



## STRONGER SCHOOLS

An inclusive education plan for Victoria

# BOOST FUNDING AND SUPPORT TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

Students with disability and/or other health and developmental needs are engaged and learning.

**Students with disability face additional health, learning and development needs that often require targeted teaching support and access to specialist therapists and integration aides.**

As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>18</sup>, Australia recognises the right of people with disability to access education without discrimination. An inclusive education system equips people with disability with academic, life and social skills that help them participate fully and equally in society.

People with disability should never be excluded from mainstream education system on the basis of disability and should receive every support needed.

Students with disability and/or other health and development needs often face suspension or expulsion for behavioural issues related to their disability. Many behaviours can be avoided if students are in an inclusive learning environment, with support from qualified experts.

There are also students who attend part-time because of gaps in specialist supports. About 15 per cent of Victorian students require reasonable education adjustment to participate in school equally with their peers<sup>19</sup>. However, under current eligibility requirements for the Program for Students with Disability (PSD), only 4 per cent of students qualify for specialist funding support<sup>20</sup>. This means about 60,000 students are missing out on targeted funding that could maximise their learning.

According to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, reasonable education adjustments are less likely if a student does not attract specific funding.<sup>21</sup>

There is also “significant unmet need for support services for students with disabilities, including integration aides, occupational therapists, speech therapists, other specialist staff and assistive technology”.<sup>22</sup>

Students who are deaf or are hard of hearing may require reasonable

adjustments to be made including preferential seating, wireless assistive listening devices or Auslan interpreters.

In 2017, the Victorian Government released The Principles for Reduction and Elimination of Restraint and Seclusion in Victorian Government Schools.<sup>23</sup>

These guidelines are scheduled to be reviewed by December 2018<sup>24</sup> and should be updated to reflect evolving best practice. Whilst the guidelines require that every instance of restraint or seclusion be reported to enable data collection, monitoring and review of the effectiveness of existing strategies, this is not publicly reported.

Without support and an inclusive school environment, students with disability and/or additional health and development needs are more likely to disengage from education and not achieve their full academic and social potential. As the VEOHRC notes “genuine participation and learning ... means more than just getting by”.<sup>25</sup>



### Increase funding and support to students with disabilities and/or additional health and developmental needs.

- Implement the remaining four recommendations under consideration from the Review of Program for Students with Disability (PSD).<sup>26</sup> Specifically:
  - Introduce a new tiered funding model based on a strengths-based functional needs assessment that meets the needs of all students with disability and/or additional health and development needs. This model includes: base funding, a teaching and learning load that would help schools to support all students who require reasonable adjustments, and targeted funding to support students with disabilities that have high education adjustment needs.
  - Adopt a functional and educational needs-based approach to assess eligibility and determine funding amounts. This would enable the full range of factors affecting a child's learning to be considered (including their risk and protective factors and educational needs) rather than focusing narrowly on their disability diagnosis.
- Ensure PSD funding is spent on evidence-based practices that improve learning outcomes for students with disability.
- Continue to fund and support the Students with Disabilities Transport Program<sup>27</sup> and the Language and Learning Disabilities Support Program<sup>28</sup>, and provide support for students with disability transitioning from primary to secondary school.



### Help schools become more effective in supporting students with disability and/or additional health and development needs.

- Provide schools with face-to-face training by qualified professionals and access to specialists to help implement evidence-based approaches for supporting learning and development of students with disability. This includes evidence-based positive behaviour support.
- Increase transparency by publicly reporting on the use of restraint and seclusion in schools.
- Ensure students who are Deaf or hard of hearing can access Auslan interpreters in schools.
- Reduce and eliminate the use of restraint and seclusion by strengthening policies and procedures to reflect contemporary research, and ensure schools fully comply with the policies and procedures through data collection and monitoring.

18. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for Inclusive Social Development, Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, accessed at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

19. Victorian Government, Education State – Review of the program for students with disabilities, p.30, accessed at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/department/PSD-Review-Report.pdf>

20. Victorian Government, Education State – Review of the program for students with disabilities, p.61, accessed at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/department/PSD-Review-Report.pdf>

21. Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Held back: The experiences of students with disabilities in Victorian schools, September 2012, p.163, accessed at <http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/our-resources-and-publications/reports/item/184-held-back-the-experiences-of-students-with-disabilities-in-victorian-schools-sep-2012>

22. Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Held back: The experiences of students with disabilities in Victorian schools, September 2012, p.60, accessed at <http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/our-resources-and-publications/reports/item/184-held-back-the-experiences-of-students-with-disabilities-in-victorian-schools-sep-2012>

23. Victorian Government, The Principles for Reduction and Elimination of Restraint and Seclusion in Victorian Government Schools, accessed at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/participation/15Principals.pdf>

24. Victorian Government, Enrolment, Attendance and Behaviour, Restraint and Seclusion, accessed at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/studentmanagement/Pages/behaviourofconcern.aspx>

25. Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Held back: The experiences of students with disabilities in Victorian schools, September 2012, p.54, accessed at <http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/our-resources-and-publications/reports/item/184-held-back-the-experiences-of-students-with-disabilities-in-victorian-schools-sep-2012>

26. Victorian Government, Education State – Review of the program for students with disabilities, p.125, accessed at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/department/PSD-Review-Report.pdf>

27. Victorian Government, Students with Disabilities Transport Program, Policy and Procedures, January 2016, accessed at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/management/sdtrppolicyandprocedures2016.pdf>

28. Victorian Government, Finance – Language and Learning Disabilities Support Program, accessed at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/finance/Pages/srpfef010.aspx>