



Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Submitter: Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children
Submitting as a: Other (Director, Organisational Development)
State: NSW

Summary

In conclusion, the success of achieving educational excellence in schools requires genuine cross sector collaboration and partnership models that will provide opportunities and take measurable steps in developing meaningful strategies that will improve student outcomes and enrich our learning environments.

Main submission

The Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children (RIDBC) has three specialist schools for children. The schools have a primary school for children who are deaf or hard of hearing that focus on oral language and a K-10 school that provides a bilingual Auslan education for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and a K-12 school for children who are blind or have low vision in addition have a mild to moderate intellectual disability.

Children with disabilities do not have the same range of schooling options available to them, this makes it critical that they have access to schools that best match their individual needs and optimise their outcomes and potential on the same basis as their peers. Access to the right school should not be impacted by arbitrary restrictions such as travel limits imposed by the Assisted School Travel Program that prevent that access, and in fact limit the choice and control of parents and their children.

The application of the Teacher Supervisor Subsidy scheme requires a more equitable application to reflect and address the functional needs and strengths of individual children, as opposed to being diagnosis based with no consideration to the range of actual abilities and needs across diagnoses.

The Disability Discrimination Act requires that schools be responsible for adjustments and provisions that a student requires to access the curriculum and whole school experience. There are however, limited or non-existent funding

provisions, grants or other mechanisms available to schools to enact this, particularly when student equipment is required or structural or building works are required.

Authentic inclusion relates to more than the physical, a child using Auslan with no access to interpreting during non-class time is not able to be part of their community and access the whole of school experience. There needs to be clear accountability with no opportunity to shift responsibility, the NDIS cannot be seen as an opportunity to shift the responsibility for funding elements of schooling.

In order to foster authentic inclusion, and enable schools to fully integrate Auslan users into schools, NSW needs to adopt the National Auslan Curriculum and continue to ensure that all other curricular that is developed is accessible for all students with a disability.

What should educational success for Australian students and schools look like?

The challenge facing the education system is to achieve equity and excellence in student outcomes. Schools are characterised by increasing diversity of students and persistent disparities in achievement. The single most important influence on students' achievement and progress is the effectiveness of the teaching they receive. One way of addressing this variability is to ensure schools focus on collaborative expertise and student progression. In collaborative cultures, all members of the community share responsibility for the success of students. Teachers are given the necessary support, time and resources to collaboratively diagnose students' learning needs and to plan and evaluate teaching programmes and strategies.

Classrooms create a culture and everything that a teacher does in a classroom should be done with the intention to create students that leave school who will be confident, connected, actively involved and lifelong learners who are active and informed decision makers.

The classroom should be collaborative and create opportunities for students to work together, inclusive of all learners and the diversity that they bring to each other. The goal of any classroom is to ensure that all students feel engaged, inspired to learn and achieve the best outcomes that they can as an individual.

Students should leave school been able to identify their strengths and weaknesses and be able to target their areas of strength. Students need to master the basic literacy and numeracy skills however need to be able to engulf their strengths and use these to continue to make progress. They should also be encouraged to be creative thinkers, active seekers, users and creators of knowledge.

Research evidence highlights how critical leadership is for achieving equity and excellence goals. School leaders need to establish the necessary conditions and relational trust to ensure that teachers have opportunities to collaboratively inquire into, reflect on and evaluate their practice, thereby building professional capability

Teachers need to have coaching skills to ensure the maximum amount of growth for each student is achieved and report back to the student on the skills that they have developed and how they can still continue to improve.

Teachers should be providing regular formative and summative feedback to students. Teachers should be focusing on continuous improvement of students throughout the year and differentiate learning and assessment tasks to meet the individual needs of student. Students should have an opportunity to measure their growth against themselves and not against other students.

All students should leave school with an understanding and knowledge of the following:

- Their rights and responsibilities that allow them to function as contributing member of their community and country
- Be able to cooperate and collaborative members in work, school, social and community settings
- Make independent and informed decisions based on facts
- Take responsibility for their own actions and act supportively and compassionately towards all people in the community
- Able to relate well to others, effective users of communication tools, members of communities, international citizens

What can we do to improve and how can we support ongoing improvement over time?

All schools irrespective of the type or setting should foster a culture of continuous improvement for not only the students, but the teachers and whole school community. Whatever the context, schools that engage in evaluation for improvement are motivated to make changes that will have a positive impact on the learning and wellbeing of all their students, and they will be sustained by the belief that they - leaders and teachers - can do better. Schools should balance academic outcomes with improvement and progress in all areas of a child's development and focus on holistic learning.

School leadership and teacher quality are key indicators/predictors for improved student outcomes. These skills need to be addressed, taught and fostered in teacher training courses. School leaders need to be coached and mentored to develop a strong understanding and knowledge of instructional leadership.

By monitoring the implementation of improvement actions and evaluating their impact, boards, leaders and teachers will come to learn what works or does not work, for which learners, and why. In the absence of systematic monitoring and evaluation, shifts in practice, and their impact, can go unnoticed. Monitoring allows

for real-time adjustments to be made to improvement actions when they are seen to be not having the intended impact; it also allows for new knowledge to be used more widely for improvement purposes. Teachers need time to access and engage with student performance data, and adjust their teaching strategies to ensure success for the diverse learners in their class/school. Teacher then need to set realistic and achievable goals for students to ensure success.

Teachers need to finish their training with strong pedagogical knowledge on how to teach students, what is evidence based practice and response to intervention. They then need to have the support and knowledge of where to find the specialised skills that they may need to teach specific students in their classes due to their disability and learning style. By doing this student outcomes and engagement will improve. Upon graduation teachers should have a professional development plan which includes further professional development, mentoring and teacher feedback, and be supported to have high expectations and achievement of all students.

The education of students with disabilities in this response specifically those with sensory disabilities require a range of specialist professional skills and knowledge. Continuing affordable professional education and training need to be available for teachers to achieve the skills they require to teach these students in the following example but not limited to areas:

- Audiological interventions
- Development of speech and language
- Knowledge of audiological conditions
- Speech perception, acoustic phonetics
- Vision assessments
- Adaptive technology
- Orientation and mobility
- Literacy mediums – braille and large print

External assessments such as NAPLAN and final year exams should be accessible and available for all students across the current. Careful consideration should be given to the small number of students due to their disability that cannot access these assessments. These students should have an external alternate assessment to ensure that high quality educational outcomes are offered to these students. They should not be compared to other students however compared against their own achievements. These assessment should be designed to measure a student's knowledge of key concepts and skills from the curriculum. These would be for the students with the most significant disabilities that still cannot access the current external test even with significant adjustments and special provisions. This would

consist of portfolio specific material that teachers and students collected annually and could include instructional data, work samples, videos and other supporting information that was submitted to an external body to review and ensure that high quality curriculum outcomes were been delivered and measured

School funding should be specific and targeted to improve the outcomes of all students within their schools with specific resourcing available to schools to make adjustments for students with disabilities so that they can participate in all aspects of school life on the same basis as their peers. Schools should have to demonstrate how the funding that they receive was directly spent on improving the outcomes of the targeted students irrespective of their disability. Capital resourcing funding for equipment and building should have direct reporting frameworks to demonstrate these funds are spent on these items.

Cross sector collaboration and partnership models should be developed and fostered to improve student outcomes. Specialist educational resources can be difficult to find and engage with particularly in rural, regional and remote locations. The ability of schools to collaborate, have joint sessions and pool resources needs to be coordinated and facilitated to maximise teacher and student engagement. An improved use of technology across sectors could increase the access for students with specialised teachers' skills they require to access teaching and learning. For example RIDBC uses telepractice to teach students braille and Auslan in remote areas.

The majority of students with disabilities are sitting in their local school and class the government needs to ensure that all students receive a high quality education irrespective of their environment of needs. All schools need to be supported with training, resources and funding to ensure that they are inclusive of all learners and have the opportunity to provide support by specialised teachers as required. Inclusion doesn't mean that a student never is removed from the class for specialist intervention it does however mean that the student is truly a member of the class and school community and is valued, respected and taught like any other student. Further instruction to teachers is required on how to differentiate the curriculum, lessons and assessment to ensure all students are be an active participant, contributor, and learner in his or her class, year level and school.