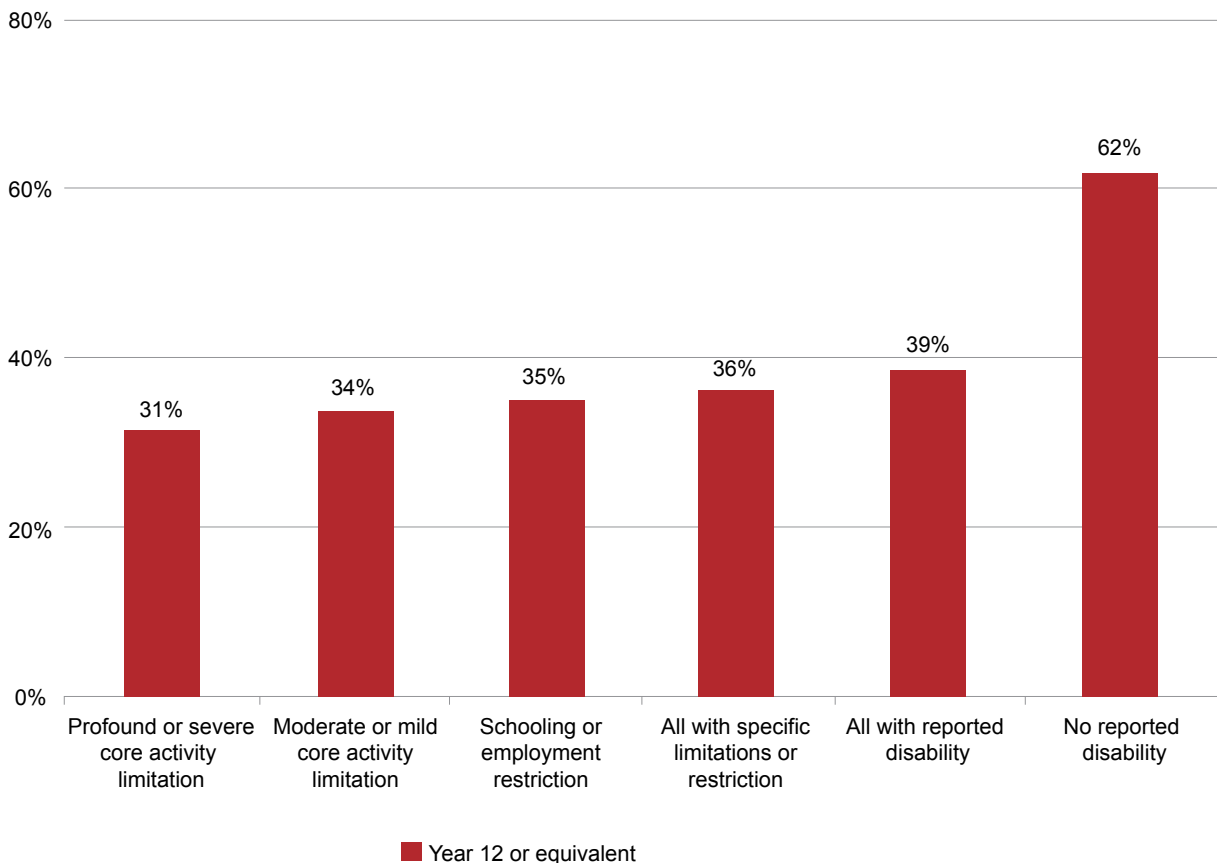
Evidence indicates that there is a significant gap between children and young people with disabilities and their peers, particularly in the successful completion of Year 12 or equivalent (see Figure 13).

High-quality universal and targeted support is needed to assist learners who have special needs, both in education and in the workforce. Local mainstream education programs must be inclusive of children and young people with diverse abilities (National Disability Strategy 2010–2020).

4.2.2 CURRENT APPROACHES TO MAXIMISING LEARNING OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The PSD can help to maximise learning outcomes by funding adjustments for students with disabilities, and by assisting schools to meet their legal obligations under the DDA. This section presents a brief summary of various approaches currently used in Victorian schools to maximise learning outcomes for students with disabilities.

Figure 13: Percentage of Australian students who have completed Year 12 by disability status



Source: ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2012 (cat. No. 4330.0)

Students with disabilities can have complex and specific needs. Recognising this fact, Victorian schools have a range of strength-based, person-centred, models for organising and coordinating support in order to maximise learning of students with disabilities. These different approaches and models are outlined as follows.

1. The Student Support Group (SSG):

Students eligible for PSD funding must have a SSG, which represents a partnership in the education planning process between parent/s, the child and school that will continue throughout the student's school life. A SSG can be used for all students with disabilities and additional learning needs. The SSG must:

- identify the student's needs
- determine any adjustments to be made to the curriculum, teaching and learning
- plan an appropriate educational program
- develop a Personalised Learning and Support Plan
- discuss the plan with teachers and provide implementation support
- provide advice to the principal concerning the additional educational and support needs of the student and what may be required to meet these needs
- Review and evaluate the student's program once per term, and at other times if requested by any member of the group.

Membership of the SSG includes a parent/guardian/carer of the student, a teacher, the school principal or nominee as a chairperson and the student themselves as appropriate. Parents may choose to invite an advocate, and other individuals such as allied health professionals can be invited to provide input on information relevant to the educational or social needs of the student on an individual case basis.

2. Team Around the Learner (TAL): This is a wraparound practice model, which targets learners with additional and complex needs. TAL encourages the education workforce to engage closely with the learner and their family/caregiver to work collaboratively to plan and coordinate actions that address the needs and goals of the learner. Wraparound is a system level intervention that aims to 'wrap' existing services around children and young people and their families to address their problems in a collaborative, comprehensive and coordinated way. Systems thinking is generally applied to the development of wraparound services, where children and young people are seen as being embedded in various (social) systems, such as families, classrooms, schools and communities (Mitchell 2015). The Department is currently trialling this approach in Victoria with children and young people who are at risk of being disengaged or already disengaged from learning. The team work together and coordinate a plan specific to the learner in the context of their family, with a focus on making sure that the needs of the learner are met and sustained.

Similarly, eligible children with disabilities at kindergarten are funded through the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Package as part of Early Childhood Intervention Services. The implementation of these services involves teams similar to the TAL approach. The teams consist of a Program Support Group and an Additional Assistant Educator who undertake tasks that are comparable to the SSG and Education Support Officer in schools.

3. Response to Intervention (RtI):

This is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behaviour needs. The essential elements of this approach are the provision of scientific, research-based instruction and interventions in general education; monitoring and measurement of student progress in response to the instruction and interventions; and use of these measures of student progress to shape instruction and make educational decisions. For example, the Department's School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support Program uses this approach by providing an evidence-based framework for preventing and responding to student behaviour. It aims to create a positive school climate, a culture of student competence and an open, responsive management system for all school community members. This approach supports the development of inclusive intervention practices that are flexible and can meet the different needs of individuals.

4. **Individualised teaching:** This is an approach, supported by ILPs, which includes goal setting, planning, provision and evaluation of a student's learning and wellbeing. The main purpose of an ILP is to link the student's specific learning needs to the curriculum in those areas where the student requires additional support. The ILP usually includes information about the student's goals, baseline skills and teaching strategies.

According to stakeholder feedback and available evidence, SSGs and ILPs are not always in place even though they are requirements of the PSD. The other models and approaches are used inconsistently across government schools.

4.3 OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE THE WAY SCHOOLS MAXIMISE THE LEARNING OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

This section considers opportunities to adopt a more holistic and best practice approach to maximising the learning of students with disabilities.

4.3.1 STRENGTH-BASED APPROACHES

Internationally, it is considered best practice to use strength-based and person-centred approaches to identify and meet the needs of individuals. These approaches facilitate the development of supports that will meet those needs in a way that enables the individuals to achieve their goals. A strength-based

approach to support focuses on what an individual can do, rather than on what they cannot do. This approach involves identifying strategies that can be developed to align with and build on the student's abilities.

In the context of the targeted PSD, a person-centred approach is one that places the student at the heart of the intervention, ensuring that their wants and needs are provided for in an individualised and personalised approach. These approaches are often complemented by a teamwork model, such as TAL and SSG, which sets out how professionals work in a coordinated way to plan and support individuals to access services in support of their goals.

Although the SSG is designed to be learner-centred by placing emphasis on the individual and their family's involvement, consultation highlighted that the effectiveness of this teamwork model to plan and support a student in their learning was unreliable.

4.3.2 MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAMS

The Education State regional reforms feature multi-disciplinary teams to maximise the specialist skills of different professional disciplines to better support schools and their students (outlined in detail in Section 1.4.3). New approaches to funding and support for students with disabilities should build on these new teams and be designed to avoid contradictory advice to families and minimise cumulative demand on them and the professionals providing services to the individual.

There is a significant opportunity to build on current work by the Department in establishing the Education State, and provide a strength-based approach and teamwork model that:

- includes clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities
- avoids duplicative assessment and planning processes for students and their families
- provides personalised learning and support for individuals that focuses on their strengths and goals
- outlines a clear direction for the school workforce to identify and respond to individuals with disabilities, and make necessary education adjustments and interventions
- enables decision-making and problem-solving processes based on student learning outcomes
- includes data and monitoring of student progress and responsiveness to instructional intervention
- prioritises consultation with parents and carers on their child's learning progress throughout the education process.

Any overarching approach would need to consider the role of the SSG and the multi-disciplinary teams in the 17 regional areas to deliver the most effective support to students and their families. Schools, teaching professionals and ES staff would require training in any broadly adopted approach across the school system, including any new tools required to implement the approach.

Finding 7

Multi-disciplinary teams are needed to support strength-based and learner-centred approaches that apply to all children and young people in educational contexts, including evidence-based intervention responses to meet the needs of individuals with additional needs.

Recommendation 9

Develop a new collaborative multi-disciplinary approach to support all students with disabilities, which considers Team Around the Learners and Response to Intervention models.

4.3.3 LEVERAGING EXISTING SUPPORTS

To support the work of a multi-disciplinary approach as recommended, new personalised learning and support planning and SSG guidelines should be developed to assist in identifying appropriate learning strategies.

The existing approach to ILPs could be improved so it is more effective in its support for schools, families and students with disabilities. This would require addressing its current shortcomings. Victoria's government school system currently has a range of methods in place to measure students' learning and progress. However, there is no current process to capture and report on the support needs of students. Only students who apply to be part of the PSD have an ENQ completed. However, the ENQ was not designed to provide advice and support for educators on how to meet the learner support needs.

A new tool could include advice and guidance and supporting resource materials for teaching students with disabilities, including profiling learning and adjustments, and assessment and reporting against curriculum. The tool should be automated to include personalised learning and support that enables teachers and parents to identify goals, strengths, personalised learning, and support needs and strategies.

The tool and guidance should be state-wide and aligned to the 'Planning for personalised learning and support: A national resource', released in 2015 and based on the Disability Standards for Education 2005. The resource provides valuable direction for the development of new guidelines and tools. The guidelines should provide advice for schools on evidence-based interventions to inform pedagogy and intervention, so that funding can be directed towards evidence-based interventions.

While leveraging what is already in place or underway is important, more needs to be done to support schools. Consultations indicated that schools would welcome and be greatly assisted by a readily accessible framework of evidence-based interventions to support effective teaching approaches for students with disabilities. A framework of evidence-based interventions would be linked to the FISO.

To improve efficiency in the planning process and to encourage information sharing, any future approaches to personalised planning in schools will need to be aware of the planning approach used by the NDIS.

Finding 8

The existing approach to Individual Learning Plans is inconsistent, cumbersome and fails to adequately drive the progress of individual students. This is, at least in part, due to the lack of comprehensive systemic guidelines on their use and how the progress of students with Individual Learning Plans should be measured.

Recommendation 10

Develop guidelines on personalised learning and support planning to assist schools with early identification of, and response to, students with disabilities. These guidelines should consider strength-based, person-centred approaches to maximise learning outcomes and the engagement and wellbeing of students with disabilities in schools. The guidelines should set out a process to plan and monitor achievement, engagement and wellbeing outcomes for the individual.

Recommendation 11

Develop and trial a new personalised support-profiling tool that identifies strengths and functional needs for all students with disabilities.

4.4 ACCOUNTABILITY ARRANGEMENTS TO SUPPORT A FOCUS ON MAXIMISING STUDENT LEARNING

To help inform planning and support and promote accountability, a range of data is collected at school and system levels on the performance of all students:

- the School Supplementary Census, which collects information on PSD students, including whether or not ILPs are in place and goals are being met
- the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data is collected for students who are funded under the PSD (although not all PSD students participate; some are exempted)
- the On Track Survey, which collects information from PSD students on their destination after leaving school, as well as from students who attended specialist schools, although not all students participate.

There have also been a number of recent developments that provide the Department and schools with an opportunity to improve data collection and deliver improved support and stronger accountability at a systemic and school level for all students with disabilities. In particular, the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data for Students with Disability (NCCDSSD) is a relatively new national annual data collection to identify the number of school students with disabilities and the level of reasonable educational adjustment provided for the students. In 2015, all government and non-government schools began to participate annually in the national data collection. The national data collection will give governments, education authorities and schools nationally consistent information about:

- the number of students with disabilities enrolled in Australian schools
- where students with disabilities are located
- the broad level of reasonable educational adjustment provided to assist students with disabilities to participate in schooling on the same basis as other students.

The implementation of the new Victorian Curriculum Foundation-10 (F-10) will also generate new data on the performance of all students with disabilities. While the curriculum is described as F-10, the Towards Foundation Level Victorian Curriculum provides necessary adjustments for students with disabilities to the standard curriculum and contains A to D levels. The use of the ABLES tool will generate the new data on students working in the A to D range of levels. The new Victorian Curriculum and ABLES are important because they enable the learning of every student to be assessed and reported using the same Victorian Curriculum, which will form part of the school's annual report.

4.5 OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN ACCOUNTABILITY ARRANGEMENTS TO ENCOURAGE SCHOOLS TO MAXIMISE LEARNING

Although the Department collects data at school and system levels, there is currently no comprehensive system to identify all students with disabilities in these data sets or linked data sets. For example, while the School Enrolment Census information includes the identification of students receiving PSD funding, it does not identify the broader cohort of students with disabilities requiring adjustment. This lack of data was a key barrier in the Review's ability to undertake a robust evaluation of how best to meet the needs and maximise learning of students with disabilities.

Research and evidence indicate that there are significant issues with a lack of transparency and accountability for the learning outcomes for students with disabilities. For example in 2012, VEOHRC reported that there was no means to assess:

- the educational progress of all students with disabilities
- the results of school interventions
- whether or not interventions are being implemented
- how schools are performing in relation to inclusion and non-discrimination.

Research also indicates there is a lack of accountability in the use of funding (McDonald & O'Callaghan 2015) and insufficient data to determine efficient and effective use of funding (O'Connor et al. 2015; VAGO 2012; VEOHRC 2012). There is no evidence or systemic data collection to show how resources have been applied and what has been successful or unsuccessful, which limits the Department's and schools' ability to make informed funding decisions. Research suggests that the quality, use and monitoring of resources could be improved (Hattie 2009; Giangreco et al. 2010).

The Review considers that research should be undertaken to identify how these data can be regularly used to build the Department's evidence base regarding students with disabilities. More broadly, the Review considers that a strategy for improving and/or linking existing data collections for all students with disabilities for whom reasonable adjustments are being made should be developed. This will help to ensure that students with disabilities are being identified and their outcomes in relation to 'achievement, engagement and wellbeing' can be determined. Examples of existing data collections, which should form the basis for improved data collections for students with disabilities include:

- the NCCDSSD, which identifies the broader cohort of students with disabilities and the level of reasonable educational adjustment provided—all Victorian schools now have this data and an annual process is in place for its collection and reporting
- the CASES21 Mirror, which is a replication of the data stored in the CASES21 school administration system, including student demographics and attendance data
- the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), which is a literacy and numeracy assessment for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9
- the biennial School Enrolment Census, which includes student level record information of all students in government schools
- the Supplementary Census, which is a flexible mechanism for collecting additional information from schools, including information on students with disabilities.
- the annual Attitudes to School Survey, which collects data about the opinions of students from Years 5 to 12, including views of their wellbeing, teaching, learning and school in general.
- the Victorian Curriculum levels A to 10 and the ABLES, which collects data on what every student should learn during their first 11 years of schooling, including the common set of knowledge and skills required by students for life-long learning, social development, and active and informed citizenship
- the annual On Track Survey, which interviews young people the year after they leave school to collect information on their post-school destination (including those with disabilities in mainstream schools as well as students who attended specialist schools).

More comprehensive and connected data would provide new intelligence and form the basis of strengthened accountability, inform systemic and school planning, and enable schools to better target their resources, and adjust their teaching and learning practices and interventions for individuals and groups of students with disabilities.

Finding 9

There is a lack of accountability and transparency for outcomes for all students with disabilities, including those students supported under the PSD and for the use of targeted PSD funding provided to schools.

Finding 10

A lack of available data on the performance and outcomes of students with disabilities undermines efforts to strengthen accountability. This gap means success cannot be measured and analysed at the school level or across the system in relation to student outcomes and the impact of support. Improved data collection, linkage and analysis would enable enhanced planning, reporting and accountability at the school, area, regional and state level.

Recommendation 12

Develop and implement a stronger system of accountability for outcomes for all students with disabilities that includes improved data quality and data collection, analysis of data, and reporting and transparency. For students this would include measures for achievement, engagement and wellbeing, and for schools this would include greater accountability and transparency for the use of funds.

The Department will need to develop new resources and tools that can assist schools to use data to plan, strengthen partnerships with parents and identify their school's achievements, strengths and areas for improvement. Improved data will enable schools, the new 17 areas, four regions and the Department to connect this information in user friendly and efficient ways, to improve the interpretation and use of the data, share it with their communities and embed its use into Department's existing governance and school accountability, support and improvement processes. These include funding and resourcing, the FISO and school reviews.

Subject to the development of the proposed Inclusive Schooling Index, the Review notes that consideration of the achievement, engagement and wellbeing of students with disabilities could also be part of a school's yearly review and evaluation.

At the state level, this information would provide data about the outcomes for students with disabilities, which would build and strengthen public confidence and demonstrate the achievements of Victorian government schools.

The Review, however, considers that in the short term schools should also be more accountable and transparent in the use of the funds provided for students with disabilities. At a minimum, this should entail a summary being included in the school annual report of the total supplementary funds provided, how these funds were used and the supporting rationale. The Department should develop guidance for schools on how to report this information.

More comprehensive data collection and analysis for students with disabilities and improved school-based planning, reporting and an accountability approach should be aligned with the proposed new policy and framework for inclusive education and tools to support personalised planning and support.

If the Department is to increase its effort and investment to improve data, planning, accountability and reporting around the participation of students with disabilities, schools would require clear direction from the Department of the meaning of inclusion at an individual and whole school level. Data sets and tools that support schools can then be aligned to this understanding and expectation. A clear statement about what constitutes inclusion, a formative school-based evaluation process and the necessary tools would need to be in place. The statement, process and tools would need to demonstrate that it is about more than just another data collection exercise and be formative in intent. The development of this process and tools should be undertaken with schools and draw upon international examples of best practice.

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter examined approaches to maximising the learning of children and young people with disabilities in Victorian government schools and accountability and reporting mechanisms required to maximise learning outcomes. It makes several findings and recommendations relating to: identifying students with disabilities and their learning needs, improving overall outcomes for students with disabilities, and reporting and accountability for the use of funding to support students with disabilities.

The education workforce is not consistently equipped to maximise the learning of students with disabilities. Despite this, progress has been made in moving towards a strength-based, person-centred approach to designing supports and learning plans for students with disabilities. There is scope to build on existing initiatives and improve collaborative efforts to promote student learning.

There are also issues of accountability, both in terms of measuring the progress of individual students to be assessed against their own learning plan, as well as identifying the outcomes obtained from the use of PSD funding. This is compounded by a lack of data on the performance of students with disabilities, meaning that success cannot be measured or analysed at the school or system level. Improved data collection, linkage and analysis would enable enhanced planning, reporting and accountability, leading to improved outcomes for students with disabilities.

Addressing the accountability challenges cannot be achieved effectively in isolation of broader considerations about school accountability structures, roles, responsibilities and mechanisms, including those not directly related to students with disabilities. Going forward, the recommendations in this chapter will need to be integrated with broader reform projects related to accountability in Victorian government schools, including those which will be made in the Bracks Review.



5. MANAGING THE TRANSITION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The Terms of Reference directed the Review to examine the efficacy of the current Year 6–7 review process—its purpose, timing, requirements and influence on students’ transition from primary to secondary school and from that assessment, recommend alternative models. This chapter:

- examines the current approach to reviewing eligibility for PSD funding through the Year 6–7 review
- summarises stakeholder views on the current approach
- discusses opportunities for improving the review of eligibility for PSD funding.

‘Children with disabilities should not be set up for failure, and as it stands the state of Victoria is doing so ... [by] imposing a mandatory review at such a highly vulnerable time, mid-Year 6, knowing many children lose funding levels.’

Parent

5.2 THE CURRENT APPROACH TO REVIEWING STUDENT ELIGIBILITY FOR PSD FUNDING

Moving from primary to secondary school is an exciting and important transition for all young people. For students with disabilities, parents and carers, it can also be a time of confusion, uncertainty and challenge. This section provides a brief summary of the rationale and process of the Year 6–7 review and discusses opportunities for improving this process.

5.2.1 WHY PSD ELIGIBILITY IS REVIEWED IN YEAR 6–7

In most instances, a student’s eligibility for targeted PSD funding is determined in the year prior to school commencement, when the child is very young. As a particular student’s needs change over time, some diagnostic categories that apply in early childhood may no longer apply as the student gets older. The Year 6–7 review aims to assess these changes to student’s needs and abilities, to effectively inform education and support planning, and to make sure the PSD funding is targeted to those students with highest need.⁸

When the PSD was introduced, students’ eligibility and funding levels were reviewed every two years. However, as the proportion of students identified under the PSD grew, these regular mandatory reviews became burdensome and unsustainable for schools, so the single Year 6–7 review was instituted.

⁸ It should be noted that an ongoing review process is currently in place to assess students whose disabilities and needs may not be apparent on school entry, or need to be reassessed at a given point in their schooling. Applications for this form of review can be submitted in any year of a student’s schooling.

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For students who have been deemed eligible for the PSD with the highest levels of support needs (Levels 5 and 6), neither eligibility nor funding level is reviewed, as these students have more complex and profound disabilities that remain consistent over time. For students with more moderate educational and support needs (Levels 1 to 4), many of these students demonstrate significant improvement in their development and support needs, and eligibility and funding levels are reviewed in the final year of primary schooling. Year 6 was determined as an appropriate review point because the results of the review inform the student's secondary schooling options and their ongoing support needs.

5.2.2 THE CURRENT YEAR 6–7 REVIEW PROCESS

The following discussion summarises the key aspects of this process that relate the Year 6–7 review. A more detailed discussion of the current application process for eligibility into the PSD is contained in Chapter 2.

The Year 6–7 review currently involves reassessing the student against the PSD's eligibility criteria. While some eligibility criteria established in the original application are permanent and do not need to be re-established (such as autism diagnosis and evidence of a history of ongoing difficulties) some are measures of current functioning and need to be reassessed (such as IQ and tests of adaptive behaviour and language).

Approximately 2000 students undertake the Year 6–7 review each year. Approximately 20 per cent of students in the Year 6–7 review in any given year have measurably improved to the extent that they no longer meet the eligibility criteria for the PSD, which in some respects is a measure of student progress and the impact of interventions. While these students continue to have support needs (as do many other students who are not in the PSD), they are no longer within the cohort of students with the highest needs. For those students who continue to meet the eligibility requirements of the PSD on their Year 6–7 review, their educational needs are reassessed by the new school and a new ENQ and reports from professionals are submitted. PSD funding levels for each student are adjusted according to the information provided.

5.3 OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

This section summarises the views presented to the Review during consultations with a range of stakeholders, acknowledges the significant stakeholder and Government concerns that exist around the Year 6–7 review, and identifies opportunities for improvement.

5.3.1 NEED FOR A REVIEW PROCESS

While stakeholders generally accept that a review process is necessary, the Year 6–7 review is perceived to be complex, time consuming, untimely and intended to withdraw funding. Transition to secondary school can be a particular challenge for students with special needs, and some schools and families have raised concerns regarding the support available for students who are no longer eligible for the PSD. In particular, it has been argued that cessation of funding support at the point of transition to secondary school for these students means that schools have reduced access to supplementary resources to support these students at a time of increased need.

The Review also examined the approaches undertaken by other states and territories to reassess targeted funding eligibility, to consider the need for a review process and if other best practice approaches existed. The Review found that all jurisdictions, except Tasmania, currently have a review process. While Tasmania

does not have a compulsory review, this is due to eligibility for targeted funding being limited to very high levels of need. The timing of the review and the criteria to be reviewed varies across jurisdictions. For example, in Western Australia, resources are reviewed when a student moves into a new phase of schooling—at the end of kindergarten, Year 3 and Year 8. For students who are eligible due to conditions such as mental disorders and medical conditions more frequent reviews are required. In Queensland, a statewide verifier determines if a review is required during the verification process for targeted funding. The decision is guided by the age of the student, stage of schools and information provided on eligibility criteria. In the ACT, reviews for targeted funding are conducted at different intervals depending on disability type. Some are every year and some every three years; for example, students with a language disorder or a mental health disorder need a disability confirmation sheet to be completed annually. While the approaches vary, the Review has not found an approach that is clearly preferable to current arrangements.

On balance, the Review found that while significant concerns exist around the Year 6–7 review, a formal review of eligibility for targeted funding is currently still required. Student needs change over time as they learn skills and mature, and the Year 6–7 review is currently a key process in ensuring and maintaining alignment between funding and student needs.

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5.3.2 TIMING OF THE REVIEW

Stakeholder feedback was divided about the preferred timing of a review. Around half of the stakeholders suggested that the review should be moved back a year, to a Year 5–6 review, as students' needs are not likely to change in one year and it would not add to the difficulties students may experience when moving to secondary school. The remaining stakeholders preferred that the assessment take place a year later, at Year 7–8, once students have begun secondary school. While this may lessen anxiety for parents and carers, the later review would not provide timely information to inform the students' secondary schooling options and could result in PSD funding being withdrawn during secondary school. A shift in timing to Year 7–8 could also move the responsibility for submission of the reviews from primary to secondary schools, which presents new challenges for secondary schools. Ultimately, moving the review to the middle primary school years or to early secondary school would present new challenges for families, primary and secondary school staff. The Review has therefore not found significant benefits in moving the timing of the review to either Year 5–6 or Year 7–8. There are issues with either option, as previously noted.

5.3.3 TRANSITIONAL SUPPORT AND MOVING TO A NEW MODEL

The Review acknowledges the significant concerns that exist around the Year 6–7 review and considers that in the short term better support is required for students transitioning to secondary school who are no longer eligible for the PSD following their review.

The Review considered the existing resources around transition, particularly the *Transitioning from Primary to Secondary* resource and the *Autism Spectrum Disorders: Planning a successful transition to secondary school* program, which have been developed by the Department to assist schools to support students with disabilities to transition from primary to secondary school. While the principles and desired outcomes that guide effective transition planning for students without disabilities also apply to students living with them, some students with disabilities may have more complex transition requirements. A school may need to consider matters such as family engagement, SSSOs' advice and engagement, or orientation and transition programs.

The Review considers that short-term transitional funding to secondary schools could be provided for students who are ineligible for the PSD following the Year 6–7 review. This short-term funding would give schools increased capacity to plan and support students'

transition to secondary school, and put in place strategies to build students' independence and skills in the first year of secondary school, consistent with the *Transitioning from Primary to Secondary resource and the Autism Spectrum Disorders: Planning a successful transition to secondary school* program. Further, the Review considers that the establishment of the new 17 areas and the multi-disciplinary teams as part of the *Learning Places* agenda provides another opportunity to deliver team around the learner support for every student who is ineligible for the PSD following the Year 6-7 review and is transitioning to secondary school, as per Recommendation 9 of this Review. This support would assist schools to identify the individual needs of each student and inform and coordinate decisions about the use of any additional funding to ensure a successful transition.

In the longer term, the Review considers that a new funding model could be developed that minimises the need for, and negative impact of, a formal review of funding eligibility at Year 6-7 through the implementation of a strength-based, functional needs approach to assessing eligibility into the program (see Chapter 7). Collectively the new approach to inclusive education and a new approach to funding and support as recommended in this Review will work to address concerns over the Year 6-7 review in the long term.

Finding 11

The Year 6-7 review is currently required to reassess eligibility into the PSD and there would not be significant benefits in moving the timing of the review to a Year 5-6 or Year 7-8 review.

Recommendation 13

Consider providing interim funding for students transitioning from Year 6 who are no longer eligible for targeted PSD funding, to provide additional support as part of a coordinated multi-disciplinary approach.

Recommendation 14

Design and implement a new funding model, based on functional needs, that removes the requirement for the Year 6-7 review process.

5.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter considered the appropriateness of the Year 6-7 review as a process to review eligibility for targeted funding over time. While stakeholders have noted a range of concerns with the process, the Review has not found significant benefits in removing the process or adjusting its timing back to Year 5-6 or forward to Year 7-8 in the short term. The Review recommends the adoption of a strength-based, functional needs assessment to determining eligibility for targeted funding (see Chapter 7) which would lessen the current concerns of the Year 6-7 review in the long term.



6. MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM AND WITH DYSLEXIA

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The Terms of Reference directed the Review to examine the future capacity of the government school education system and the role of the PSD in meeting the specific needs of students with autism and dyslexia. Autism and dyslexia are two different disabilities and students with these disabilities need and receive different forms of support to participate in school. This chapter:

- examines how the current system meets the needs of students with autism and examines the available evidence to identify areas for improvement
- documents how students with dyslexia are currently supported in schools and where the evidence gathered suggests there is scope to better support students.

6.2 CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS FOR STUDENTS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

This section provides contextual information about autism, how it impacts students and the current supports available to assist students on the autism spectrum to participate in school.

6.2.1 THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

Autism is a life-long disability that affects people's social and communication skills. The autism spectrum covers a wide range of individual strengths and needs, although there are some generic characteristics, including difficulties with social communication, imagination and social interaction (Autism New Zealand n.d.). Some students may also display repetitive or obsessive behavioural patterns. Students with autism may also have strong creative and cognitive skills and exceptionalities that can enable them to achieve academic and professional success (Australian Advisory Board on ASD 2011).

'There are no systems in place to identify at risk children early. Some don't even know what dyslexia is. My boy does not have an intellectual disability. He is smart, but he shouldn't be at a disadvantage because his struggle doesn't stem from low IQ.'

Parent

'More support is needed for students on the high functioning end of the autism spectrum. They often don't meet the strict criteria due to assessment score cut-offs, yet are a group that require individualised support if they are to succeed in a mainstream setting.'

Teacher

MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM AND WITH DYSLEXIA

6.2.2 SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM

While the PSD provides targeted funding for most students with autism, not all students on the autism spectrum meet the eligibility guidelines. The PSD criteria for autism require a diagnosis in addition to two indicators of student need, and demonstrated deficits in adaptive behaviour⁹ and language skills. Children and young people who are assessed as being on the autism spectrum can have a wide variety of strengths and needs, despite having the same diagnosis. Up to 90 per cent of children and young people with autism may have additional conditions (co-morbidity), such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, epilepsy and obsessive compulsive disorder (O'Connor et al. 2015).

While the majority of students with autism are currently captured within the existing PSD eligibility criteria (0.9 per cent of all student enrolments), not all students with autism receive targeted PSD support because the focus of the PSD is on students with moderate to high educational adjustment needs. This results in a number of students who have a diagnosis of autism but do not meet the existing eligibility criteria (such as students with stronger adaptive behaviour or language skills). However, these students may still require additional support in school.

⁹ Adaptive behaviour scales measure the personal and social skills of individuals from birth through to adulthood. Tests of adaptive behaviour and language are standardised assessments administered by qualified professionals, including psychologists.

6.2.3 SCHOOL-BASED CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENTS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

As do many students with disabilities, students on the autism spectrum may face a range of challenges in the school context and benefit from additional support.

As a result of the challenges they experience, some students present with a range of behaviours of concern, which can be difficult for teachers to manage or understand. These behaviours are a child's communication, coping or reactive responses to their distress or extreme discomfort in a specific situation. It is important that schools and teachers, while ensuring duty of care for all, are able to see the presenting behaviour as a form of communication and a function of the student's needs and experiences. Supporting students with behaviours of concern requires understanding, planning and strategies that are evidence based, focus on positive behaviour support and ensure the safety and dignity of all.

6.3 OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE IN-SCHOOL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

This section outlines findings about how well the current education system is supporting students on the autism spectrum and identifies opportunities for improvement. The findings and recommendations in this section are based on:

- extensive consultation
- two detailed literature reviews to identify best practice educational support for students with autism
- analysis of written submissions provided by parents and teachers.

Overall the Review found that there are a number of opportunities to improve the capacity of schools to support students on the autism spectrum. These are discussed below.

6.3.1 BEST PRACTICE APPROACHES

A review of available literature identified that characteristics of best-practice approaches for supporting children and young people on the autism spectrum include:

- early assessment and intervention
- intensive behavioural interventions
- specific teaching strategies
- ongoing assessment and monitoring
- the active involvement of teachers, families and para-professionals

- multi-agency collaboration
- transition planning¹⁰ (Sharma et.al 2015b).

There is a strong view that generalisations about every child on the autism spectrum can be unhelpful, as each child or young person is likely to have different needs.

A review of the literature, supported by stakeholder views, identified that to effectively support all students with autism, teachers need to have knowledge and understanding of autism, as well as an understanding of the specific learning and functional needs for each student. Additionally, teachers need intensive and informed support around the key challenges that a particular child may experience with their social and communication interactions with peers and others.

However, according to many stakeholders and the written submissions from parents, not all Victorian schools consistently use evidence-based interventions when trying to manage behaviours of concern related to students with disabilities, including students with autism. Several stakeholders observed that schools use ineffective or inappropriate interventions to resolve these behavioural challenges, rather than adopting a solution-based response that is informed by an understanding of why the student is displaying that behaviour.

¹⁰ Transition planning refers to the process of drawing together information from a range of individuals and settings beyond the current school/setting, in order to plan coherently for a student's transition. Students on the autism spectrum can find change difficult and extra attention needs to be given to their transition into schools and from Year 6 to Year 7, and if they change schools.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM AND WITH DYSLEXIA

6.3.2 BUILDING SCHOOL CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY

Stakeholders suggested that to build school and teacher abilities to support students on the autism spectrum, schools need access to professionals with specialist skills in supporting staff and young people with autism and whose behaviour is of concern to the school and their family. These staff would have high-level skills, a deep knowledge of autism and disability in general, functional behaviour analysis and positive behaviour support.

Stakeholders identified existing initiatives and relationships that could be strengthened to better support students on the autism spectrum in schools.

- Wider implementation of the Autism Connect initiative. Autism Connect is a service open to all schools in the North Western Victoria Region. The program aims to develop the capacity of school staff to support the needs of students with a diagnosis of autism in mainstream primary and secondary school settings. Autism Connect

Service Providers have a high level of expertise in this area and staff with exemplary practice in the field of supporting students with autism. Autism Connect Service Providers have a range of supports available, including professional learning opportunities, consultation in relation to ILPs or behaviour management plans, and teacher mentoring to develop a broader range of strategies to support students with autism. Once a support request has been submitted, there is a telephone consultation with a member of the Autism Connect Intake Team. Following this support requests may then be referred to an Autism Connect Service Provider.

- Build upon existing partnerships and agreements with AMAZE and other autism disability service providers, to enhance the access of schools to high-level expertise and advice regarding children and young people on the autism spectrum. Recent work in a number of schools to strengthen their autism-related practices provides a good example of ways these partnerships could be leveraged for more systemic reform.

Finding 12

Stakeholders report that there is variable use of evidence-based intervention approaches within Victorian government schools to respond to behaviours of concern related to students on the autism spectrum.

Recommendation 15

Make available ongoing autism-specific disability training and access to specialist support and expertise, particularly in relation to evidence-based approaches to respond to the specific learning needs of students on the autism spectrum, for example through:

- expanding the role of autism-specific schools to include greater outreach and support (see Recommendation 7)
- including allied health professionals or specialist teachers with expertise in autism in the new area multidisciplinary teams to support schools and individual students
- developing specific resources and teacher support material for supporting students with autism and high-level communication, social and behavioural challenges
- establishing partnerships with non-government organisations that provide support for students with autism.

6.3.3 SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS NOT ELIGIBLE FOR TARGETED PSD FUNDING

As noted earlier in this chapter, while the majority of students on the autism spectrum in schools are currently captured within the existing targeted PSD eligibility criteria, not all students with an autism diagnosis are eligible for targeted PSD funding. According to stakeholders, many of the students on the autism spectrum who are ineligible for targeted PSD funding do experience significant problems at school and struggle with communication and social challenges within the school environment. These problems often increase as students enter secondary school and it is not uncommon for young people to experience mental health and general wellbeing problems.

Stakeholders suggested that the creation of an inclusive education culture (see Chapter 3) and providing schools with the information and necessary resourcing could enable more responsive and individually appropriate adjustments to the needs of students with autism who are not identified through the targeted PSD but would benefit from less intensive adjustments.

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Finding 13

Stakeholders report that students on the autism spectrum who are not supported under targeted PSD funding are not consistently well supported in their specific needs by all schools.

Recommendation 16

Consider providing additional resourcing to schools to better meet the educational needs of students with autism, dyslexia and learning disabilities who are not eligible for the PSD, for example through the expansion of the Language Support Program.

6.3.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The built environment also plays an important role in supporting inclusive education, including for students on the autism spectrum. The research indicates that, as far as possible, it is important to ensure that all the elements of the indoor physical environment that may affect a student's ability to learn are optimal.

Learners who spend time in well-designed, well-maintained classrooms that are comfortable, well lit, reasonably quiet, and properly ventilated with healthy air, will learn more efficiently and enjoy their educational experiences. In such environments, teachers will also be healthier, happier and more effective as educators. Good design benefits all learners (Mitchell 2015). Flexible workspaces also play an important role as they help to facilitate flexible grouping and differentiated instruction by allowing for whole class, small-group and individual instruction.

Students with autism may have particular built environment needs as they may require access to personal spaces that are calm, ordered and low-stimulus (and an absence of confusing large spaces). In addition, they may need safe indoor and outdoor places for withdrawal and to calm down (Vogel 2008 in Mitchell 2015). Fluorescent lighting can also be problematic for learners with autism or for those with photosensitive epilepsy (Anshel 2000 in Mitchell 2015).

The Review notes that as part of the Special Needs Plan the Government has committed that all newly built government schools—or schools undertaking planning works—will be required to provide facilities to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities, and that the work to deliver this commitment is ongoing. Similarly, the Review notes that as part of the Special Needs Plan the Government has launched a new \$10 million Inclusive Schools Fund, to help existing government schools better support the social and educational needs of students with disabilities. When taken together, the Review considers that these initiatives will help to develop a built environment that works to support inclusive education and that these initiatives should continue to be developed and implemented.

Finding 14

The built environment plays an important role in supporting inclusive education for students with disabilities, including students on the autism spectrum.

Recommendation 17

Continue the rollout and implementation of the Special Needs Plan commitments to require all new schools to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities and the delivery of the \$10 million Inclusive Schools Fund to improve existing schools.



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6.4 CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS FOR STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA

This section outlines findings about how well the current education system is supporting students with dyslexia and identifies opportunities for improvement. As with students on the autism spectrum, the Review found that there are a number of opportunities to improve the capacity of schools to support students with dyslexia.

6.4.1 IDENTIFYING STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA

Dyslexia is described as a neurological difficulty that makes it difficult for an individual to accurately and fluently read and write.

It can be difficult to accurately identify students with dyslexia and their specific needs to ensure that they receive support. Dyslexia lies on a continuum and a cut-off in a standardised test to indicate a diagnosis is arbitrary. While it is estimated that one in 10 children has dyslexia, estimates vary depending on how it is defined (Quach et al. 2015).

6.4.2 CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA

Students with dyslexia may struggle to decode words, have slow or laboured reading, and may have difficulty in understanding text. No two individuals with dyslexia have similar learning profiles. Depending on the severity of the condition, students with dyslexia could have mild to significant learning adjustment needs (Sharma et al. 2015a).

Dyslexia may affect a student's reading comprehension, vocabulary development, writing and spelling. Current research suggests that dyslexia is a persistent, life-long condition, so these difficulties do not diminish as the student grows older or through practice.

Dyslexia is associated with a number of negative impacts on academic success, self-esteem and confidence as a learner (Quach et al. 2015). For instance, adolescents with dyslexia are more likely to drop out of school and not pursue tertiary education (Mitchell 2015). Students with dyslexia can experience bullying and difficulties with peer relationships and are at risk of emotional problems, including anxiety and depression.

6.4.3 SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA

The PSD does not target funding to students with dyslexia. Instead students with dyslexia are expected to be supported through a school's SRP and quality differentiated teaching practice. This is consistent with the approaches taken in other states and territories, where support for students with dyslexia is mostly available through general funding to schools to support students with learning difficulties (Sharma et al. 2015a).

While targeted funding is not available for students with dyslexia, the Department provides additional resources to schools to build the capacity, knowledge and skills of teachers and school communities so that they can better identify and support children and young people with learning difficulties and dyslexia. This support is provided in the following ways.

- **The Language Support Program (LSP):** The LSP funding is considered a part of the broader PSD. The LSP provides schools with resources to support the delivery of teaching and learning programs for students with language disorders. Funding amounts provided to schools through the SRP, are calculated based on numbers of students by 'stage of school' between Prep and Year 9, and a further allocation is provided for schools with a high ranking on the Student Family Occupation Index. The intention of the LSP funding is set out in the SRP guidelines: to support the delivery of teaching and learning programs for students with language disorders.

- **The national inclusion online professional learning program— understanding dyslexia and significant difficulties in reading:** The program is available at no cost to all Victorian government schools. Over 2900 school staff have participated in this training to date, suggesting there is scope to increase participation.
- **The Department's reading difficulties and dyslexia website:** The website provides practical assessments for teachers to identify the nature of a student's reading difficulty and outlines focused teaching strategies to support the development of a student's reading.¹¹
- **The Department's website:** The website includes a page for parents that provides strategies for supporting students at home, and establishing positive relationships with schools.¹²

While all of these resources are available, their uptake and use may require more systemic support, as explored in the next section.

¹¹ This resource can be accessed at: www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/english/reading/Pages/default.aspx

¹² This webpage is available from www.education.vic.gov.au/school/parents/learning/Pages/Dyslexia.aspx

MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM AND WITH DYSLEXIA

Case study: Supporting students with dyslexia at Bentleigh West Primary School

Bentleigh West Primary School found that past approaches had not worked well to support students with dyslexia. The school's response was to introduce clear targets for these children and adopt ongoing daily explicit instruction. Intervention is tailored for both small group and individual support depending on the specific needs of the children.

The support program was developed to enable classroom teachers to facilitate the delivery of more systematic and structured processes that are inclusive of all students. The pace at which it is delivered and the repetitive nature of the program ensures that gaps in student learning are immediately identified.

Every Foundation student is benchmarked against AusVELS in English and data indicates significant growth in the older students. There is a direct increase in the levels of self-confidence in students whose previous lack of self-esteem was impacting on their learning. The ability to assess and know what the issues are for students with learning difficulties has provided much needed answers for frustrated parents. Students have an understanding of their own difficulties and teachers have the knowledge required to target explicit teaching.

The school has developed evidence-based teaching practices including Multisensory Structured Language Instruction (MSL) to support students who have learning difficulties of a dyslexic nature. Bentleigh West has supported the training of staff in the MSL approach with a small team completing the postgraduate course through the Australian Dyslexia Association (ADA).

Staff are trained in ADA's Early Screening in Transition and all children are assessed in their phonemic awareness during their first term of school. Early screening has led to the development of support programs for students who are identified as facing a potential risk of underachieving. This new data informs continual improvement to the quality and effectiveness of planning and review processes that have been aligned to support embedding the practice into culture. Staff are using the latest research to inform teaching and support student learning. They are skilled at profiling students across the school to enable clear goal setting for ILPs and target the necessary support and intervention. An explicit scope and sequence for spelling has been introduced across the school based on phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, morphology and etymology.

Weekly staff meetings focus on ongoing professional learning. Classroom observations have been introduced to support feedback and teacher practice. The professional learning of staff has broadened curriculum knowledge, particularly in the linguistic structure of the English language, and equipped teachers with skills and knowledge in using the MSL approach to inform all aspects of teaching. The innovative approach of MSL Instruction has engendered enthusiasm and confidence in staff and has led to a deeper understanding of all students

Early intervention and student profiling that is explicit, structured and systematic means that the MSL program has led to greater understanding of all its students. ILPs include student goals, which are targeted outcomes. Quality professional learning for staff has generated a sense of understanding of language-based differences of students and this in turn has led to whole-school change in the teaching of literacy.

The success of Bentleigh West demonstrates that appropriately timed interventions, support and professional learning for teachers, and appropriate accountability settings, encourage schools to tailor support students with dyslexia to achieve positive outcomes.

6.5 OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE IN SCHOOL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA

This section outlines evidence gathered through the literature reviews on best practice support for students with dyslexia and stakeholder views on the adequacy of the current system.

6.5.1 BEST PRACTICE APPROACHES

Academic studies have identified that inclusive schooling interventions can have positive outcomes for students with dyslexia, and can lead to stronger academic outcomes, better social and emotional health, and greater participation in the classroom (O'Connor et. al 2015).

According to stakeholders, for most students with dyslexia the most powerful form of adjustment is early identification followed by tailored, evidence-based and differentiated pedagogy. Consequently, it is essential that teachers are aware of and able to tailor their teaching approach so it is effective for students with dyslexia. Schools also need access to materials and print matter in alternative or adjusted formats, develop special measures in assessment processes and acquire an understanding of the impact that dyslexia may have on a student's sense of wellbeing.

Recognising the importance of early identification, the Government's Special Needs Plan for Victorian Schools includes a commitment to 'investigate an early years screening program for learning disorders'. The Review notes that this investigation is ongoing.

Finding 15

Best practice support for students with dyslexia includes early identification and differentiated teaching approaches. An investigation into an early years screening program is currently underway as part of the Special Needs Plan.

Recommendation 18

Complete the investigation into an early years screening program for learning disorders.

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6.5.2 BUILDING SCHOOL CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY TO BETTER SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA

Despite the online resources the Department has made available about dyslexia (outlined above), there is concern among some stakeholders that although these resources provide valuable information and training opportunities for school staff and school communities, more could be done to put in place appropriate intervention and teaching strategies.

Stakeholders expressed concern that although these resources are available, schools are not consistently aware of them or how to adapt their teaching to support students with dyslexia to develop their reading. More critically, the peak body for people with dyslexia (SPELD) has suggested that within the school system there are areas of under-diagnosis, a misunderstanding of students with dyslexia, and an inability or unwillingness to support students with dyslexia.

According to SPELD this lack of support in schools is linked to students with learning difficulties being overrepresented as early school leavers, as well as within Victoria's prisons and mental health systems (SPELD Victoria n.d.).

Stakeholders identified there is an opportunity for the Department to enhance the access of schools to high-level expertise and advice around children and young people with dyslexia and other learning difficulties by building upon existing partnerships and agreements with SPELD and other learning difficulty peak bodies and organisations.

Finding 16

Stakeholder feedback suggests that students with dyslexia are not consistently supported in schools. Some teachers require professional development to be able to adapt their teaching to support students with dyslexia.

Recommendation 19

Raise awareness and encourage schools and teachers to participate in the available online training on supporting students with dyslexia.

Recommendation 20

Develop and implement a dyslexia and learning difficulties strategy, including providing ongoing disability-specific training to lift workforce capability to understand and teach students with learning difficulties and dyslexia.

6.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter considered the capacity of the current school system to support students on the autism spectrum and students with dyslexia into the future. Overall, the Review identified a number of opportunities to improve the capacity of schools to support students with autism and students with dyslexia. Evidence suggests that schools do not consistently use evidence-based interventions when trying to support the learning needs of these students.

In particular, there is scope to improve the awareness of all schools and teachers about evidence-based approaches to support students with autism and students with dyslexia and how to use these in the classroom. This could be achieved by providing ongoing disability-specific training to lift workforce capability in order to support teachers to better understand and teach these students. This disability-specific training could be funded through an increase to the LSP component of the current PSD. A key advantage of investing in teacher development is that this would benefit all students with disabilities, whether they attract targeted funding or not. Chapter 8 provides a discussion of the key considerations and procedures for implementing these changes.



7. A NEW APPROACH TO FUNDING AND SUPPORT

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The Terms of Reference directed the Review to examine the feasibility of shifting to a strength-based, functional-needs assessment approach for students with disabilities, which is consistent with the directions of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) while taking account of the context of schooling.

This chapter begins by summarising some of the key features of the current approach to determining eligibility for PSD and allocating funding and identifies opportunities to refine the approach to allocating funding to more effectively support students with disabilities to achieve better outcomes.

'It is hoped that our approach can be shifted to a strength-based model.'

Student Service Support Officer

7.2 CURRENT APPROACH TO PSD ELIGIBILITY AND FUNDING

The current approach to determining eligibility for PSD and allocating funding is based on completion of an application containing evidence that addresses the PSD eligibility criteria. Eligibility requirements stipulate that a student must have a medically diagnosed disability that falls into one of the seven recognised categories. If an application meets the eligibility criteria of the PSD, an allocation of additional funding based on the verified ENQ will be provided as part of the SRP. Entry is based on a multi-stage process involving an initial assessment, the PSD ENQ and verification by the Department and independent professionals (see additional detail in Chapter 2).

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7.2.1 ELIGIBILITY FOR TARGETED PSD FUNDING

An assessment of the level of educational need determines the level of targeted PSD funding (for eligible students).

Recognising the differing strengths and support needs of students with disabilities, the PSD utilises an escalating support scale to determine how much additional targeted support (funding) to provide to students with moderate to severe disabilities. Students assessed to have comparatively higher support needs are allocated a higher level of funding than students with comparatively lower support needs. The PSD has six levels of support, with funding allocated to schools through the SRP. The 2016 Disabilities Levels of Support are displayed in Figure 14.

7.3 OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE FUNDING APPROACH FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The purpose of any school funding is to maximise the learning, engagement, health and wellbeing of the children and young people in schools. Drawing on the results of consultation with a range of stakeholders and a review of literature on best practice funding approaches, this Review identified a number of opportunities to refine the way funding is allocated to more effectively support students with disabilities to achieve better outcomes. The discussion below outlines a number of changes to the current approach to funding which seek to:

- address the identified deficiencies of the current approach
- leverage improved and emerging methods for identifying the needs and required supports for students with disabilities.

Figure 14: PSD targeted funding levels, 2015



Source: Department of Education and Training, 2015

7.3.1 RELATED REFORMS

The education system, and in particular the systems of support for students with disabilities, will undergo change in the near term as a result of national and state-based reforms, including:

- the rollout of the NDIS
- the findings and recommendations of the Bracks Review
- implementation of the initiatives of the Special Needs Plan for Victorian Schools
- implementation of the NCCDSSD
- the broader reforms to the Victorian education system proposed through the Victorian Government's Education State agenda.

It is likely that some of the reforms initiated from these reviews and programs will change the overall approach to funding government schools in Victoria. Other reforms will reshape the broader frameworks and systems for supporting people with disabilities. To ensure any changes to the funding arrangements to supporting students with disabilities in government schools can deliver on their intended benefits, the changes will need to draw on and be aligned to these broader reforms around funding and support.

This remainder of this section includes:

- a brief summary of the views of stakeholders and findings from research that point to deficiencies or limitations of the current system of funding

- a discussion of recommended changes to the current approach to distributing funding to support students with disabilities in government schools.

7.3.2 STAKEHOLDER VIEWS AND RESEARCH

A range of views were heard from stakeholders concerning the funding approach adopted through the PSD. A majority of these focused specifically on the current approach for assessing individual student eligibility for additional funding as part of the targeted component of the PSD. The key themes drawn from the consultation process are summarised below.

- Stakeholders expressed a concern that the current categorical approach to assessing eligibility may exclude children and young people who require learning adjustments, but who do not have a medically diagnosed disability that falls into one of the seven recognised PSD categories.
- Stakeholders questioned the suitability of the ENQ as a tool for determining the level of educational need. The views of stakeholders suggest that the scope and accuracy of the ENQ results in a level of resource allocation that does not always reflect a particular student's needs.
- Stakeholders expressed concern that the requirements for eligibility for targeted PSD funding is not consistently understood or applied across Victoria, resulting in varied PSD applications and allocations across the Victorian regions.

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- Stakeholders expressed concern that the quality of an application (rather than the level of student need) could influence whether or not an individual student is deemed eligible for targeted PSD funding. For instance, stakeholders suggested that access to the targeted PSD was in part dependent on a 'good application'.
- Stakeholders suggested that the assessment process is overly time-consuming and inefficient. It was suggested that the cost of assessment, verification and administration of the program is high and that this cost detracts from funding that could be better targeted to supporting students.

A review of the literature examining the PSD also highlighted a number of key issues with the current approach to funding, some of which are consistent with the views of stakeholders noted above. Key findings from the review of relevant literature are summarised in the points below.

- The process for allocating funding is deficit-focused (O'Connor et al. 2015; Quach et al. 2015). It focuses on identifying what students cannot do/achieve and allocates funding based on an assessment of what support they would require to meet certain benchmarks (regardless of the goals of the individual student). This is different to a strength-based approach that recognises the resilience of individuals

and focuses on the potentials, strengths, interests, abilities, knowledge and capacities of individuals, rather than their limits (Grant and Cadell 2009).

- Research suggests that the PSD's current assessment process does not necessarily relate to functional capacity due to the emphasis on a diagnosis of disability (McDonald and O'Callaghan 2015).
- There is no accountability system in place to ensure that schools are responding to the specific learning needs of students with disabilities who are not eligible for PSD funding under the current assessment approach (VEOHRC, 2012).
- The current funding approach discourages schools from regularly reassessing student needs, when the need for educational adjustments has changed (O'Connor 2015; Quach et al. 2015)

Finding 17

The current approach to assessing eligibility for funding through the targeted PSD component is costly, inconsistently understood and applied by schools, and results in inequitable funding outcomes.

7.3.3 A NEW APPROACH FOR FUNDING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Within the context of the significant reforms currently underway in the disability and education sectors, there exists an opportunity to revise the current approach to allocating funding to support students with disabilities. In the near term, it is likely that a number of significant adjustments will be made to the systems and related frameworks underpinning funding for students with disabilities. For example, the Review anticipates that the relevant advancements will include, at a minimum:

- possible adjustments to the conceptual design features and funding allocation approach of the SRP driven by the future Government response to the Bracks Review, which focuses in particular on how the SRP targets funding to student need
- improvements in the available collections of data on students with disabilities due to the rollout of the NDIS and advancements in the NCCDSSD.

To ensure that students with disabilities are effectively supported in schools, a new approach to funding needs to be designed in a way that takes into account the implications of these broader reforms.

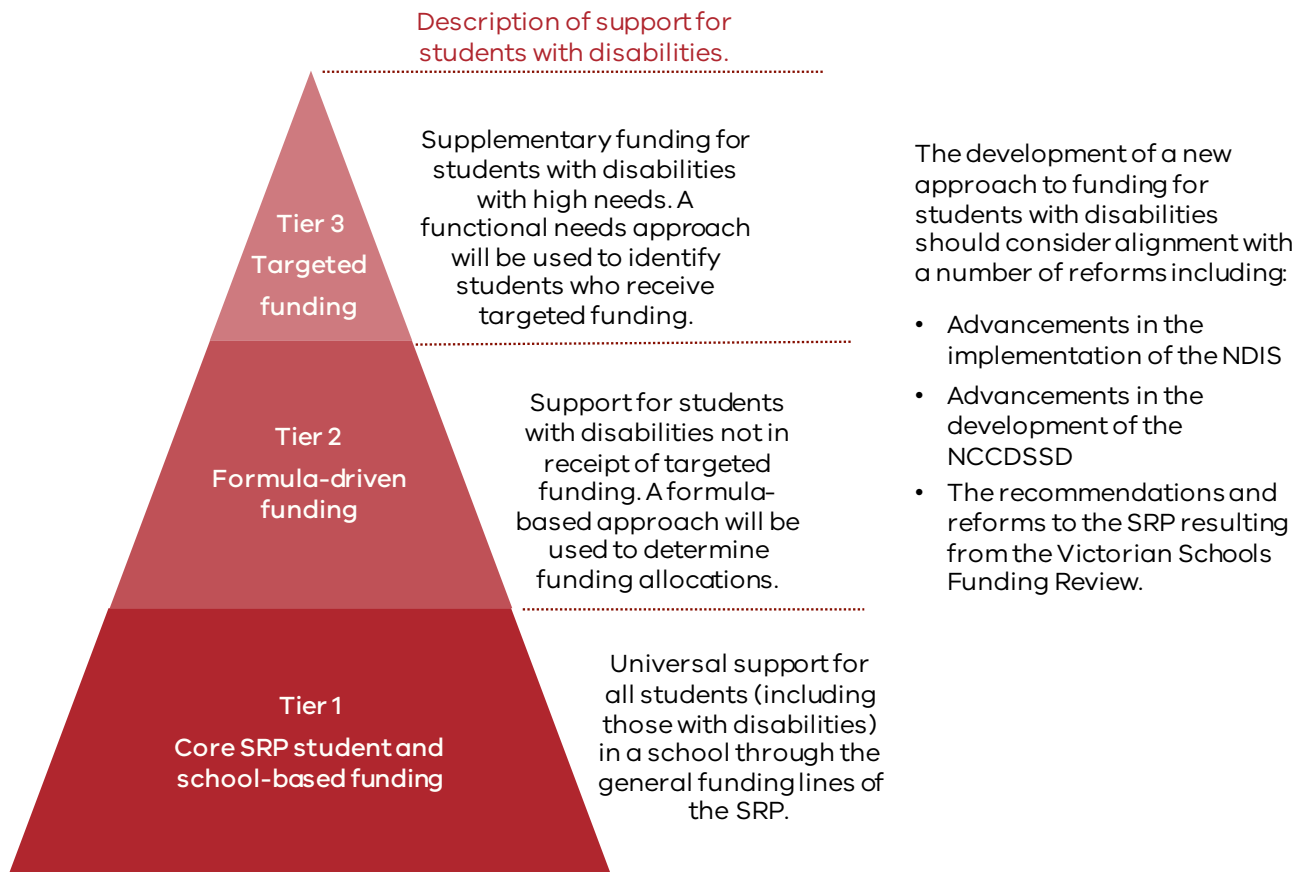
In an attempt to address the identified shortcomings of the current approach, the Review has developed preliminary features of a proposed revised model for allocating funding to support students with disabilities. This focuses specifically on the processes for assessing eligibility and student need. This preliminary outline of a revised funding model is intended to be built upon by the Department as the emerging features of the NDIS, NCCDSSD and Victorian Government education reforms develop.

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7.3.4 FUNDING MODEL FEATURES

Drawing on a review of literature regarding options for the design of education funding models, the Review has developed a high-level conceptual framework to guide the revision of funding for students with disabilities in Victoria. This framework is based on three tiers of funding, as illustrated in Figure 15.

Figure 15: High-level conceptual framework for a revised approach to funding for students with disabilities



Under this framework, students with the greatest need for support will be allocated more funding through the revised model than students with lower levels of need. A brief description of the three tiers of the revised funding framework is provided below.

Tier 1: core SRP student and school-based funding

The basis of funding for schooling for all students, including those with disabilities, will continue to be provided through the core student and school-based allocation mechanisms of the SRP, and would provide for reasonable adjustments.

Tier 2: formula-driven funding

A second tier of support sits within the equity bands and will provide additional funding to support students with disabilities requiring low-level adjustments through a formula. This second tier would be based on a formula and therefore would not require a formal eligibility and verification process, while providing a sustainable and predictable funding mechanism. A second tier of funding recognises the additional learning and support needs of a broader cohort of students with disabilities in need of an educational adjustment. The Department would need to develop a formula based on a proxy for additional needs, drawing on the NCCDSSD and other available data.

Tier 3: targeted funding

The third tier of further supplementary funding is intended to provide a higher level of support for students with the greatest level of need. The Department would need to develop a revised approach to measuring student need based on a strength-based, functional needs assessment (see Section 7.3.4). This approach is in broad alignment with the NDIS and has benefits from a student perspective.

As illustrated in the figure above, the revision of the funding model should be considered in line with the advancement of a number of reforms. Further investigation is required to determine the features and parameters of the second and third tiers of funding.

Recommendation 21

Develop a new tiered funding model based on a strength-based functional needs approach to meet the needs of all students with disabilities, which includes:

- base funding—allocated to all schools for all students
- teaching and learning loading—allocated to schools to support students with disabilities who require reasonable adjustments
- targeted funding—allocated to schools to support students with disabilities and high education adjustment needs.

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7.3.5 FUNDING MODEL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Developing a new approach to funding for students with disabilities will be supported by a number of processes, including:

- a process to identify student needs within an educational context and the appropriate level of support required
- a process to map the outcomes of the assessments of student needs to funding allocations across the three tiers.

A key consideration in the design of these processes will be alignment with the funding model principles. The Review has developed the following design principles to underpin the reform of the current approach to funding students with disabilities.

Future funding for students with disabilities in Victoria should:

- promote improved student outcomes
- promote inclusive education
- be equitable, so students receive educational adjustments on a needs basis
- be transparent
- require schools to be accountable for its use
- avoid perverse incentives (such as overestimating student needs to attract higher levels of funding)
- minimise eligibility and re-eligibility costs

- minimise the hidden cost of paperwork and reporting
- allow schools flexibility
- encourage school innovation
- provide funding predictability for schools
- contribute to the Department's ability to meet legislative responsibilities.

It will also be necessary to model the financial impact on students and schools of applying the new approach. The new approach could provide a more predictable and sustainable funding model for the Government. A detailed understanding of the impact of the new approach requires a definition of the group who would be assessed for funding through Tiers 2 and 3. The size of the group will be defined by a strength-based functional education needs assessment and other supporting student or school level data such as the NCCDSSD. It is likely a number of methodologies under Tiers 2 and 3 will need to be developed and tested by the Department.

7.3.6 THE NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME

The NDIS is expected to be fully implemented in Victoria by 2020. The aim of the NDIS is to support the independence and social and financial participation of people with disabilities.

The NDIS intake and planning process identifies what is needed for an individual on the basis of how well that person can

take part in everyday activities (Australian Government 2013). With the introduction of the NDIS, there will be an increasing expectation that disability support approaches are tailored to an individual's abilities and goals and the supports they need to remove the barriers to full and active participation, while maximising choice and control.

The implications of emerging reforms on the design of the revised funding approach are discussed in further detail in the subsections below.

The NDIS approach to assessing need

The NDIS uses a combination of medical diagnosis and functional needs assessment to determine eligibility. The NDIS requires a disability to be permanent, and to fit into one or more of intellectual, cognitive, neurological, sensory or physical impairments, or to one or more impairments attributable to a psychiatric condition.

The NDIS also requires that any impairment identified would result in a substantially reduced capacity to function independently, as well as a reduced capacity for social and economic participation. A strength-based, functional needs assessment will be required for those identified as having a disability in one or more of the impairment categories.

The NDIS is adopting a 'strength-based' assessment approach that considers the functional impact of a disability, which means that functional goals, outcomes, milestones, regular reviews and flexibility will form part of the support process. This kind of strength-based assessment and planning is clearer and easier to understand (McDonald and O'Callaghan 2015).

The NDIS strength-based, functional needs assessment approach is aligned to WHO's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). The ICF is a tool for measuring health and disability of individuals and populations. It focuses on function and strengths rather than disability, and can be flexible, helping to meet the needs of children with a range of diagnoses (O'Connor et al. 2015).

However, the NDIS's approach to strength-based, functional needs assessment is still evolving. Currently providers can utilise the functional assessment tool of their choice, so long as they provide the NDIA with the evidence of functional outcomes against the goals in the client's plan from the provider. There is no specific functional assessment tool prescribed by the NDIA. Consequently, while a future approach to determining whether students with disabilities are eligible for targeted funding can broadly align with the general principles of the NDIS approach, a specific assessment tool will need to be developed in order to adopt a strength-based, functional needs approach.

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Alignment of PSD with the National Disability Insurance Scheme

The relationship between services provided by the NDIS and school education systems is still evolving as the NDIS is rolled out across Victoria from 1 July 2016 across 16 geographical areas, in addition to the trial site in Barwon. The first area to roll out will be the North Eastern Melbourne area, comprising the local government areas of Banyule, Darebin, Nillumbik, Whittlesea and Yarra. This will be followed by the Central Highlands in March 2017 and Loddon in May 2017, with the rest of Victoria following until full scheme rollout is achieved in 2019.

The Department has four programs in scope for the NDIS—the Students with Disabilities Transport Program, attendant care in schools, Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS), and flexible support packages (which is an early childhood family support program). ECIS will transition into the NDIS by area during the planned rollout schedule starting 1 July 2016.

The NDIS is expected to mature over the rollout period of three years, including the development of greater clarity on the scope of eligibility.

It is intended that the NDIS will provide a range of support services for school-aged children and young people with disabilities, **but exclude services related to their education and training**. The NDIS will provide personal care and support, transport to and from school, and specialist supports for the transition from school to training or employment (Sharma et al. 2015a; Sharma et al. 2015b).

While the NDIS has not developed or specified a specific strength-based, functional needs assessment tool, aligning the way government schools are funded to support students with disabilities with the strength-based, functional needs approach could potentially make it easier for families and practitioners to collect the relevant evidence to support eligibility assessment under the NDIS and in government schools.

There are a number of benefits from aligning the approach government schools take to assessing student needs to the approach used under the NDIS. This would assist parents and families to navigate services and supports in and out of school, reduce the administrative burden for families, carers and students, provide a holistic approach to meeting the health and education needs of students with disabilities, and may make the assessment process more efficient.

There are however a range of differences between the NDIS and the needs of students with disabilities in government schools, which may limit potential alignment with the NDIS, including:

- differences between the support required at home and school
- the support government schools (and PSD) give refugee and international students, which is not given by the NDIS
- the number of students covered by the current PSD who are also eligible for the NDIS.

Despite these limitations, the significant benefits of philosophical and principle-based alignment with the NDIS eligibility and assessment process mean the default position of the Department should be to align with the NDIS as much as possible, except in instances where there is a need for divergence or where the NDIS does not align with the Department's obligations to Victorian students and families. This will ultimately assist parents and families to navigate services and supports in and out of school, reduce the burden for families, carers and students, and provide a holistic approach to meeting the health and education needs of students with disabilities. Ongoing liaison with the NDIA is required to pursue this objective.

Finding 18

There are a number of benefits from aligning the approach taken to assessing student needs to the approach used under the evolving the NDIS. This would assist parents and families to navigate services and supports in and out of school, reduce the administrative burden for families, carers and students, provide a holistic approach to meeting the health and education needs of students with disabilities, and may make the assessment process more efficient.

Recommendation 22

Develop a formal relationship with the National Disability Insurance Agency to ensure maximum alignment with the NDIS as it evolves, including consistency and sharing of information and professional insight where possible.

7.3.7 A STRENGTH-BASED, FUNCTIONAL NEEDS APPROACH TO ASSESSING STUDENT NEED AND ELIGIBILITY FOR PSD FUNDING

The targeted PSD currently relies on eligibility criteria, based on diagnostic categories, to determine funding eligibility. While this approach has been successful in understanding funding requirements for particular cohorts of students with high needs, its capacity to reflect broader educational need is limited. In effect, this means that the current categorical approach to eligibility may exclude some students who require learning adjustments, but who do not have a formally diagnosed disability of the specified type.

A strength-based, functional needs-based assessment approach, by contrast, would seek to provide a way of assessing a student's learning and education requirements without the need for formal diagnosis. A functional education needs assessment distinguishes between the disability and its influence on the individual's learning needs, and the role of the environment on an individual's function (Simeonsson 2003). In an education context, a functional education needs assessment considers four domains of a child or young person:

- bodily functions and structures (for example, intellectual capacities, physical impairments)
- ability to perform activities of daily living independently (for example, ability to manage self-care skills such as toileting independently)

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- social participation (for example, interaction with peers)
- educational participation (for example, school attendance).

These domains are complex, overlap and interrelate. For example, factors relating to bodily function will be linked to a child or young person's educational participation, such as their capacity to access a mainstream curriculum (O'Connor et al. 2015; Quach et al. 2015).

A 'strength-based' approach to functional needs assessment is one that supports the aspirations, strengths and capacities of students with disabilities. This approach has a focus on how best to maximise independence and achievement rather than an exclusive concentration on the limitations related to their disability.

Finding 19

Implementation of a strength-based, functional needs approach in the process of assessing eligibility and determining funding amounts would improve the capacity of the future disability funding model to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Recommendation 23

Develop and implement a strength-based, functional needs approach to assessing student need, to support the achievement and participation of students with disabilities.

Feasibility of adapting the ENQ for use in a strength-based, functional needs approach

The Review examined the feasibility of adapting the ENQ so that it could be used as the basis of a new strength-based, functional needs approach.

In its present form, the ENQ already reflects a number of the key features of a strength-based, functional needs approach. For instance, the 11 indicators used are functional areas that impact on a student's ability to participate at school. However, the ENQ has a number of limitations that would require significant adjustment for it to be suitable for use as a functional tool.

One key limitation is the language used by the current ENQ. At present, the descriptions of the levels of impairment used for scoring in the ENQ are deficit focused and would require adjustment. Ideally, these descriptions would focus on the student's abilities rather than describing impairments. As an example of the current use of language, descriptions in the ENQ include 'the student is clumsy' and 'the student has no understanding of simple one-word commands using either voice, visual or gestural cues'.

In addition, the PSD eligibility criteria and ENQ do not adequately identify and address the breadth of needs of students with challenging behaviours currently presenting in schools. Comprehensive strategies are required to build the capacity of schools to support students with challenging behaviours, along with flexible and timely access to specialist expertise and resources.

While extensive changes to the ENQ could address some of these issues, the Review notes that an entirely new approach may need to be developed. There are a variety of other jurisdictional approaches being used that should be considered alongside any potential adaptation of the ENQ and that could inform work to develop a new strength-based, functional needs approach for Victoria, as detailed below.

Case study: Functional needs approach—NSW PLASST

NSW Personalised Learning and Support Signposting Tool

The NSW Personalised Learning and Support Signposting Tool (PLASST) is a web-based tool developed by the NSW Department of Education and Communities to assist teachers and learning and support teams in profiling the educational needs of students who may benefit from personalised learning and support.

The PLASST generates a student profile report for an individual student in response to a set of questions completed online by their teacher. The student profile report highlights or signposts the relative strengths and needs of the student and where they may benefit from adjustments or support. The student profile report can be used to inform decision-making and planning by teachers and learning and support teams for the provision of personalised learning and support for the student, in consultation with their parents or carers.

The PLASST is an optional tool to assist teachers in assessing the individual needs of their students. It can be used for any students teachers believe have additional learning and support needs. This includes students in regular classes as well as students in specialist settings and support classes.

The PLASST seems to be a step towards a non-categorical system of supporting students with disabilities based on functional needs. It is important to note that the profiling tool is not used to determine level of funding for individual students. However, the tool has the potential to be used for the purpose (Sharma et al. 2015b).

Source: Department of Education and Training, 2015

A NEW APPROACH TO FUNDING AND SUPPORT

Case study: Functional needs approach —New Zealand's ORS

New Zealand's Ongoing Resourcing Scheme

The New Zealand education system includes a targeted needs-based funding model, known as the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS). The ORS works without diagnostic criteria and a set of disability categories. Instead the ORS requires evidence of special educational need in relation to nine criteria covering the five areas of 'learning, hearing, vision, physical, language use and social communication'. To be eligible, students must have ongoing extreme or severe difficulty with any of the need areas or moderate to high difficulty with learning, combined with very high or high needs in any two need areas.

It is important to note that evidence of disability can still be required in the ORS. For example, the hearing category requests that information be provided on the 'current audiogram showing both aided and unaided hearing' and 'age when deafness diagnosed'. Nevertheless the clear focus of the ORS is on what the child or student can do both independently and with support.

The ORS has been in operation for more than 10 years and supports a population similar in size to Victoria, although only a very small group of students (around 1 per cent, or 7000 students at any one time) who have the highest need. Most of these students have this level of need throughout their school years and hence once a student is in ORS, their funding stays with them throughout their time at school.

The ORS is designed to help students to be included alongside their peers. ORS funding is used to cover specialist services, additional teachers and teachers' aides (75 per cent of funding is used for employing teachers' aides).

The Review notes that even with a fully developed functional needs-based approach to targeted funding, the ORS still requires the following rigorous application process:

- completion of an application form (usually completed by early intervention teacher, other early intervention team member, or a registered early childhood teacher)
- a verification process to consider each application (verifiers are experienced in special education in the early childhood, primary and secondary education sectors)
- a review and appeal process when an application is declined (an appeal is a formal process made by the parent or caregiver and not the early childhood education centre or school)
- audit visits to help ORS verifiers to make sure students with similar needs get similar outcomes when they apply for ORS, no matter what school they go to or where they live.

Source: Department of Education and Training, 2015

Case Study: Functional needs approach – International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health

International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) is the world standard for conceptualising and classifying functioning and disability, agreed by the World Health Assembly in 2001, and provides a framework for organising and documenting information on functioning and disability (WHO 2001). The ICF provides a freely available technical resource, which is the international reference framework for health and disability information.

It conceptualises functioning as a 'dynamic interaction between a person's health condition, environmental factors and personal factors'. ICF provides a standard language and conceptual basis for the definition and measurement of disability, as well as classifications and codes. It integrates the major models of disability—the medical model and the social model—as a 'bio-psycho-social synthesis'. It recognises the role of environmental factors in the creation of disability, as well as the role of health conditions (Üstün et al. 2003).¹³

In the ICF, functioning and disability are dual concepts in a broad framework. 'Functioning' is the umbrella term for any or all of body functions, body structures, activities and participation. 'Disability' is the umbrella term for any or all of an impairment of body structure or function, a limitation in activities, or a restriction in participation. The ICF puts every person in an environmental context, with functioning and disability the results of the interaction between the health conditions of the person and their environment.

The ICF can be used and adapted in the educational context. The Review considers that the development of a functional needs assessment tool for Victoria should examine the ICF further to leverage this global resource.

Source: Department of Education and Training, 2015

A NEW APPROACH TO FUNDING AND SUPPORT

7.3.8 NATIONALLY CONSISTENT COLLECTION OF DATA ON SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

Australian, state and territory governments have agreed on a new approach to collecting data on school students with disability (see Section 4.4).

It is expected the NCCDSSD data collection could be a key input in the development of a formula-based funding allocation to support students with disabilities requiring low-level adjustments. In the development of the second tier of funding for the revised approach, the Department should consider the suitability of this data set in the design of inputs and parameters.

This chapter recommends reforms and outlines the features of a revised funding approach, which seeks to address the identified shortcomings of the current approach while also leveraging opportunities from emerging reforms in the disability and education sectors including the NDIS. Drawing on the results of consultation with a range of stakeholders and a review of literature on best practice funding approaches, the Review identified a number of opportunities for a significant new approach to funding and supporting students with disabilities to achieve better outcomes.

7.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter examined issues with the existing funding model and the opportunities for developing a new approach to funding and support using a strength-based functional needs approach. The purpose of any school funding model is to maximise the learning, engagement, health and wellbeing of the children and young people in schools. The literature and the views of stakeholders suggest that the current approach to assessing eligibility for funding through the targeted PSD component is costly and inconsistently understood and applied by schools, and results in inequitable funding outcomes.

8. POLICY INTO PRACTICE — OPERATIONALISING REFORM

The Terms of Reference directed the Review to provide advice on how recommendations could be implemented, including the identification of any transition implications. This chapter provides a high-level overview of the key steps and timelines required in order to improve the ability of Victorian government schools to support students with disabilities.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The Review has made recommendations that aim to improve the way in which Victoria's government school system supports students with disabilities. Some of these recommendations are focused on how the design and implementation of programs could be improved, while other recommendations are broader in scope and relate more to the overall functioning of the government school system and the systems of support for students with disabilities. The recommendations fall into a number of categories covering a number of issues:

- how to make schools inclusive for students with disabilities
- staff capability and capacity to support students with disabilities
- identification, assessment and planning for students with disabilities
- effective approaches to resourcing schools to support students with disabilities
- accountability mechanisms for achieving outcomes for students with disabilities.

It is not possible to address all of these issues at once, or in isolation of the broader reform program that is occurring. Implementation of the recommendations made throughout this report will need to be prioritised and sequenced. Some recommendations, particularly those that aim to make better use of existing resources and programs can be implemented more readily, while others such as the development of new funding and assessment approaches will require more evidence-based scoping, trialling and refining. Implementation of the suggested changes will also need to link into broader reforms underway.

POLICY INTO PRACTICE — OPERATIONALISING REFORM

8.2 OPERATIONALISATION STRATEGY

An implementation strategy is necessary to set out clear and integrated stages of work, timelines and accountability arrangements for the implementation of each recommendation. This should help to ensure that there are positive outcomes for students with disabilities as a result of the recommendations of the Review.

This section provides an overview of how the recommendations would be implemented over the short, medium and longer term. Figure 16 provides a high-level summary of the overall implementation process, including all categories of reform.

Within this overarching transition plan, there are several streams of work that will need to take place. The following sections provide more detailed information on the work program and timing for these work streams.

Figure 16: Transition to inclusive government schools that support the achievement of students with disabilities

2016: Operationalisation Strategy and leveraging existing resources

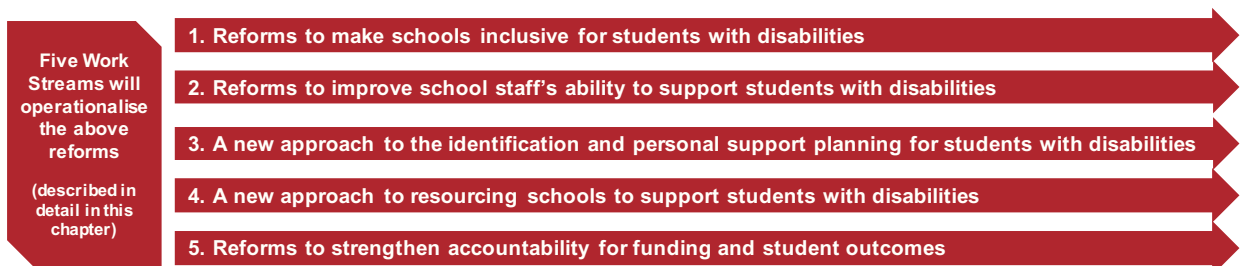
- Develop detailed implementation plan and communications plan
- Develop necessary policies, strategies and guidelines
- Expand access to and awareness of current training on working with students with disabilities
- Develop accountability measures
- Develop functional needs assessment tool and begin developing new funding approach

2017: Trial and implement changes

- Implement actions of the workforce capability strategy
- Implement actions under the Inclusive Education Policy Statement and Framework
- Release and promote personalised learning and support guidelines
- Trial and refine functional needs assessment tool and funding approach
- Implement transitional funding arrangements

2018 onwards: Inclusive government schools support students with disability to achieve

- Continual monitoring of outcomes for students with disabilities
- Statewide implementation of new approach to assessing student need and a new approach to allocating PSD funding



Source: Department of Education and Training, 2015

8.2.1 REFORMS TO MAKE SCHOOLS INCLUSIVE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

A number of changes are needed if schools are to be truly inclusive. Table 6 demonstrates the steps that could be taken to progressively improve the way Victorian government schools include students with disabilities. Developing the indicators of success and routinely

reporting on these measures will be key to tracking the impact of these changes.

Improving staff capability and capacity to support students with disabilities will also contribute to schools becoming more inclusive. Operationalisation of recommendations focused on improving staff capability are discussed on the next page.

Table 6: Operationalising reforms to make government schools inclusive for students with disabilities

1. REFORMS TO MAKE SCHOOLS INCLUSIVE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES		
2016	2017	2018 ONWARDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a policy framework that defines inclusive education, Government expectations, targeted initiatives, objectives and indicators for success. • Test the definition of 'inclusive education' with key stakeholders. • Develop supporting policy and guidance materials for inclusive education that sets out the expectations for educating students with disabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the inclusive education policy framework. • Begin capturing data and reporting on indicators for success. • Develop and implement a dyslexia and learning difficulties strategy to achieve inclusive education for these student groups. • Clarify the role of ES staff, and how they contribute to the inclusion of students with disabilities. • Undertake a feasibility study for a new Victorian Inclusive Education Institute. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the participation of students with disabilities. • Monitor the educational outcomes for students with disabilities over time to identify areas for continual improvement. • If supported, develop a business case for the new Victorian Inclusive Education Institute. • Evaluate the impact of inclusive education and the dyslexia and learning difficulties strategy. • Identify and implement areas for continual improvement.

POLICY INTO PRACTICE — OPERATIONALISING REFORM

8.2.2 REFORMS TO IMPROVE GOVERNMENT SCHOOL STAFF'S ABILITY TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The Review identified that there is scope to improve teacher capability and understanding of how to support students with disabilities. Table 7 illustrates the actions required to better prepare staff to support these students.

A workforce capability strategy needs to be developed with a clear understanding of the goals of inclusive education, as well as the capacity and capability of the current teaching workforce.

Table 7: Operationalising recommendations to improve government school staff's ability to support students with disabilities

2. REFORMS TO IMPROVE SCHOOL STAFF'S ABILITY TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES		
2016	2017	2018 onwards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand access to and promote participation in current disability-specific training already available. Develop a workforce capability strategy, which includes strategies to better leverage skills of specialist teachers and multi-disciplinary staff across schools to 'teach the teacher'. Conduct a detailed analysis to identify specific gaps with regard to supporting students with disabilities. Assess current prevalence of disability-specific qualifications and professional learning of teachers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Release a workforce capability strategy. Implement the recommendations of the workforce capability strategy, which may include development of new professional learning. Implement disability-specific training (including autism and dyslexia) that aligns with the broader workforce capability strategy. Support staff to understand how to differentiate teaching and learning approaches for students with disabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor developments in best practice educational support for students with disabilities to identify areas for continual improvement. Continue to evolve available professional learning to reflect developments in best practice. Evaluate the impact of the workforce capability strategy.

8.2.3 A NEW APPROACH TO IDENTIFICATION AND PERSONALISED SUPPORT PLANNING FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The Review identified several opportunities to improve the identification of and personal support planning for students with disabilities. Table 8 demonstrates the stages necessary in order to improve the consistency and use of evidence-based interventions in personalised support planning.

The development of a strength-based, functional needs assessment tool, a personalised support profiling tool, and a process for completing personalised planning, will be fundamental to ensuring that all students with disabilities are supported consistently, regardless of the school attended.

Table 8: Operationalising a new approach to the identification and personal support planning for students with disabilities

3. A NEW APPROACH TO IDENTIFICATION AND PERSONALISED SUPPORT PLANNING FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES		
2016	2017	2018 onwards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and validate a new personalised support profiling tool. • Develop a process for personalised learning and support that includes monitoring student outcomes. • Design and test a process for a functional needs assessment, linking to NDIS where relevant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop guidelines on personalised learning and support planning. • Consult stakeholders on proposed guidelines. • Release guidelines on personalised learning and support planning to schools along with the personalised support-profiling tool. • Trial and refine the functional needs assessment. • Inform schools on how to use the functional needs assessment tool. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review, continually improve on and update guidelines on personalised learning and support planning as more best practice research and evidence becomes available. • Implement functional needs assessment.

POLICY INTO PRACTICE — OPERATIONALISING REFORM

8.2.4 A NEW APPROACH TO RESOURCING SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The Review identified multiple opportunities to improve the way government schools are resourced to support students with disabilities. Table 9 considers how to operationalise changes to school resourcing.

Table 9: Operationalising a new approach to resourcing schools to support students with disabilities

4. A NEW APPROACH TO RESOURCING SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES		
2016	2017	2018 onwards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a business case for providing additional funding to the LSP to support students with autism, dyslexia and learning disabilities. • Design a new funding approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trial and seek feedback on the new funding approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the new funding approach.

8.2.5 REFORMS TO STRENGTHEN ACCOUNTABILITY FOR FUNDING AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

Alongside strategies to improve the way government schools are resourced and identify, plan for, and adjust their teaching approaches to support students with disabilities, there is a need to strengthen and clarify accountability arrangements. Table 10 sets out the key steps necessary to develop a stronger accountability framework.

In order to have a stronger accountability framework, it is important to clearly articulate the expected actions that all schools will take to support students with disabilities, and to develop and collect data on measures that indicate performance against these expectations.

Table 10: Operationalising changes to strengthen accountability for funding and student outcomes

5. REFORMS TO STRENGTHEN ACCOUNTABILITY FOR FUNDING AND STUDENT OUTCOMES		
2016	2017	2018 onwards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make clear the expectations on schools for educating students with disabilities. • Develop outcome measures to collect at the school level. • Consult with key stakeholders on the appropriate outcome measures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin collecting outcomes data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse outcomes data to identify areas for improvement and strengths of current approaches. • Use outcomes data to inform policy/strategy development and priorities.

8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 20

Successful implementation will require clear and integrated stages of work, timelines and accountability arrangements, including adequate resources and oversight.

Recommendation 24

The Department to provide sufficient resources to develop and implement the recommendations in the Review, including oversight and coordination through a Department-wide steering committee.

Recommendation 25

Undertake regular consultations with the education sector and the community to inform the development and implementation of the reforms and prepare all stakeholders for the changes.

9. GLOSSARY

<p>Abilities Based Learning and Education Support (ABLES)</p>	<p>A program that supports the teaching and learning of students with disabilities and additional needs. It provides a suite of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and reporting resources that assist teachers in recognising and responding to the diverse learning needs of all students, and in assessing and reporting student learning, monitoring student progress and providing accurate intervention advice.</p> <p>http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/Pages/ablesassessment.aspx</p>
<p>Autism Spectrum Disorder</p>	<p>Diagnosis that is given to an individual if they present with abnormal behaviours in social interaction and communication, as well as if they exhibit restricted and repetitive patterns of interest and activities.</p>
<p>Categorical approach</p>	<p>Approach used to categorise children and young people according to a list of health conditions that are chronic in nature and assume that students who carry these diagnoses are in need of additional support.</p>
<p>Disability Discrimination Act 1992, Section 32</p>	<p>Legislation that means education providers must comply with the Disability Standards for Education. To comply, an education provider must make 'reasonable adjustments' to accommodate students with disabilities.</p>
<p>Disability Standards for Education 2005</p>	<p>Benchmarks for education and training providers with which all Victorian government schools must comply. These benchmarks include the right to comparable access, services and facilities, and the right to participate in education and training unimpeded by discrimination, including on the basis of stereotyped beliefs about the abilities and choices of students with disabilities.</p>

Dyslexia	A language-based learning disability of neurological origin that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling. It is frequently associated with difficulties in phonological processing. It occurs across the range of intellectual abilities with no distinct cut-off points. It is viewed as a lifelong disability that often does not respond as expected to best-practice, evidence-based classroom methods for teaching reading.
Educational Needs Questionnaire (ENQ)	A tool used to establish a student's level of educational need and the resources that will be provided to the school once it has been established that the student is eligible for the PSD. http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/needs/Pages/disabilityprogram.aspx
Functional needs assessment approach	A focus that is primarily on the child or young person and their individual needs within their daily environments, rather than on the medical diagnosis.
Individual Learning Plan (ILP) or Individual Education Plan (IEP)	Plans that articulates a student's educational, social and behavioural needs and how the re-engagement program, together with the enrolling school and other support services, will address these. http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/participation/Pages/reengageplans.aspx
Inclusive education	Education that addresses and responds to the diversity of the needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education.
Multi-tiered System of Support Framework	Evidence-based teaching practices and intervention that is scaled progressively to support students at risk of falling behind their cohorts in learning and performance.
Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCDSSD)	An annual count of the number of students with disabilities who receive educational adjustments to support their participation in education on the same basis as students without disability.

9. GLOSSARY

Student Support Group (SSG)	<p>A partnership in the education planning process between parent/s, student and school that will continue throughout the student’s school life. A SSG should operate for all students with disabilities and additional learning needs.</p> <p>http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/oohcsupp.aspx</p>
Student Resource Package (SRP)	<p>A funding model that was introduced for Victorian government schools in 2005 to bring about improvement in learning outcomes for students. The SRP funding model continues for schools in 2016.</p> <p>http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/finance/Pages/srp.aspx</p>
Year 6–7 Review	<p>A review of eligibility and funding levels for students with more moderate educational and support needs that is conducted in the final year of primary schooling.</p>
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	<p>An approach to learning that involves planning and delivering programs with the needs of all students in mind from the outset. It applies to all facets of education from curriculum, assessment and pedagogy to classroom and school design.</p>

10. ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABLES	Abilities Based Learning and Education Support
ADA	Australian Dyslexia Association
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
AusVELS	The Victorian school curriculum
ECIS	Early Childhood Intervention Services
ENQ	Educational Needs Questionnaire
ES	Education Support
ETRA	Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)
FISO	Framework for Improving Student Outcomes
ICF	International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health
IEP	Individual Education Plan
ILP	Individual Learning Plan
LSP	Language Support Program
MSL	Multisensory Structured Language Instruction
NAATD	National Association of Teachers of the Deaf
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy
NCCDSSD	Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
ORS	Ongoing Resourcing Scheme
PLASST	Personalised Learning and Support Signposting Tool
PSD	Program for Students with Disabilities
SRP	Student Resources Package
SSG	Student Support Group
SSSO	Student Support Services Officers
TAL	Team Around the Learner
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
VAGO	Victorian Auditor General's Office
VEOHRC	Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
WHO	World Health Organisation

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APPENDIX A: EXPERT ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

PSD Review Project Board

The PSD Review Project Board consisted of 10 members representing key areas of the Department:

- Strategy and Review Group
- Infrastructure and Finance Services Group
- People and Executive Services Group
- Early Childhood and School Education Group
- Regional Services Support Group.

The PSD Review Project Board members provided advice and expertise on a range of areas: student health, wellbeing and engagement; service design and delivery; legal requirements; and resources and strategy, as well as the Education State reform agenda.

PSD Review Project Board meetings were held on 29 May 2015, 29 June 2015, 12 August 2015, 21 September 2015 and 28 October 2015.

PSD Review Advisory Panel

The PSD Review established an Advisory Panel representing 11 organisations:

- Victorian Primary Principals' Association
- Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals
- Principals' Association of Specialist Schools
- Association for Children with a Disability
- Australian Association of Special Education
- Parents Victoria
- Specific Learning Difficulties (SPELD) Victoria
- AMAZE (Autism Victoria)
- Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne University
- Australian Education Union
- Australian Principals Federation

Advisory Panel meetings were held on 13 July 2015, 20 August 2015, 21 October 2015, 23 November 2015 and 22 January 2016.

APPENDIX B: LITERATURE REVIEWS

The PSD Review commissioned eight comprehensive literature reviews.

- Foreman, P. & Arthur-Kelly, M. (2015). *An update on the social justice principles, the law and research, as bases for inclusion*, University of Newcastle, NSW.

This report examines three principle drivers of inclusion: social justice, legislation and research findings, and considers the extent to which each of these has impacted on inclusive policy and practice. The report considers the research base for inclusive practice and examines the extent to which the policy and practice of inclusion is supported by evidence.

The paper concludes with some suggestions for a research agenda that focuses on the contextual challenges and complexities faced in Australian school settings, while recognising international directions in the identification of evidence-based practices.

- McDonald, D. & O'Callaghan, K. (2015). *Developing synergies between the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the Victorian Government school system*, Griffith University, Queensland.

This report considers the interface between the NDIS and school education. The report identifies areas where there are potential policy and service contradictions or discrepancies, as well as synergies between the NDIS and the Victorian education system that could provide better clarity and support to children and families.

The report identified areas for greater engagement and collaboration between the NDIA and the Department in sharing information, which would align processes and provide effective support to maximise learning outcomes for students with disabilities.

- Mitchell, D. (2015). *Education that fits: International trends in the education of students with special education needs*, University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

This report addresses international trends in the education of students with special needs, the complexities around educational programming, classroom practice and systemic issues such as policy priorities in the USA, United Kingdom and Europe. Mitchell emphasises the need for a national approach with a focus on inclusion to improve the quality of education for students with special needs.

- O'Connor, M., Quach, J., Goldfeld, S., Gold, L., Hopkins, D., Beatson, R., & Aston, R. (2015). *Approaches to the provision of educational support for children and young people with additional health and developmental needs: Autism, Murdoch Children's Institute*, Victoria.

This report outlines potential approaches to the provision of funding at school for children and young people with additional health and developmental needs, including those with autism. The report suggests an alternative approach to funding that is linked to the guiding principles of an optimal funding model.

- Punch, R. (2015). *Use and efficacy of paraprofessionals in special education*, Griffith University, Queensland.

This report examines the impact of ES staff on the learning of students with disabilities in general education settings. The author found no discernible improvements in students' learning and/or social development that could be attributed to using ES staff to support students with disabilities. This is because most ES staff have no training in how best to support the teacher in the classroom to enable all students, including students with disabilities, to learn. Punch emphasises the need for professional learning for ES staff, improvement in recruitment practices, and recommendations on how teachers can better supervise and use ES staff support in the classroom.

- Quach, J., O'Connor, M., Goldfeld, S., Gold, L., Hopkins, D., Beatson, R., & Aston, R. (2015). *Approaches to the provision of educational support for children and young people with additional health and developmental needs: Dyslexia*, Murdoch Children's Institute, Victoria.

This report outlines potential approaches to funding support at school for children and young people with additional health and developmental needs, including those with dyslexia. The report suggests an alternative approach to funding that is linked to the guiding principles of an optimal funding model.

- Sharma, U., Forlin, C. & Furlonger, B. (2015a). *A review of contemporary models of funding inclusive education for students with dyslexia*, Monash University, Victoria.

This report provides a systematic analysis of local and international funding models, focusing on those that foster best practice inclusive education for students with dyslexia. The report makes recommendations for funding models that best support inclusive education in Victoria.

- Sharma, U., Forlin, C. & Furlonger, B. (2015b). *Contemporary models of funding inclusive education for students with autism spectrum disorder*, Monash University, Victoria.

This report provides a systematic analysis of local and international funding models, focusing on those that foster best practice inclusive education for students with autism. The report makes recommendations for funding models that best support inclusive education in Victoria.

APPENDIX C: PSD REVIEW EXTERNAL IN-PERSON STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS

The Review conducted 24 consultations with a range of stakeholders, as displayed in Table 11.

Table 11: Stakeholder participation in PSD review in-person consultations

Organisation	Description	Meeting date
AMAZE	AMAZE is a member-based, not-for-profit organisation and is the peak organisation for autism in Victoria.	Monday 3 August 2015
Association for Children with a Disability	Association for Children with a Disability provides advocacy and information services for children with any type of a disability and their families living in Victoria.	Wednesday 29 July 2015
Australian Association of Special Education	Australian Association of Special Education provides advocacy and a range of services to ensure provision of and access to quality education services for people with special needs.	Tuesday 4 August 2015
Australian Education Union	The Australian Education Union represents over 180,000 members (teachers, allied professionals, principals and administration staff) industrially and professionally.	Monday 27 July 2015
Australian Principals Federation	Australian Principals Federation represents state Primary and Secondary Principals and Assistant Principals in the industrial arena in Victoria and Western Australia.	Monday 27 July 2015
Children with Disability Australia	Children with Disability Australia is the national peak body representing children and young people (aged 0–25) with a disability.	Wednesday 29 July 2015
Communication Rights Australia	Communication Rights Australia is an advocacy and information service for people with little or no speech.	Monday 17 August 2015
Community and Public Sector Union	The Community and Public Sector Union covers members in state government and related employment, and has around 100,000 members defending the public sector (VPS/Allied Health school and regional employees) and the essential services it provides to the community.	Tuesday 28 July 2015
Deaf Children Australia	Deaf Children Australia's purpose is to remove barriers to the personal development and social inclusion of children and young people who are deaf.	Monday 3 August 2015
Down Syndrome Victoria	Down Syndrome Victoria is the statewide peak membership organisation representing people with Down Syndrome and their families.	Thursday 3 September 2015
Leadership Plus	Leadership Plus is an innovator in diversity inclusion—focusing on leadership and capacity building, consultancy, advocacy, training and employment.	Friday 14 August 2015

Organisation	Description	Meeting date
National Association of Australian Teachers of the Deaf Victoria	The National Association of Australian Teachers of the Deaf Victoria currently represents over 300 teachers of the Deaf throughout Australia and potentially includes all teachers of the Deaf within Australia.	Tuesday 28 July 2015
Parents Victoria	Parents Victoria is a statewide democratic organisation representing parents of students in Victorian government schools.	Thursday 30 July 2015
Principals' Association of Specialist Schools	The professional body for the principals of the 81 specialist Victorian government schools that have over 7000 students with a wide range of special needs.	Thursday 23 July 2015
SPELD	SPELD Victoria is a membership based, not-for-profit organisation and registered charity. SPELD serves an estimated 10 per cent of Victorians with Specific Learning Difficulties such as dyslexia.	Thursday 5 August 2015
STAR	STAR is an independent community organisation that advocates on a statewide basis for the rights of people with an intellectual disability and their families.	Tuesday 18 August 2015
The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission	The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission is an independent statutory body with responsibilities under three acts: Equal Opportunity Act 2010, Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 and the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.	Wednesday 5 August 2015
Victorian Council of Social Services	Victorian Council of Social Services is the peak body of the social and community services sector in Victoria. It pursues just and fair social outcomes through policy development and public and private advocacy.	Thursday 13 August 2015
Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals	The Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals is a professional association of Principal Class officers whose primary concern is the welfare of government secondary schools and the principals who lead them.	Thursday 23 July 2015
Victorian Children's Council	The Victorian Children's Council supports the Premier and the Minister for Families and Children with expert independent advice relating to policies and services that enhance the health, wellbeing, development and safety of children.	Thursday 13 August 2015
Victorian Principal's Association	The Victorian Principal's Association represents educational leaders, Principal Class and leading teachers, in Victorian government schools.	Tuesday 25 August 2015
Vision Australia	Vision Australia is a national provider of blindness and low-vision services in Australia that works in partnership with Australians who are blind or have low vision to help them achieve the possibilities they choose in life.	Friday 14 August 2015
Youth Disability Advocacy	Youth Disability Advocacy is a statewide service in Victoria and the only advocacy service in Australia, which exists specifically to work on issues of concern to young people with disabilities.	Thursday 30 July 2015
Murdoch Children's Institute	The Murdoch Children's Institute undertakes research into infant, child and adolescent health.	Monday 17 August 2015

APPENDIX D: ONLINE SUBMISSIONS TO THE PSD REVIEW

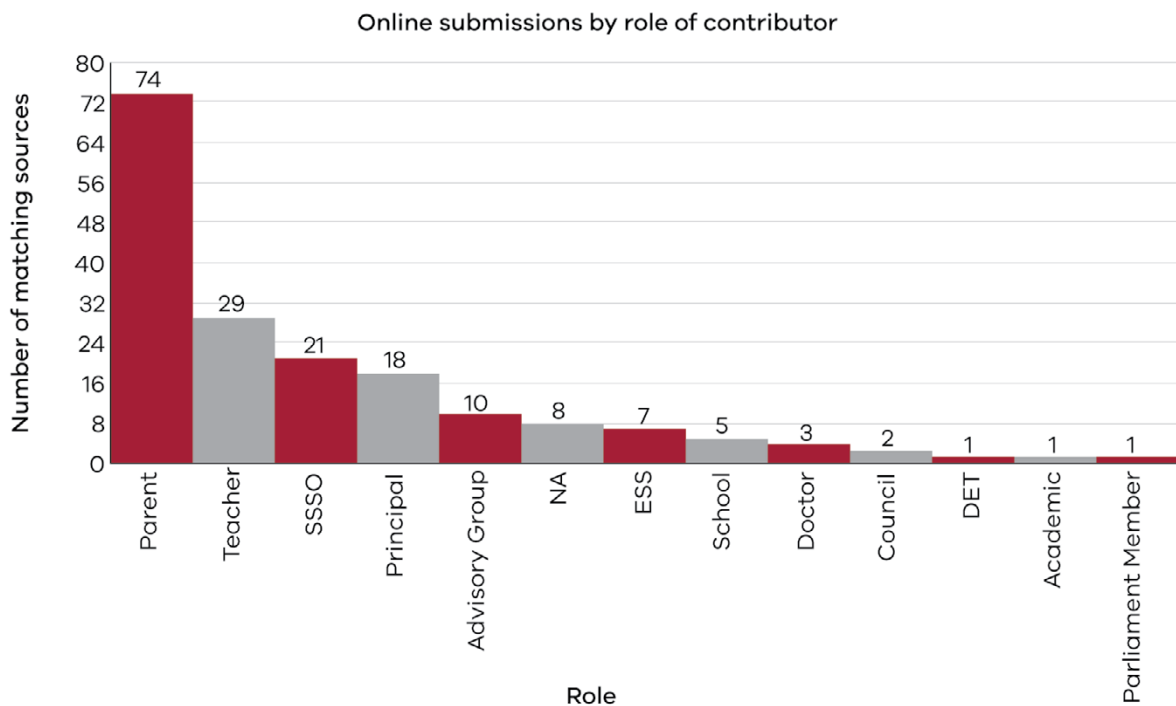
The Review invited parents, carers, students, principals, teachers, disability professionals, advocates and all other members of the public to share their thoughts on how to maximise the learning of students with disabilities through open submissions.

The Review received 170 online submissions from individuals or groups. In addition a further seven items that take the form of articles written for purposes other than responding specifically to the invitation to make online submissions to the PSD Review were received. Examples include a copy of the Victorian Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Commission's Held Back Fact Sheet and a copy of the Australian Government's

response to the Dyslexia Working Party Report.

The majority of online submissions were received from parents of children with a disability. Some of the online submissions specifically addressed each of the Review's Terms of Reference, but the majority addressed one or more specific issues of particular concern to the person making the submission. An example is the number of parents who described their experience of the government school system and the PSD through the lens of their concern for their child who had been diagnosed with autism (26 online submissions) or with dyslexia (27 online submissions).

Figure 17: Online submissions by role of contributor



Source: Department of Education and Training, 2015

Table 12: Parent submissions

Disability	Number of parent submissions
Dyslexia	27
Autism	26
Specific Learning Disorder	6
Multiple Disabilities	5
Language Disorder	2
Acquired Brain Injury	1
Cerebral Palsy	1
Diabetes	1
Down Syndrome	1
Unspecified	4

SUMMARY OF THE SUBMISSIONS

Excellence in inclusive education

1. PSD and inclusive education: 15 submissions commented on PSD and inclusive education. Some submissions commented that full inclusive education is currently a distant aspiration.
2. Government schools cater for everyone: 23 submissions commented that all children have the right to attend mainstream schools, underpinned by human rights principles and an inclusive approach to education. A number of submissions also commented on the place of specialist schools in an inclusive education context.
3. Building school capacity to achieve inclusive education: 34 submissions commented on approaches to building school capacity to achieve inclusive education. Of these submissions, change of the culture of schools was commented on in 18 submissions. It was indicated that inclusive education needs to extend beyond the classroom to school culture and that support is provided at all levels for inclusive education. A number of submissions commented on funding for inclusion, including release of funds from assessments to be directed towards substantial interventions in schools.

APPENDIX D: ONLINE SUBMISSIONS TO THE PSD REVIEW

4. Being accountable for inclusion: 17 submissions commented on being accountable for inclusion at the system and school levels. Accountability for inclusion should be happening at the system level. This could include monitoring school performance or accountability for student outcomes, which would require tracking across the educational sectors or an audit of the LSP. At the school level, accountability occurs if the school review process has an 'inclusion' focus area.

Maximising learning

1. Funding: Over 100 submissions commented on how the PSD is currently functioning. Over a third of these submissions (n=39) raised issues related to students with needs who fall through the funding eligibility gaps. These submissions commented that students with specific and complex learning disabilities are not funded and current cut-offs are arbitrary, not recognising the true needs of students in a classroom setting. A total of 29 submissions commented on issues in determining funding eligibility for students with autism. A similar number of submissions raised issues relating to funding for students with dyslexia. Other comments related to the current PSD application process being complex and unfair, obtaining a diagnosis and applying for funding being onerous and stressful, and that administration of application processes needs to be improved.
2. Building school capacity: Of the 38 submissions that commented on the role of ES staff in building school capacity, many indicated that greater access to ES staff is desirable. ES staff were seen to allow students with disabilities to be included in the classroom but not necessarily help learning. It was suggested that disability-specific training and qualifications should be a requirement for ES staff. School/parent partnerships were commented on in 31 submissions. It was suggested that parent/teacher/school partnerships benefit the child and that informing parents is important.
3. Curriculum development and delivery: 53 submissions commented on current limitations with curriculum development and delivery, including schools failing to accommodate student needs, even for funded students. The challenges are associated with determining and adopting evidence-based approaches to teaching. 11 submissions suggested strategies that support development of social skills associated with autism and management of behaviour disorders. In addition, 25 submissions provided strategies that support students with dyslexia and related learning difficulties.
4. Professional learning: 52 submissions made general recommendations regarding training and professional learning. Many submissions indicated that teachers and principals lack knowledge and understanding of autism and dyslexia and commented on

the need to have compulsory training to support the learning of students with disabilities.

5. Student support services and resources: 23 submissions commented that schools need better resourcing as currently there are insufficient funds to maximise the learning of students with disabilities and fund the support required or to provide additional facilities. 25 submissions commented on the need for better access to SSSOs and other allied health professionals
6. Accountability: 15 submissions commented on accountability issues related to funding and 13 submissions commented on accountability issues related to outcomes.

Managing the transition to secondary school

1. Clarify the purpose of the review: 23 submissions commented on the need to clarify the purpose of the Year 6–7 review process. Of these, 17 submissions commented that the Year 6–7 review is about funding and that students with autism need transition funding or bridging funding to enable secondary schools to support transition. 10 submissions commented that the Year 6–7 review is about review of functional needs. It was suggested that the two purposes of the Year 6–7 review are often not linked.
2. Address efficiency of Year 6 review: 22 submissions commented on the efficiency of the Year 6–7 review process. Many reported that it is stressful for parents to go through the assessment process twice while the assessment process task tends to be undertaken by primary schools. There were also comments that the Year 6–7 review process is inefficient and that the consequences are negative.
3. Transition to secondary schools: 36 submissions commented that the transition to secondary school is a critical time that requires support. Withdrawing funding at this point puts students at high risk and causes parental anxieties about transition.

Appropriate timing: 43 submissions commented on the appropriate timing of the Year 6–7 review. Of these, 11 submissions indicated that the timing of the review needs to be reconsidered. 30 submissions suggested delaying the review until after transition to Year 7 or Year 8. 14 submissions made recommendations for improving transition arrangements, including changing funding criteria to be more aligned with functional need Meeting the needs of students with autism and dyslexia.

APPENDIX D: ONLINE SUBMISSIONS TO THE PSD REVIEW

The majority of online submissions addressing autism or dyslexia came from parents of children who have been diagnosed with either these or related disabilities. The submissions ranged over a variety of issues, intersecting with each of the Terms of Reference. Some provide strong insights into the lives of those affected by these disorders, both the children themselves and their families.

Although the issues raised by these submissions are also raised in other contexts—discussion of funding allocation and processes, inclusive education and making the transition from primary to secondary education, for example—the issues are thrown into sharp relief by the particular challenges confronting students with autism or dyslexia and their parents and teachers.

44 submissions described common experiences of students and parents of students with autism or dyslexia. Of these, 21 submissions were related to students with autism and 27 to students with dyslexia.

A total of 28 submissions reported negative school experiences for the child, including school refusal, bullying and the perception that the child's presence in the classroom is not positive. Many submissions also indicated significant impact on the lives of parents and siblings, such as parents experiencing anxiety and stress, including concern about their children's futures.

APPENDIX E: ONLINE SURVEY OF THE PSD REVIEW

The Review commissioned TF Choices Ltd to administer a Discrete Choice Experiment survey to gain a better understanding of the relative importance of the 13 potential attitudes towards funding the education of students with disabilities. Findings from the Discrete Choice Experiment survey are discussed in Chapter 7.

Informed by the information collected from in-person consultations (Appendix C), 13 potential attitudes were identified as being of importance to parents, teachers, principals and SSSOs:

1. Schools must explain to families and the Department how the funding for students with disabilities is used.
2. Funding must be used for individual children, not dispersed across the general school budget.
3. Funding for students with disabilities must be given to schools to allow schools flexibility in how it is used.
4. Schools must document student-learning progress in order to receive funding.
5. Funding must be allocated based on the student's learning needs, not disability type.
6. Funding must be used to help teachers better teach students with disabilities.
7. Spending money on supporting students directly is more important than spending money on establishing their funding eligibility.
8. Schools must meet with parents at least once a term to talk about their child's progress.
9. Victoria must provide inclusive schooling environments to all students
10. Teachers, rather than teacher aides, must teach all students, including those with disabilities.
11. Access to transition funding support is important (transition to primary, transition to secondary, interstate transition, cross sector transition).
12. Every school must teach every child, regardless of their disabilities.
13. Eligibility must be based on what students can do, rather than what they cannot do.

Of the 1403 respondents who completed the survey, 1098 completed it correctly with complete data for analysis. A summary of the online survey respondent groups are provided in Table 13.

APPENDIX E: ONLINE SURVEY OF THE PSD REVIEW

Table 13: Online survey respondent groups

Respondent group	Sample number
Adult with no school-age children	420
Adult with school-age children, none of whom experience disabilities	200
Adult with school-age children, of whom at least one experiences a disability	478
School teacher with experience only in mainstream schools	141
School teacher with experience only in schools catering to students with disabilities	15
School teacher with experience in schools catering to students with disabilities and those without	155
School principal with experience only in mainstream schools	78
School principal with experience only in schools catering to students with disabilities	10
School principal with experience in schools catering to students with disabilities and those without	34
SSSO	147
*TOTAL	1678

*A respondent can have more than one status, for example there are parents of children who are also teachers

Key results of the survey

The results suggest that there are many points of agreement but also some fundamental differences in the funding model preferred by educators and that preferred by the parents of the children they teach. Being a parent of a child with disabilities has a marked effect on certain attitudes towards funding. For example, parents prefer for funding to be allocated to and follow the individual student, rather than being used by the school as they see fit. Parents with children with disabilities support the idea of teacher aides helping in teaching, whereas teachers and principals do not.

On the whole, however, respondents generally:

- support the flexible use of funding but want funds spent on the students directly, with minimal bureaucracy and documentation
- support funding being based on and used to support functional needs (not simply learning)
- support Victoria providing inclusive schooling environments to all students.

