
BUILDING INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS: PATHWAYS TO THE FUTURE WORKING PARTY THREE REPORT

REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRINCIPLE 3 A range of effective and appropriate adjustments is provided to ensure access, participation and achievement

The following indicators assist in describing the principle in practice:

- adjustments are informed through collaboration with parents and other relevant stakeholders;
- students' views are sought and are reflected in the educational program;
- adjustments are made at the whole school, classroom and individual levels and are regularly monitored and reviewed;
- decisions about adjustments are made, where possible, at the local level;
- adjustments are culturally sensitive and minimise discrimination;
- adjustments are recorded within a documented educational program as part of a broader accountability framework.

Scope

The working party was required to formulate recommendations focused upon:

- providing appropriate educational programs with a focus on teaching and learning, educational needs and curriculum provision;
- ensuring adjustments that facilitate curriculum access, participation and achievement are provided and resourced according to student need;
- providing a transparent approach to information provision and decision making.

Action

The working party conducted a two day workshop in order to identify the critical issues and factors to be taken into account as policies, procedures and frameworks are developed to:

- ensure adjustments are provided and resourced according to student need;
- ensure a focus on teaching and learning, educational need and curriculum provision;
- allow parents, teachers and others to share a common understanding of the educational needs of students;
- provide a foundation for the provision of appropriate educational programs in a range of learning environments;
- provide a transparent approach to the way decisions are reached and educational arrangements are made.

Issues

The working party identified and debated a number of issues that impact on an understanding of the intent and meaning behind Principle 3.

Special educational needs

The term has potentially negative messages and values implicit in within a WA educational and service provision context. There was concern expressed that this term does not support inclusivity or acceptance of diversity. In our local context there are links to educational practices that excluded students from participation in the full range of school environments and these links are still strong within both the education and disability sectors.

The term can imply that everything must be specialized and schools may express concern about their ability to provide quality education for all students who require teaching and learning adjustments. Special used in this context could therefore become a reason to exclude or limit a student's participation in learning opportunities. The term also implies that the student has the need, it is preferable to identify the level of adjustment that is required in the school environment to support the student. Thus reference needs to be made to a student who requires a certain level of support to achieve learning outcomes. In an international context the use of this term is being reviewed as a consequence of the marginalisation that has occurred for students identified as having special needs.

Defining and assessing educational need

Students with disabilities or other educational needs enrol in a school context, which reflects the interactions between all students, parents and school staff.

Provision of assistance and support to a school must take into account all relevant factors including the confidence and competence of staff, the supports available and the school community attitudes and expectations.

The determination of educational need must include the essential recognition that the needs of all students, not just the child with identified special needs, are taken into account in the provision of appropriate educational adjustments and supports to enable enrolment to occur in a range of educational settings or programs.

Educational need is to be defined as – whatever the individual child needs in order to achieve the Overarching Learning Outcomes from the Curriculum Framework. The purpose of providing adjustments to the school and learning environment for students who require teaching and learning adjustments is to ensure that, as far as possible and practicable, they have the same access to educational opportunities as other students and optimal learning outcomes. Assessment of educational needs must be fair, equitable and non-discriminatory for all students with special needs at all phases of schooling. It is not acceptable to limit access to required adjustments or curriculum modifications as consequence of the assessment processes adopted by the Department of Education and Training.

Parental decision making

Parental decision making about where their child attends school needs to be informed, meaningful, respected and accepted by the Department whenever possible. Parents need to be fully informed about their right to advocate for their child to be considered for enrolment in their preferred school.

The links between enrolment options available to parents and the provision of adjustments or support that can be provided to a school need to be clear. There will be an ongoing need to provide facilities, programmes and specialist services that are able to meet very high levels of educational need and provide intensive support to students with severe disabilities. The provision of such resources must be based on the level of a student's educational need and continue at current levels if required.

Inclusivity

Inclusivity needs to become part of the overall curriculum improvement plan for

schools and be acknowledged as a critical component of the Curriculum Framework with a legislated foundation. Sufficient funding and other supports must be made available for supporting professional development, collaboration and program development to respond to student needs and inform all members of the school community about inclusivity and its beneficial impact in the long term for all members of our community.

Recommendations from working party 3

It is recommended that the Department of Education and Training:

- further investigate the implications of the term special educational needs and consider the use of alternative language in order to ensure that the nature of support required is identified rather than the child's need. The implications and expectations created by this term in the WA context must be carefully considered.
- establish ongoing opportunities for all groups of parents, staff, students and service providers to contribute to the development and delivery of quality education for students who require teaching and learning adjustments by developing recommendations and action plans and/or responding to information which is under consideration by the Department.
- adopt processes that enable all key interested parties to contribute to the development of specific recommendations for implementing changes to policies, procedures or practices.
- develop operational definitions and assessment of educational need which includes
 - individual developmental and learning needs of students;
 - measures of progress and the level of support or curriculum modification required to facilitate this progress;
 - clear reference to the learning outcomes described in the Curriculum Framework and the Student Outcome Statements;
 - adjustments required regardless of the school at which they are enrolled;
 - relevant characteristics of the school community.
- develop procedures to ensure information regarding student learning needs is efficiently recorded and used in an integrated manner across all levels of the system to support student learning and decision making regarding the provision of adjustments or supports necessary to meet a student's needs.

- establish an independent advocacy service to promote quality education in inclusive settings and utilise this service to supplement existing processes to resolve difficulties between schools and parents in order to minimize the disputes that require formal resolution processes.
- identify the roles and responsibilities of teachers, education assistants and other Department staff in assessing educational needs, planning and delivering education for students with special needs. Provide job descriptions or role statements that are consistent with the roles and responsibilities that are identified.
- fully implement the philosophy and principles of the Curriculum Framework in all government schools and actively engage local school communities in this process.
- commence a staged program, which is independent of the new schools building program or the requirement to respond to the enrolment of a particular student, to ensure all schools:
 - meet community standards for enabling access to the physical environment;
 - are provided with the necessary equipment to facilitate the flexible provision of assistive technologies.

It is recommended that the Department of Education and Training and the Curriculum Council:

- establish common policies and guidelines to ensure all students leave school with documented evidence of all learning outcomes that have been achieved;
- review the Graduation Certificate and the special examination provisions at Year 12 level to ensure they are inclusive of all students.

Chair: Donnelle Morcom
 Executive Officer: Elizabeth Fairclough
 September 2002