

Review of Educational Services for Students with Disabilities in Government Schools

Consultation Paper
February 2002



INTRODUCTION

The Minister for Education announced a comprehensive *Review of Educational Services For Students With Disabilities in Government Schools* in April 2001. This is the most comprehensive review of services and supports for students with disabilities that has been undertaken in two decades. The Department of Education is taking this opportunity to identify and confirm what is working well and where educational practice needs to be brought into line with current thinking and legislation.

Stage 1 of the Review is now completed and a *Discussion Paper* has been written to present findings as a foundation for work to be undertaken in the next stage of the Review. Over 250 submissions and 150 interviews provided information during Stage 1. This information was supplemented by investigation of other education systems across Australia and other countries. Up to this point the Review has identified general issues concerning the provision of education, services and supports for students with disabilities in government schools.

This document describes the major findings of Stage 1. It includes the principles of quality education for students with disabilities and recommendations for Stage 2. The principles provide a description of what is required to provide educational programs, services, supports and resources that meet the needs of students with disabilities. Stage 2 will involve further investigation of how the Department can develop policies and practices to support quality education for students with disabilities. The major recommendations of Stage 1 set directions for work in Stage 2 that will lead to specific recommendations for implementation by the Department.

This is an overview of the *Discussion Paper* (see the end for how to access the *Discussion Paper*). The full *Discussion Paper* describes quality education for students with disabilities and makes recommendations for further investigation during Stage 2. This document may provide a foundation for providing input to Stage 2 of the Review.

GENERAL FINDINGS, PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Developing government schools that are welcoming for students with disabilities and their families is a priority for the Department of Education. Schools that accept diversity and promote participation in learning activities for all students are inclusive schools. The development of such school environments relies on the values and actions of all Department staff and school communities.

The Department has already initiated strategies to further develop inclusive practices within school communities. Participants in this program will provide inspirational leadership for their school communities as they develop strategies to demonstrate their commitment to inclusive schools.

Staff confidence when managing and planning suitable learning experiences for students with disabilities contributes to student participation and the achievement of optimal learning outcomes. Knowledge and understanding of strategies for providing access and participation in schooling for all students with disabilities is necessary. Teachers will be provided with support so they can implement educational programs that take into account the special educational needs of students with disabilities.

There is concern that a number of students experiencing significant difficulty with learning cannot currently be provided with appropriate educational services. In response to this concern work in Stage 2 of the Review will consider all students with special educational needs including students with disabilities. At this stage there is limited flexibility for schools to deliver educational services and programs that are tailored for students with disabilities and others with special educational needs.

There is a growing need for schools to be in a position to design and implement strategies that take into account the diverse nature of students with disabilities or special educational needs and the characteristics of the school. Increased school flexibility in the allocation of funding for staff and other resources is critical for the development of quality education for all students with special educational needs. Schools will be responsible for ensuring the resources they receive are used to support students with disabilities and others with special educational needs.

During the next phase of the Review strategies for identifying the special educational needs of students will be developed. In this way, assessment of the services needed by a student can be based on the individual student's needs not simply the diagnosis of disability. The nature of learning programs and the support services required by students with disabilities varies depending upon the educational needs of the student. Schools have a responsibility to provide appropriate education for all students.

Developing an educational program to meet the needs of a student with a disability requires school staff, parents and other professionals who support the student to work together. They identify the learning outcomes to work towards and the teaching strategies to be used. Collaboration and cooperation between Department staff and other service providers will continue to be facilitated and strengthened.

State and Federal legislation set the conditions for providing educational opportunities for all students. The *School Education Act (1999)* describes the rights of parents to make choices about the school at which they enrol their child. The *Disability Discrimination Act (1992)* ensures that students are not discriminated against on the basis of their disability. The Department is committed to the intent of the legislation. Current policies and procedures are under review to ensure they are consistent with legislation.

It is important that parents are fully informed about the schooling options available for their child at all year levels K - 12. The Department will continue to provide a range of educational programs and support services including supporting enrolment in mainstream schools and specialist programs or facilities, such as education support. Detailed information about the programs and support services available in schools and their benefits will be provided to parents.

During Stage 1 principles have been developed to describe an education system that is able to provide quality educational services and supports for all students with disabilities and students with special educational needs. Putting these principles into practice will enable students with disabilities to achieve the best possible learning outcomes.

The principles are as follows:

PRINCIPLE 1 **Providing access and participation**

Students with disabilities have the right to enrol and participate on the same basis as other students.

The Review will reinforce the intent of the *School Education Act (1999)* and recommend that all parents of children with disabilities will be able to select the form of education that best suits the needs of their child. The *School Education Act (1999)* and the enrolment policy will outline the conditions of enrolment for all students with disabilities.

The Department will assist parents to make informed decisions by providing more clear and comprehensive information about the range of programs, services or supports available in our schools and the potential benefits of each.

PRINCIPLE 2 **Supporting inclusive schools**

All levels of the system value diversity and operate within an inclusive framework.

The Department of Education will support principals, teachers and school-based personnel in a comprehensive strategy to develop inclusive schools and classrooms.

The Department has already developed a comprehensive leadership strategy to commence in May 2002 that will support the development of inclusive schools. The continuous improvement of teaching and learning will enhance learning outcomes for all students with special educational needs.

PRINCIPLE 3 **Ensuring local decisions and adjustments**

A range of effective and appropriate adjustments is provided to ensure access, participation and achievement.

Schools will be able to select the type of support which best supports students using their detailed understanding of individual student needs and the local situation. Schools will be better placed to support a range of students with special educational needs including those students with disabilities.

Schools will be encouraged to create flexible learning environments to better meet student needs and encourage full participation in school activities. This flexibility will allow more efficient use of Department and school resources.

PRINCIPLE 4 **Implementing a new framework for resource allocation**

Adjustments are provided on a needs basis and are equitably resourced.

Resources will be allocated more equitably to all students with disabilities, removing inconsistencies in the nature of services or supports provided. A more consistent approach across all schools and districts in the state will be apparent. Schools will be more equitably resourced to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities.

The Department will develop a comprehensive approach for identifying the educational needs of students with disabilities and students with other special educational needs. This will enable services, supports and resources to be provided to schools on the basis of educational need. Processes for the allocation of

4. A system-wide leadership program be developed and costed with a staged implementation plan devised to support an inclusive educational system.
5. A comprehensive staff development process be undertaken across all schools and districts to promote inclusive educational practice within school communities.
6. Comprehensive models of service delivery for all students with disabilities be developed.

STAGE 2 OF THE REVIEW

Stage 2 will develop specific implementation recommendations based on the recommendations and the principles developed from the information analysis in Stage 1. The Minister for Education and the Department will be provided with recommendations to enhance the quality of education for students with special educational needs and students with disabilities. These will provide the Department with a foundation for strategic planning over the next 3 to 5 years.



This document has provided a brief overview of the general findings, principles and recommendations from Stage 1 of the *Review of Educational Services for Students with Disabilities in Government Schools*.

The full *Discussion Paper* is available from:

- All government schools in Western Australia.
- Executive Officer: Review of Educational Services for Students with Disabilities in Government Schools.

Postal Address: Department of Education
151 Royal St
EAST PERTH WA 6004

Phone: (08) 9264 4926
Fax: (08) 9264 4754
Email: disabilities.review@eddept.wa.edu.au

Both documents are available in alternative accessible formats upon request to the Executive Officer.

You are invited to provide input and comment to the Stage 2 of the Review. A feedback form is attached to this document or available on the website and from all government schools.