



Progress Report: Improving outcomes for students with disability 2020



Change has been a key feature of 2020 with drought, bushfires, floods and of course the COVID-19 pandemic. However, these challenges have also brought us opportunities, giving us the chance to reimagine the ways education can be delivered in NSW.

Minister's Foreword

Through it all, the NSW Government's focus has been ensuring every student continues to learn and thrive – including students with disability.

Implementation is now well progressed on the Disability Strategy, launched in February 2019. The strategy built on the NSW Government's response to the Parliamentary Inquiry: Education of students with a disability or special needs in NSW.

As Minister, I'm proud to release this second progress report, and I will continue to report annually on our achievements to improve outcomes for students with disability.

In 2020, we have implemented a number of key Disability Strategy initiatives, and have now delivered on more than two-thirds of our immediate focus areas. We have also identified and commenced new pieces of work we believe will drive strong educational and wellbeing outcomes for students with disability in NSW public schools.

We know that increasing the time students spend engaged with learning improves social, emotional, behavioural and academic outcomes for children and young people. In August, I invited community input on a draft behaviour strategy to support positive student behaviour and create effective and engaging classrooms. We want to embed positive behaviour support and inclusive practice in all our schools.

Creating a more inclusive education system is a key focus in our Disability Strategy journey. We have listened and responded to diverse voices and have strengthened our approach to and expectations for inclusion of students with disability in NSW schools by releasing our Inclusive Education Statement for Students with Disability. Our inclusive education principles outlined in the Statement help us build on the great work that is already happening in many of our schools.

Both this year and next, we will grow our approach to inclusive education in NSW, because we know all students learn best when our classrooms welcome everyone.

In 2021, we will remain focused on delivering the Disability Strategy's commitments. We will also develop our forward work program to consolidate and build on our achievements, reflecting the living reform agenda of the Strategy. Our annual report on progress will adopt a new approach, reorienting our strategic direction to our forward agenda as we move into this next phase of work.

Crucial to improving outcomes for students with disability is continuing to build the capacity of our teachers and our schools so they are well equipped to support the needs of children. We have high expectations of all students, and our schools will continue to work with parents and education experts to enhance the student and family experience in our schools.

Students are at the centre of everything we do in education, and we will continue to expand opportunities for students to have a direct influence on education and school policy that affects them. We will also continue to build on a whole-system approach to improve the experience of students with disability.

There is no one-size-fits-all model for improving education for students with disability. We will continue to ask students what they need; to talk to their parents and carers; and to engage with their support network, teachers and schools.

I am committed to improving the learning and wellbeing of students with disability in every classroom in every public school. It is only by working together that we can bring about positive change and improve outcomes for our students with disability, now and into the future.



The Hon. Sarah Mitchell, MLC

Minister for Education and
Early Childhood Learning

Our vision remains unwavering

In our schools across NSW and in all our work, we want to ensure every student is known, valued and cared for through a relentless focus across our education system to ensure continuous improvement and skills reform.

We have been presented with particularly unique challenges in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic obliged education systems across the world to rethink the way we deliver education to all students.

We acknowledge that this has been a difficult time for many students, including students with disability and their families. Many of the usual supports and structures had to be delivered differently due to physical distancing measures. We are proud of our school-based staff who have worked to support our students with disability whether they were learning from home or at school.



“ As part of our value of equity, we ensure every student has access to high quality public education. ”

**Mark Scott, Secretary,
Department of Education**

Supporting students with disability during COVID-19

The experience of learning from home inspired school staff to deploy innovative practices to maintain connections with students and to strive to ensure no student was left behind, regardless of their circumstances. The pressures applied by COVID-19 leveraged the state's collective education intelligence to overcome the many roadblocks thrown up by remote learning.

To help our schools respond to COVID-19, the Department of Education established a Continuity of Education Taskforce in early March 2020. Its role was to set up online learning platforms, curriculum resources and student access to wrap around support services. Equity of access was a key consideration for many schools during remote learning. We wanted to ensure education continued for public school students across NSW, regardless of whether they were learning in the classroom or remotely.

We established a [Learning from Home Hub](#) that provides teaching, learning and wellbeing advice and support to teachers, school leaders, parents and students. The teaching and learning resources include strategies for using technology to deliver learning, supporting students to use assistive technology

effectively, and practical advice that teachers could apply immediately when engaging with students. Virtual staffrooms were set up, including those for disability, learning and support, to enable staff to share ideas and connect with one another.

One of the other achievements of the taskforce was a coordinated, collaborative case support approach to supporting vulnerable students alongside virtual counselling for students. Schools worked to support the wellbeing of their students with a range of solutions including Wellbeing Wednesdays, Mindful Mondays, and by reaching out to global experts for guidance about how to stay safe during the pandemic.

Many schools also adopted innovative approaches to supporting equity of access during remote learning. At Carlton South, Learning and Support staff, Student Learning Support Officers and English as an Additional Language or Dialect staff created home learning packs to cater for individualised learning needs.

The Hunter Signing Choir kept students with hearing loss connected by arranging zoom performances. The choir is made up of public school students from the Hunter region who are deaf or hard of hearing, ranging from year 1 to year 12. It provides valuable opportunities for students with a hearing loss to access the performing arts, promoting positive self-esteem and developing communication skills.

We aspire to build an education system in which children with disability thrive academically; develop good physical, mental and emotional health; and gain the skills to live a fulfilling, independent life and access opportunities for further education and meaningful employment post-school.

We want to ensure all children and young people:

- are welcomed and included in their local school community

- enjoy a wide range of experiences
- learn to their fullest capability, achieving demonstrable learning, wellbeing and independence outcomes, in a safe, supportive and healthy environment
- receive an excellent education, with expertise available to support access to the full curriculum in a way that is relevant to them
- build friendships, interact with other students, and feel a sense of belonging.

We have continued to meet our commitments

In 2020, we have continued to make strong progress against the four focus areas and key actions of the Disability Strategy:

1. Strengthen support

Investing in teachers and other support staff

2. Increase resources and flexibility

Enabling schools to operate with more flexibility

3. Improve the family experience

Making experiences better and easier

4. Track outcomes

Building an evidence base to measure progress

Our focus on improvements for students with disability is not limited to these four initial focus areas of the [Disability Strategy](#). The Strategy is a living reform agenda, through which we are implementing recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry, and driving work across the department to support a more inclusive education system.

Disability policy has changed a lot over the last 10 years at both a state and national level. We seek to reflect these changes as we build on current and potential future opportunities.

- NSW continues to work together with the Australian, state, territory and local governments, in consultation with people with disability, to develop a new [National Disability Strategy](#) to commence in 2021.
- The Australian Government is leading a review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005 under the [Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#) supported by all states and territories.
- The NSW Government is undertaking a review of the [Disability Inclusion Act 2014](#) to ensure it is still meeting its stated aims. The Act promotes the inclusion and participation of people with disability in the community.
- The [Disability Inclusion Act 2014](#) requires each NSW Government agency to prepare a [Disability Inclusion Action Plan](#). The department's current Disability Inclusion Action Plan ends in 2020. We will extend the duration of our existing action plan and

update it to ensure it reflects our current commitments to disability inclusion while we await the outcomes of the Act's review.

In this progress report, we set out our key achievements in 2020 and the focus of our work into 2021. The impact of COVID-19 across our education system has inevitably meant we have had to rethink our approach to some initiatives.

We know that every student wants to learn, to be included, to have friends, and to participate in the school community like everyone else.

Our focus in 2020 has been to incorporate student voice and student participation even further into the work that we do. To support this across our education system, the Minister for Education established a student council to give students a direct influence on education and school policy.

We also launched a new online [student voices hub](#), giving all NSW students a platform to share their views. We want to engage better with students and those who support them: their parents, carers, educators and supporters.

We will keep building the evidence base of effective approaches to supporting students with disability. We will implement a framework to improve our measurement of student outcomes and the way we collect, connect and share our data, helping to build a whole-system approach to improving the experience of students with disability.

Inclusive practice should be embedded in all aspects of school life, supported by culture, policies and everyday practices. This includes an inclusive curriculum. In planning for the successful implementation of new syllabuses, we will maintain a strong focus on the imperative to support all students to access the curriculum, and consider what support our teachers will need to do this well.

In 2020, we have maintained our drive towards a more inclusive education system by releasing our [Inclusive Education Statement for Students with Disability](#) and we are developing a draft

Inclusive Education Policy. These support the next stage of our journey to further embed inclusive practice for students with disability in all NSW public schools.

In future years, we will retain our connection to the important focus areas and work underway through the Disability Strategy. We will also reorient our strategic direction to do even more to build on these reforms, recognising that the Strategy is a living reform. Our annual report on progress will adopt a new approach, to reflect the next phase of our work.

We remain committed to ensuring students with disability can equitably access and participate in the highest quality education. Around 15% – or more than 125,000 students in our public schools – receive adjustments or personalised learning and support. The majority of students learn in mainstream classes. In 2020, there are:



More than
3,590
specialist support classes
in mainstream schools and schools for specific purposes.



More than
1,890
specialist teachers across every primary, secondary and central school in NSW support students whose learning is affected by disability.



More than
980
classes in schools
for specific purposes support more than **5,560 students**.



More than
160
scholarship recipients who have commenced a master's degree in inclusive/special education to grow the number of our teachers with expertise in inclusive practice.



Around
97%
of students
with disability learning in mainstream public schools.



More than
440
specialist itinerant teachers and assistant principals support students with hearing or vision impairment.

Inclusive education: Our practice, our policy, our focus

A key focus of our work in 2020 has been building on our approach to inclusive education for students with disability across our system.

We are focused on strengthening inclusive practice across all NSW public schools. Improving inclusive practice benefits all students. We know there are many excellent examples of inclusive education in NSW schools. We value the important work our staff do to ensure students with disability are learning to their fullest potential, and we want to build on this and strengthen inclusive practice across our schools.

Delivered

We have developed an [Inclusive Education Statement for Students with Disability](#), to strengthen inclusive practice across all NSW public schools, in our culture, policies and every day practice. The inclusive education statement advances the commitment in the Disability Strategy to “building a more inclusive education system, one where all students feel welcomed and are learning to their fullest capability”. The statement marks the next stage of the department’s work to further embed inclusive practice for students with disability in NSW public schools.

The Statement builds on the definition of inclusive education in NSW detailed in the Disability Strategy, which states all students, regardless of disability, ethnicity, socio-economic status, nationality, language, gender, sexual orientation or faith, can access and fully participate in learning, alongside their similar aged peers, supported by reasonable adjustments and teaching strategies tailored to meet their individual needs. Inclusion is embedded in all aspects of school life, and is supported by culture, policies and everyday practices.

Inclusion means education environments that adapt the design and physical structures, teaching methods, and curriculum as well as the culture, policy and practice so that they are accessible to all students without discrimination¹.

We also acknowledge the importance of parental choice regarding the type of education provided to their child.

The Inclusive Education Statement for Students with Disability sets out six principles of inclusive practice to guide how we continue improving practice in our schools.

¹ UNICEF, Inclusive Education: Understanding Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Page 3.

“ We really work on having a mindset of inclusion. There should never be a sense that any child's disadvantaged because they have any individual needs. ”

**Nicole Molloy, Principal,
Woollahra Public School**

Principles of inclusive practice



1. Student agency and self-determination



2. Parent and carer inclusion



3. Social and cultural inclusion



4. Curriculum inclusion



5. Workforce capability for inclusion



6. System inclusion

The principles outline our aspirations to build an education system where:

- Students are supported to express their views. The capacity of students to solve problems, set goals, make decisions and self-advocate is valued and developed.
- Parents/carers are engaged as partners to achieve the best outcomes for their child's education.
- Students are supported to access the curriculum with individualised goals and high aspirations.
- All students are welcomed, supported to belong and build relationships with their peers. The school community embraces all learners, has respect for, and values, diversity.
- Our school staff are supported to provide adjustments and differentiate their teaching for the diversity of students in their class.
- Inclusion is embedded across all parts of our system in culture, policies and everyday practices.

Inclusive education in NSW public schools is an ongoing process of reflection, evaluation and reform at all levels across the department: in classrooms, schools, and networks, and in policy, practice, projects and culture.

We are committed to growing inclusive practice, sharing knowledge across the system, and building the capacity of our NSW public schools to meet the needs of their local students in an inclusive school culture.

We have high expectations of all students. We will continue to work with parents/carers and disability and education experts to personalise support so that every student is engaged and learning to their fullest capability.

“ Inclusion is making sure that the students have the skills and the comfort to be doing the activities that we're asking them to do. ”

Cate Clark, Assistant Principal – Support, Hobartville Public School



→ On Track

We are developing an Inclusive Education Policy for students with disability. The policy will support our schools to implement inclusive education and better understand their roles and responsibilities for delivering inclusive education in all our schools.

We are consulting with parents and carers, students, and people who support them, as well as our schools and our leaders on inclusive education. We are seeking feedback to better understand the support and guidance teachers

and principals need to continue to drive improvements in inclusive practice in our schools and to improve the experience of students and families.

We will focus on continuing to build inclusive practice across all our schools: identifying where quality practice and high standards are already occurring and where further support and development is needed along the inclusion journey. For all students, the paramount focus is the best possible education and wellbeing outcomes for the student.

Case Study: Wentworth Public School

Wentworth Public School provides a good example of a range of the elements of inclusive practice.

The school has implemented learning and support structures which are integral to the success of inclusive education practices. For example, a designated full-time learning and support wellbeing teacher has been

employed to coordinate learning and support, lead professional learning to upskill staff, and help families get support for their child.

Effective use of data is also a key part of identifying students' learning needs and effectively implementing good inclusive education practice. The school uses student data, formative assessment and diagnostic tests to inform decision-making about teaching and learning programs at an individual, small group and whole class level.



“ In this school [inclusive education] means making sure that as a teacher I deliver the best outcomes for all of my kids and that across the school, making sure that all kids are getting the best that they can given their circumstances or what they bring to the table, what we can support them with – whether that’s extending or supporting to get kids along. ”

**Brian Gray, Teacher,
Wentworth Public School**

“ [The learning and support wellbeing teacher] picks up all the information for me. You can’t go wrong. Especially when you’re out of your depth. I’ve always got someone here, if I’m out of my depth, that can put me on the right path. ”

Parent at Wentworth Public School

Delivering on key reform areas

1. Strengthening support

We remain focused on investing in our leaders, teachers and other support staff so they can better support students with disability. We are equipping them with the tools, techniques and confidence they need to enable their school community to embed inclusive practice and high-quality education for children and young people with diverse needs in our schools.

Building our professional learning for leaders, teachers and support staff using evidenced-based approaches

We continue to strengthen and grow our professional learning offerings for teaching, support staff and school leaders. We have expanded the range of evidence-based professional learning and will keep building on this.

“ Staff professional learning... is crucial. I mean, you can put all the resources in the world into things, but if your staff aren't on board and aren't speaking that language, it's a bit of a waste of time. ”

**Marni Milne, Principal,
Narrandera High School**

Our commitments

- 1.1 Build on suite of core, advanced and specialist professional learning.
- 1.2 Provide funding support for qualified candidates to pursue additional specialist studies.
- 1.3 Train school and departmental leaders in evidence-based approaches to support students with disability.
- 1.4 Develop and launch a new approach to induction on supporting students with disability for all new teachers.
- 1.5 Establish a permanent team of expert designers, planners, researchers and leaders to work on the creation of inclusive learning spaces.

We are committed to sustaining safe, supportive and inclusive school communities, with a holistic approach to driving positive student behaviour.

→ On Track

We will release a [Student Behaviour Strategy](#) by 2021 to create engaging classrooms and safe, inclusive school communities. We sought community feedback in September on the proposed approach and are now analysing submissions to ensure that through the Strategy we better support a range of student behaviours and increase the time students spend at school engaged with learning.

“ We have a great opportunity for [the students] to get some one on one tuition [and] to work on some behaviour management strategy. Mindfulness is one, wellbeing is another. ”

**Jake Matthews, Teacher,
Penrith Valley School**

Our development of the Strategy included a review of the Student Discipline in Government Schools Policy, suspension procedures and other supporting implementation documents. We also considered the recommendations of the 2017 Ombudsman’s Inquiry into Behaviour Management in Schools and Recommendation 17 of the Parliamentary Inquiry, Education of students with a disability or special needs in NSW.

As part of our behaviour support for schools, we provided training to more than 1,370 of our schools to implement **Positive Behaviour for Learning**. This is a whole-school process to help schools improve social, emotional, behavioural and academic outcomes for children and young people.

In 2021, our schools will have access to a suite of tools, checklists and other resources to help our staff effectively implement behaviour support in our schools. We will also bring together professional learning for teachers and on-the-ground support resources for schools to guide improvements and fill identified gaps to ensure a continuum of support is available.

Delivering on key reform areas:

1. Strengthening support


We are committed to reducing the use of restrictive practices in all NSW public schools.

→ On Track

We will release our restrictive practices framework in Term 1, 2021, which will provide clear guidance to our staff on the use of restrictive practices. The framework clearly articulates a definition of restrictive practices and provides guidance around principle-based decision-making when considering the use of restrictive practices. The framework will link to department policies and procedures that are relevant to specific types of restrictive practice.

Restrictive practices refer to a range of activities that impact on the freedom of movement of a person with the primary purpose of protecting the person and others from harm. Restrictive practices are used to protect the rights and safety of all students and staff. The restrictive practices framework will apply to students with or without disability.





The impact of trauma for children and young people can affect their ability to learn, form relationships, regulate their behaviour and their overall wellbeing. We have focused on improving how teachers, school-based staff and leaders can better understand and support children and young people who have experienced trauma.

 **Delivered**

We successfully piloted our new foundation professional learning course on **trauma-informed practice for improved learning and wellbeing**. The first two modules have been piloted to more than 1400 participants from 128 schools, and modules three and four have been piloted to over 650 participants. The four modules were collaboratively developed by experienced practitioners across the department. They provide staff with information on how to identify the indicators of trauma and how to mitigate its impact at school so that students can learn to their fullest capability. We are evaluating and refining the pilot before undertaking quality assurance and NESA accreditation.

“ I think the whole module so far is a necessary and vital part of our learning as education providers to understand the impact and long-term effect trauma is having on our children and the need for essential support to be in place across the board. ”

Course participant in completion survey for trauma-informed practice professional learning

 **On Track**

We are developing advanced leadership and advanced specialist courses in trauma-informed practice for relevant staff across the department. These courses will be co-designed by department staff with organisations that specialise in trauma-informed practice, and will provide additional knowledge and strategies for staff who work in school communities significantly affected by trauma. We plan to make these available to schools from Term 3 2021.

 **Delivered**

We developed a **trauma-informed practice in schools explainer and discussion guide**. It summarises the evidence on trauma-informed practice within an educational context, as a brief introduction to the topic for teachers, principals and other school staff.

“ We know from previous research that trauma-informed practice is an area that many staff want to know more about and that a lot of great practice is already happening every day in public schools. We hope staff read and discuss the explainer and that it promotes conversations about the causes of student behaviour and inspires them to become trauma-aware. ”

Nicholas Danta, Engagement Lead, Disability Strategy, and Trauma-Informed Practice Facilitator

We continue to build the skills and confidence of our teachers, school leaders and other staff who support schools by expanding our professional learning offerings.

✓ **Delivered**

Our personalised learning with technology course supported teachers to choose and use assistive technology, by improving their knowledge of assistive technology and its application in the classroom. Through this they are better able to support their students who use it. The use of assistive technology enables student engagement in their learning as well as allowing them to better demonstrate their skills and knowledge. Uptake of the course continues to be strong, with completion by over 1,800 teachers since August 2019. We also provided learning opportunities for non-teaching staff to better understand the assistive technology available to students and teachers.

✓ **Delivered**

We released a new Disability Strategy Checklist to ensure the needs of students with disability are considered in all our initiatives from the outset. The checklist is intended to guide corporate staff in reflecting the aims of the Disability Strategy in their work – whether it be policies, programs, training systems or agreements. The checklist requires corporate staff to consider the impact of their work on students with disability and ensure it meets their needs.

✓ **Delivered**

We have mandated [disability standards for education](#) training for all school leaders who must complete the training by the end of January 2021, implementing recommendation 29 from the Parliamentary Inquiry. The training is available for all school staff, along with resources to support embedding best practice in schools.

✓ **Delivered**

We developed professional learning to support non-teaching staff in schools to improve their understanding of the Disability Strategy and how it connects to their work. More than 2,220 staff have completed this professional learning since April 2020. There were more than 550 participants in Autism: Lived experience, sessions delivered by Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect), and there has been further specialised professional learning sessions for school learning support officers who work directly with students with disability. Future plans include collaborating with Unified English Braille Online to enable access to Braille e-learning administered by the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children.

“ It is exciting to see the level of commitment the department has with the Disability Strategy. The outcomes of the pilot programs [under the Strategy] will enable us to achieve best practice initiatives as we work towards common goals. Increasing not only educational outcomes but inclusiveness for all stakeholders will be the reward for investing in a Disability Strategy. ”

Course participant feedback for the professional learning on the Disability Strategy for non-teaching staff.



✓ **Delivered**

We developed a resource on **building effective learning and support teams**. This resource is being used as part of tailored support for our schools. It is designed to provide schools with professional learning that supports them to evaluate their current learning and support practices and procedures. Participating schools are provided with professional learning and resources to support the development of an action plan for a whole-school approach to building effective learning and support teams.

✓ **Delivered**

We offer **digital lessons and online workshops in each art form** developed for teachers, parents and carers, and students with disability. Currently The Arts Unit Digital Engagement website offers more than 30 items to support students, staff and families to successfully engage in arts education.

→ **On Track**

We are using the evidence on what makes for high impact professional learning to guide a **review of our existing professional learning options** for staff to identify gaps and

opportunities. The outcomes of the review will inform development of a refreshed approach to professional learning that will support our teachers and other school support staff to grow their skills and confidence in supporting learning and wellbeing outcomes for students with disability.

→ **On Track**

We are mindful of the interconnection between physical activity and wellbeing for all students, and are supporting schools improve their inclusive physical activity by including it in their School Improvement Plans and through a review of existing professional learning to ensure evidence-based approaches are used to improve teachers' skills and confidence in the delivery of inclusive physical activity. We are increasing the delivery of 'Multi-Sport' and 'Come-and-Try Days' across NSW, including in rural and remote areas. This will allow for an **additional 3,500 students with a disability to access sport and physical activity events** specifically designed to meet their needs. In addition, the representative sport pathway will be expanded in 2021 to provide greater opportunities for students with a disability who are recognised as having high potential in sport.

→ **On Track**

We are providing a range of inclusive teaching, learning and performance opportunities in dance, visual arts, music and drama through The Arts Unit's Connections Program. From the beginning of 2021 arts projects and programs will invite students and their teachers to create and showcase their own works based on a central theme. In 2021, we will offer disability-inclusive dance professional learning in conjunction with regional student dance workshops. We are also developing sponsorships to further support inclusive practice and broader extracurricular opportunities in the area of creative and performing arts. These additional resources will support the involvement of students with disability in both high-profile state-wide events and smaller local programs. They will also facilitate building the skills and confidence of teachers and other support staff who engage and empower students through movement, music and performance.

“ We'd really put in place appropriate adjustments to make sure our students were included and performed alongside students without disability. ”

**Angela Sampson, Principal,
Kalinda School**

We know that investing in leadership at all phases of a school leader's career will make a substantial difference to the quality of teaching and therefore the quality of student learning. We want to ensure all our leaders are equipped with the tools and techniques they need to build and maintain inclusive learning environments and school communities. Effective induction offers new and developing leaders the opportunity to fully understand their role, clarify expectations and detail the breadth of their responsibilities, including inclusive practice.


✓ **Delivered**

We have invested in our Aspiring Principals Leadership Program, targeting deputy principals and assistant principals who have demonstrated outstanding educational leadership and are seeking to enhance their leadership impact and obtain support from highly experienced current principals.

We developed keynote sessions, workshops and short seminars focusing on inclusion of students with disability and reforms under way through the Disability Strategy. These form part of the induction programs and conferences for principals, deputy principals and middle leaders (assistant principals/head teachers). These sessions provide current leaders with knowledge around policy and their responsibilities to embed inclusion in their school, and offers resources and guidance to increase understanding on how to best support students with disability.

→ **On Track**

We are updating and strengthening principals' and leaders' professional learning through the NSW Public Schools Leadership and Management Credential. This helps ensure a greater focus on how they can lead their schools to embed inclusivity and the Disability Strategy to improve student outcomes.



We remain focused on providing evidence-based wellbeing and mental health programs for staff and students, as part of our commitment of \$1.5 million in funding each year for four years, in partnership with leading youth mental health organisations and universities.

✓ **Delivered**

We increased the number of staff trained through SAFEMinds, an evidenced-based course for schools and families on supporting student wellbeing and mental health to better meet the needs of students with disability, which was adapted to online delivery.

✓ **Delivered**

We developed a webinar series and toolkit of resources, in collaboration with the Black Dog Institute, for school counselling staff to support students with the most commonly occurring mental health issues including anxiety, depression and emotional distress.

✓ **Delivered**

We commissioned academic research, through the Sax Institute and Monash University, to examine the international evidence base associated with mental health and wellbeing programs available to schools. Based on our findings, we have developed practical materials that schools can use to identify and plan the implementation of evidence-based wellbeing and mental health programs. Our schools can use these materials to select programs with evidence of positive outcomes for students.

→ **On Track**

We know that the recent bushfires in NSW have deeply affected many of our students and their families. We are delivering evidenced-based anxiety treatment programs for children and adolescents to support the mental health and wellbeing of our students and communities in bushfire-affected schools. Up to 450 students will complete home-based online anxiety interventions by the end of 2020, through the Centre for Emotional Health at Macquarie University, complementing ongoing programs and services within schools and support for families to improve the wellbeing of our students.

→ **On Track**

We introduced the PAX Good Behaviour Game, an evidence-based approach that has been shown to improve learning and wellbeing outcomes as well as reduce longer-term mental health disorders for vulnerable young children. The training will give primary school teachers proven behavioural and instructional strategies to integrate into their everyday teaching. We have already trained 244 educators across 83 schools since the program began, and feedback from our teachers is that the program is helping them to better manage emotional and behavioural challenges in their classrooms.

We will develop an evaluation approach for the training. As part of the program, we also plan to share evidence-based strategies with parents, kinship and foster carers and outside-of-school-hours staff to help improve cooperation and self-regulation in young children.

✓ **Delivered**

We delivered mental health and wellbeing workshops for the early childhood sector on responding to mental health concerns in the early years, and educator self-care and wellbeing in the workplace. More than 1,300 participants from education and care services attended livestreamed workshops during June and July 2020.



Supporting staff to complete specialist studies

In 2020, we have continued to support the growth of capability in our teaching and support workforce to meet the needs of students with disability. We are committed to increasing the supply of high-quality teachers and support staff skilled in supporting the growing number of students with disability in our system.

Our [Inclusive Practice in Education Scholarship](#) was met with great interest from staff when it launched in 2019. The scholarships are open to all permanent, temporary and casual teachers in all NSW public schools and aim to increase the number of teachers with expertise in inclusive practice across all settings. Scholars receive up to \$23,000 towards their degree and access to the inclusive education practice network.

✓ Delivered

We welcomed our first cohort of more than 160 successful scholarship recipients, who in 2020 have commenced a master's degree in inclusive/special education.

✓ Delivered

We established an inclusive education practice network for departmental staff, with existing qualified specialist teachers from our classrooms who are available to support and guide new scholars. The network has created opportunities for scholars to share their experiences with each other.

→ On Track

We expanded our options for the Inclusive Practice in Education Scholarship in 2020. We are offering three study pathways for 2021 commencement:

1. Graduate Diploma in Inclusive/Special Education
2. Master qualification with a specialisation in vision impairment or deaf and hard of hearing
3. Master of Inclusive/Special Education.

Applications for the second round of scholars opened in June. Successful applicants will be informed in November and commence their study through the scholarship in 2021.



“ I have learned so much that I've begun applying not just within my classroom but also within the whole school environment.

“ I've been able to teach some of the mainstream teachers, and go, 'Have you seen this approach?' or, 'Have you seen this intervention or this strategy?'.

“ The scholarship has been one of the best things that I've done. ”

Brodie, classroom teacher and Inclusive Practice in Education Scholar



→ **On Track**

We commissioned research on initial teacher education through 11 focus groups with 60 participants and a literature review, to explore the needs of pre-service teachers in relation to teaching students with disability and opportunities for improvement. We continue to partner with the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) and universities to ensure we are building teacher capability through all undergraduate teaching degrees and postgraduate degrees, and are using the findings of this research to prioritise elaborations for teacher education.

→ **On Track**

We maintain our support for improving inclusion in early childhood education and care through the Disability Inclusion Program, which provides support for community preschools to engage children with disability in education programs on the same basis as their peers, and the Sector Capacity Building program, which offers training and support for staff in community preschools to enhance ongoing inclusion readiness. Through the Start Strong Funding model, we also continue to support preschool affordability for children aged 3 to 5, with a particular focus on vulnerable cohorts such as children with disability and additional needs.

We remain focused on growing the number of school counselling service staff as part of our commitment to invest \$88.4 million over four years to improve student mental health and wellbeing.

→ **On Track**

We continue to deliver our commitment to provide every public high school with a full-time school counselling allocation and a full-time student support officer by June 2023. Over the next three years, we will phase in 100 additional school counselling positions. We have already successfully recruited 25 school counselling positions identified in the first phase of this year. We have recruited more than 155 student support positions and will recruit 200 more by next year. We are increasing the number of student support officers in our schools for specific purposes, with more than 40 additional support officers under recruitment.

✓ **Delivered**

We implemented strategies to fill school counselling vacancies through a targeted, ongoing state-wide recruitment strategy and an expansion of scholarships, with 96 per cent of substantive school counselling positions now filled.

✓ **Delivered**

We continue to offer scholarships for teachers to retrain as school counsellors and for psychology graduates to complete postgraduate studies to become school psychologists. This year more than 70 teachers commenced school counsellor training and more than 20 psychology graduates have taken up scholarships.

✓ **Delivered**

We established contingent psychology services through prequalified providers to deliver psychology services in response to emergent needs, with capacity to provide services through telepsychology services. We were able to access this pool of psychologists to support bushfire-affected schools in early 2020.

→ **On Track**

We will establish a new rural scholarship program for school psychologists to work in rural and remote schools, commencing in 2021, building on the existing suite of scholarships.

✓ **Delivered**

We know that the number of students needing targeted individual support is growing at a greater rate than our overall annual enrolment growth. We have worked with our school leaders

to continue to address immediate and medium-term staffing pressures in specialist classrooms and schools.

✓ **Delivered**

We established a prequalification scheme to help schools access and engage specialist allied health service providers who can support staff to better understand and respond to student need (Recommendation 26 of the Parliamentary Inquiry). Through the scheme, schools are able to quickly and easily access qualified allied health and behaviour support providers, thus reducing the administrative burden. This scheme is also seeking to promote improved collaborative relationships between school staff and allied health providers. We will use the data we gather from the use of this scheme to improve our understanding of school need for these services.



Creating more inclusive learning spaces

We remain committed to developing more inclusive approaches to school infrastructure by improving physical environments for students with disability.

✓ Delivered

We created a Disability Standards and Projects Team in School Infrastructure NSW. The focus of this team is to provide advice on creating educational environments that maximise the participation of students with disability and aims to ensure that spaces allow for dignified access and participation for all students.

✓ Delivered

We delivered more than 342 projects to improve access to school facilities in line with agreed support plans, including installing lifts, ramps, accessible toilets, high-visibility markings and bollards. We have ensured new school facilities comply with Educational Facilities Standards and Guidelines, which meet or exceed Australian design standards and construction codes for access and mobility.

→ On Track

We commenced work on developing a set of Best Practice Principles to support the creation of schools and learning environments that best allow for inclusion of students with disability. We are undertaking research to improve our understanding of the interaction between physical learning environments and support and outcomes for students with disability, starting with a review of the current literature and evidence around designing learning environments to maximise inclusion. This will contribute to building the evidence base for the future design and upgrades of schools to ensure we are meeting the needs of the full range of students.

→ On Track

We will develop a service needs strategy for students with disability to inform the future planning of school infrastructure to better respond to the needs of our students and the creation of suitable contemporary learning environments into the future.





2. Increase resources and flexibility

Our commitments

- 2.1 Launch an innovation fund for schools to trial and evaluate new resourcing models to give schools greater resourcing and flexibility to tailor education to students' needs.
- 2.2 Identify and showcase approaches that are getting great results for students.
- 2.3 Build online tools that make it easy for families, carers and teachers of students with similar needs across NSW to connect.

We continue to look for opportunities across our education system to enable schools to be more responsive and empower them to innovate and better support students with disability.

“ Telepresence robots will make a big difference for students who are missing whole terms of learning opportunities because of illness or disability. Students being able to feel connected and engaged with their teacher and peers is a real benefit. ”

**Leonie Donaldson, Principal,
The Ponds School**

Innovation Program

Delivered

We launched our new [Disability Strategy Innovation Program](#), established to encourage and test new and innovative ideas and partnerships for improving outcomes for students with disability and to scale up effective approaches.

The Innovation Program is working with 16 government schools and two preschools to co-design and trial seven innovative approaches to improve the learning and wellbeing of students with disability. These include schools in metropolitan and regional areas and involve government preschools, primary and high schools, as well as schools for specific purposes.

We identified the successful proposals from 197 applications received from 262 schools. Schools are testing approaches that facilitate and contribute to inclusive education for our students with disability. Initiatives being tested include the implementation of new technology, better capturing the voice of students with disability in Individual Education Plans, and applying universal design for learning and co-teaching to improve learning and wellbeing outcomes for students with disability in their early years.

We will trial and evaluate these innovative ideas to continue to build our evidence base of best practice approaches that maximise learning and wellbeing outcomes for students with disability.

We are funding another nine projects as Disability Strategy initiatives to investigate how their ideas could impact outcomes such as attendance, engagement and suspension for students with disability. These school-generated initiatives include partnering with experts in the disability sector to support targeted training, inclusive play, skill-sharing between mainstream and schools for specific purposes, and a platform for support staff and families to access much-needed networking and practical strategies.

We continue to showcase approaches that achieve great results for students

We have seen many excellent examples of effective practice across our education system and firmly believe in celebrating our successes and highlighting these examples. We value the important work our staff do to ensure students with disability are flourishing and learning to their fullest potential. There are numerous examples throughout this report of how we continue to showcase effective practice.

✓ Delivered

We continue to raise awareness of inclusion and the Disability Strategy through our Disability Strategy newsletter and website. Our monthly [Disability Strategy newsletter](#) highlights research and good practice across our education system, with more than 2350 subscribers.

✓ Delivered

We developed videos to give voice to the experience of students with disability and their families in public schools about what works for them, and to keep their perspective at the centre of what we do. We have also highlighted effective practice as part of videos to promote the inclusive education scholarships.

✓ Delivered

We created a database of more than 3,800 teachers from every school across the state who are nominated as **school sport disability contacts**. This database is used to disseminate information and provide details of opportunities relating to sport and physical activity for students with disability. These contacts act as an important link between the School Sport Unit, the school and the community.

→ On Track

We will share our lessons learned on successes and challenges from the Innovation Program.

“ We’re excited about giving our students a voice in their Individual Education Plans. Using pictures will enable them to make choices about their interests. Children learn best when we can plan learning around their goals and interests.”

**Judy Chan, Early Intervention Teacher,
Bankstown South Infants School**



3. Making the family experience better

Our commitments

- 3.1 Create a one-stop online resource with information for families and carers.
- 3.2 Provide new resources for local use to educate school and local communities about disability.
- 3.3 Streamline and improve the processes by which families, children and young people access support at schools.
- 3.4 Improve our response rates to concerns and complaints.

We continue to strive to improve the experience of families of children and young people with disability as they journey through our education system. We are working to streamline processes and improve resources and supports for students, families and carers.

We are improving the way in which we respond to complaints to make it easier for parents and members of the public to make a complaint and to provide more guidance to schools on how they respond to complaints.

We have heard from students and their families about their experiences at school, and will continue to actively engage with them, as we know there is still much more to be done. We are using the themes from what they have told us to inform our work so that the needs of students with disability and their families remain at the centre of what we do.

Information for families and carers

We remain focused on improving how families and carers are welcomed in our schools and how they find the information and advice they need online. We want to make it easy for them to understand what to expect and how to access the support they need, as well as provide clear accessible resources.

Delivered

We launched a new accessible online resource for families and carers of children with additional learning and support needs and disability. This resource makes it easier for them to find the advice and information they need to support their child through their education journey. We tested this with parents and carers and will continue to refine and improve the resource based on their feedback.

Delivered

As part of the online resource, we have actively engaged with parents and carers of children with disability to incorporate their views into the development of improved enrolment information for the early years before starting at school. We have made clear for parents the steps they need to take during the enrolment process and to provide accurate information on support resources.

Kylie's son has autism and attends a support class at a mainstream public school: “ [His] individual needs are supported by him being able to learn at his own pace with the confidence to proceed at his own pace. I feel all of my children are included in the school. ”

✓ **Delivered**

We launched a new suite of accessible online informative videos and web content for families and carers, improving the understanding of the sporting classification process in representative school sport for students with a disability. This information provides guidance for parents, carers and staff to successfully navigate the classification process, reducing the overwhelming burden often encountered during the sport classification eligibility process. Promotion of the new classification content was widespread, being viewed and shared by more than 12,000 people on the first day of its release.

→ **On Track**

In 2020 we commenced work on an attendance communication trial, including with students with disability in support classes. Personalised communication will share with a parent or carer details on what their child is learning at school to improve the engagement of parents and carers as advocates of improved attendance. We will co-design the options, informed by the curriculum, with a number of trial schools and participating families. This will happen once the need for physical distancing measures have diminished and all key indicators of school and community readiness support a re-launch of the trial.

→ **On Track**

We developed and are currently implementing new resources for non-teaching staff on welcoming and guiding families of students with disability. This professional learning explains our commitment to excellence in customer service and supports participants in understanding the value of diversity in our schools. The professional learning provides an overview of the department's responsibilities under the *Disability Discrimination Act* and the Disability Standards for Education, through scenario-based learning. The scenarios also demonstrate how staff can make all families and students welcome in all school environments. We also plan to review and update resources for non-teaching staff on the best way to support students and staff with disability.



“ We plan for each learner individually by creating an individual program or making adjustments to existing programs. We strongly advocate for inclusion and equity for all our students. ”

**Rebekah Palmer, Teacher,
the Hospital School at Westmead**

Resources to support our schools and to educate school and local communities about disability

Additional practical resources for teachers and schools to embed inclusive practice and create a positive culture change will be available on a new inclusive education teacher resource hub. This hub will provide teachers with the tools and knowledge they need to support students with disability and their diverse learning needs.

Delivered

We published a series of [case studies highlighting inclusive practice](#) for students with disability. These were produced by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE). The case studies highlight what has worked in each school to improve inclusive education, identifying themes from their practice from which other schools can learn.

On Track

We will develop an online hub of practical resources to support school staff with inclusive education. The online hub will include resources that are easily accessible, comprehensive and provide evidence-based practical guidance for teachers and schools.

Case Study: Narrandera High School

[Narrandera High School](#) has embedded inclusive education to provide students with the support they need to be able to learn and access education.

Staff are supported to build the knowledge and capability needed to embed inclusive education. For example, the school has developed inclusive education resources and professional learning for teachers and support staff suited to the local context. The professional learning focuses on ensuring all


students can access the curriculum through the use of differentiation and adjustments.

Narrandera High School also focuses on building positive relationships and high expectations for all students to achieve a supportive and inclusive environment. For example, every student identifies at least one staff member to act as their trusted adult and advocate to ensure every student is known, has their needs met and has someone to speak to if things are not going well. Additionally, the school seeks regular student feedback to ensure the individualised support the school provides is meeting students' needs.



“ [Inclusive education means] every person regardless of ability will have the support that they need to become the best version of themselves. ”

Krystin Metcalf,
Intervention Centre Coordinator,
Narrandera High School



We continue to support students, families and schools to understand and navigate the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

 **Delivered**

Over the past three years, we have successfully implemented a \$20 million program to **scale up the disability sector** in response to demand under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). We increased the number of culturally appropriate Aboriginal businesses within the disability sector, plus we delivered advisory services for businesses expanding as part of the NDIS. We also supported business to develop and implement new and innovative models to support NSW's disability sector.

 **Delivered**

We delivered advice and provided more than 400 information and professional learning sessions to staff, parents and carers, and providers in the past year. We have supported school staff and families to navigate the NDIS, resolve issues and access specific NDIS pathways.

 **On Track**

We are focused on improving how we work with the National Disability Insurance Agency and other agencies to support students with complex support needs. We are developing additional guidance for schools on how NDIS plans can be used to support student personalised learning and support, and we are working nationally to resolve outstanding issues relating to the NDIS transition.

“ As self-managed NDIS beneficiaries, we are able to choose the service providers that best meet our needs. We chose Royal Far West's Immersion Weeks, which are offered through their Windmill program.

“ Until COVID-19, we were attending one week each term at Royal Far West in Manly, using our NDIS package. We book our sessions to suit the twins' schooling timetables and our farming operation, rather than having to drop everything to fit into an organisation's timetables.

“ The boys are now thriving at school and their futures are bright when we focus on their strengths and extend their confidence and capabilities.”

Michelle, rural parent

Delivered

We know that a student’s speech, language and communication abilities are central to literacy and other educational outcomes. We developed a new resource in collaboration with Speech Pathology Australia to better support students with communication difficulties and disorders through enhanced collaboration between school staff, parents and carers, teachers, students, and speech pathologists.

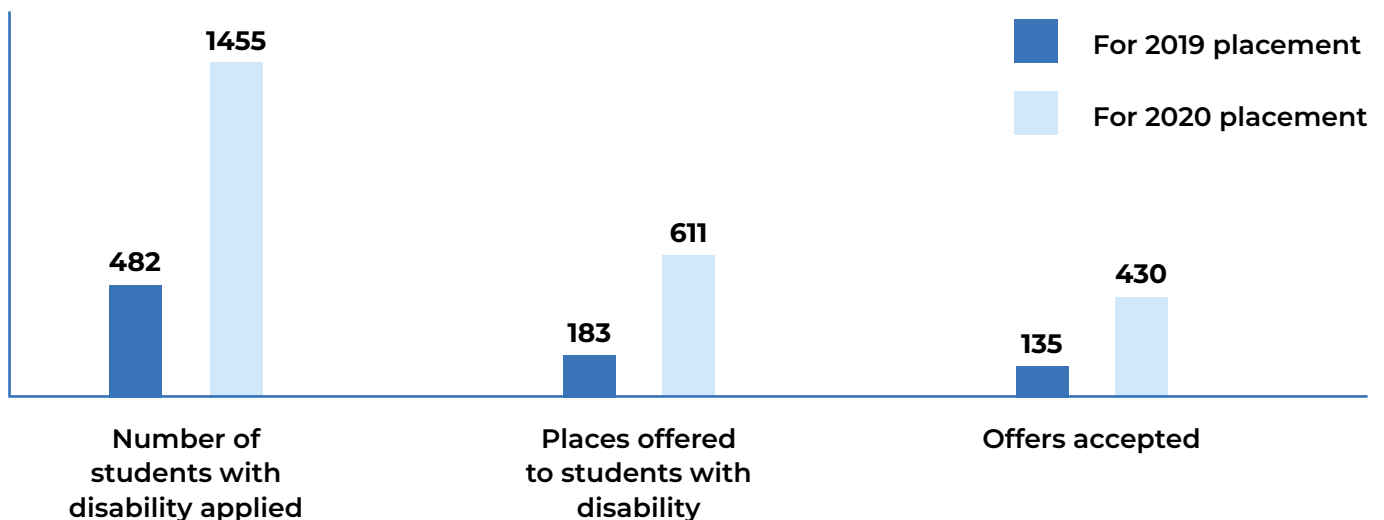
Delivered

In the past year, we further implemented our action plan to improve selection processes for the identification and placement of gifted students in selective high schools and

opportunity classes in NSW. One of the focus areas identified in the action plan is to ‘ensure appropriate provisions and adjustments for gifted students with disability’. We successfully increased access for students with disability by reducing the barriers and limitations to their participation in the testing process.

These improvements have resulted in a 200 per cent increase in the numbers of students with disability applying for and accepting a selective high school or opportunity class placement. Over the next 12 months, we are planning further improvements to support students with disability. We will introduce computer-based testing, which will increase the opportunities to support students’ participation in the selection process.

Increase in numbers of students with disability applying for and accepting a selective high school or opportunity class placement



In the 2018 selection process for 2019 placement:

482 students with disability applied
183 places offered to students with disability
135 accepted.

In the 2019 selection process for 2020 placement:

1455 students with disability applied
611 places offered to students with disability
430 accepted.

We continue to work with schools to improve the collection, quality and use of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) as a record of the adjustments delivered by schools to support students with disability to access education on the same basis as their peers and as a means of ensuring all students with disability are participating and engaged in learning and able to pursue life opportunities.

 **Delivered**

We improved the way school leaders can access and use reports informed by the NCCD. This will enhance understanding of the levels and categories of adjustments for students with disability and promote greater consistency in data use and understanding.

 **On Track**

We are finalising the process to allocate low-level adjustment for disability funding to mainstream schools using NCCD data. We continue to work with school principals and other stakeholders to determine a methodology to allocate learning and support teacher positions using NCCD as well as other relevant data as a component (Recommendation 5 of the Parliamentary Inquiry). We are engaging in national conversations to build a strong evidence base to inform funding for students with disability.



→ **On Track**

We have initiated a review of the criteria we use to determine whether students with disability are able to access additional targeted support. We are working with a range of stakeholders to identify and test potential options that reflect contemporary understandings of disability and align to needs-based assessment approaches (Recommendation 7 of the Parliamentary Inquiry). We are focused on how the assessment process can be used to understand the educational needs of students with disability to better inform decisions about support.

→ **On Track**

We are focused on addressing the needs of families through the investment of \$120 million over four years to expand access to before and after school care, making it available to all parents with children who attend public primary schools by 2021. We are considering the needs of students with disability and their families to ensure equitable and inclusive access to before and after school care for those who need it. We are undertaking research to understand the current access to before and after school care for particular priority cohorts of students, including students with disability. We will use this research to inform any future work required to improve access for the identified cohorts, including students with disability.

→ **On Track**


We are working closely with our government partners in other jurisdictions to examine the implications of and options for extending the Disability Standards for Education to include child care providers. The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) is undertaking consultations with early childhood and school-aged education and care providers to inform this work, which forms part of the review of the Standards being led by the Australian Government.

→ **On Track**

We are currently consulting with key stakeholders to identify areas of priority for rural and remote education. A theme of this work is to 'enable learners and learning' for all students, regardless of location or ability. We know that the context of learning for students in rural and remote areas increases in complexity with distance and isolation. As part of this work, we will focus on reducing disadvantage and enhancing equity of opportunity and outcomes for students with additional needs or disability in rural and remote areas. We will continue to collaborate and implement localised solutions and expanded service provision in partnership with other agencies to ensure we are meeting students' needs.

→ **On Track**

We are developing career pathways and work readiness support program to help students with disability as they transition out of school. Students will have access to information to assist them with job readiness skills and we will work with employers to offer work experience or placement, school-based traineeships and post school positions. Students will have access to continued support if they do not immediately acquire a placement through the program.



Improving the learning and support journey

Our goal is for students, families and schools to receive consistent and transparent support throughout their school journey and at key transition points. We have continued to build on our efforts to streamline and improve the processes by which students and their families access support at schools, delivering on the Parliamentary Inquiry recommendations about the department prioritising its review of the access request process by streamlining the process and facilitating the timely provision of funds to schools (Recommendations 22, 23 and 24).

We are focused on ensuring that personalised learning and support for a student is a shared journey that involves the school, family and student collaborating to identify the adjustments required to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of the student. Adjustments may include changes to teaching and learning, individual planning, learning materials, and the learning environment.

Delivered

We undertook a number of pilots, testing how we can streamline the access request process for families and schools. We listened to the experiences of students and parents through focus groups to understand their perspective on personalised learning and support and to ensure future changes are aligned to their need. These pilots provided us with valuable insights into process and practice improvements, including the frequency of panel meetings, panel membership and communication with families and schools. We have built these learnings into the development of resources to support families and into work under way to improve the quality and timeliness of information provided to students and parents about additional supports in schools.

We have also improved the access request process so that some students who need hearing and vision support in the classroom no longer need to apply through the access request process. Instead, their families can liaise with their local school-based sensory team.

In addition, more than 750 students with disability who receive Integration Funding Support have benefited from improvements for students transitioning from primary to high school.

Delivered

We developed standard operating procedures for applications for hearing and vision support, Integration Funding Support and support class placements. This will ensure consistent decision making and practice across NSW public schools, which in turn leads to more timely decision-making for families.

Over the next year, we will embed these changes and continue to measure their effectiveness. We will engage with students and families to understand the impact of these improvements. During the implementation phase, we will test and refine processes to streamline the access request application process for families and schools across NSW.

→ On Track

We will introduce a **consistent model for access requests** across NSW public schools for the placement of students in support classes, supported by standard operating procedures and professional learning for representatives on placement panels. This will enhance transparency and consistency of practice, as well as improve the experience for students and families applying for these placements.

We will improve the way students with disability receive Integration Funding Support by introducing a **centralised decision-making team**.

→ On Track

We will introduce a consistent and timely method of **communication with schools and families** about support class placement panel outcomes. These outcomes will be communicated within an average of 28 calendar days (excluding school holidays), in line with the Parliamentary Inquiry recommendation.

→ On Track

We will **develop resources to help our schools engage with parents and carers** as they navigate available resources and supports for their child. The resources provide information for school staff, parents and carers on specialist support provisions, accessing specialist provisions and eligibility. Parents and carers can access this information via the new online resource, or their school may provide hard copies.

Improve how we respond to concerns and complaints

We know that students achieve better outcomes when families and schools work together. We also know that parents and carers of children with disability often have specific questions and concerns, and that our **complaint processes** need to be easy and accessible so that issues can be raised, resolved or referred quickly. Sometimes, the concerns raised by families include information about the conduct of our staff.

We remain committed to protecting the safety and wellbeing of our students and have robust systems for responding to allegations of staff misconduct. We have continued to improve the way we respond to concerns, complaints and allegations of staff misconduct.

✓ Delivered

We updated our **guidelines for the management of conduct and performance** and grown our preliminary investigation team, which pays particular attention to matters involving students with disability.

✓ Delivered

We developed e-learning modules to support school-based staff to develop the knowledge and skills needed to effectively manage any concerns or issues that families may raise. These build on existing professional learning resources which **guide staff in responding to complaints**, including making the complaint process easy and accessible, so that parents and carers of children with disability can engage with schools at an early stage.

4. Track outcomes

Our commitments

- 4.1 Initiate a ground-breaking approach, developed in NSW schools, to track and report the learning progress of students with complex needs.
- 4.2 Invest in new research to identify the practices that support the best learning outcomes.
- 4.3 Invest in research to better understand the prevalence of autism and mental health in our schools.

We are committed across our education system to a continuous process of improvement in the way we plan for excellence, use data to inform decision-making, track outcomes for students and continue to develop our evidence base about effective practices to support our students to thrive.

Starting in 2021, all schools will develop a strategic improvement plan, underpinned by our School Excellence Framework, as part of a new four-year school planning cycle. We launched [School Excellence in Action](#) to support this strategic approach to school planning and have developed a comprehensive suite of resources to assist our schools. This includes guidance and examples to support planning for specific contexts or student cohorts, including students with disability.

In addition, our Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation released an update to '[What works best: evidence-based practices to help improve student performance](#)'. This valuable resource for our schools highlights eight key quality teaching practices that are known to support school improvement and enhance the learning outcomes of all our students.

We remain focused on **investing in research to build our evidence base**, including about effective approaches and supports for students with disability. There continues to be little consensus on how to measure learning outcomes for the full range of students with disability – and as a result, a lack of clear evidence about the effectiveness of different approaches in achieving learning outcomes. This is one of our biggest challenges.

In the Disability Strategy, we outlined a vision for what success would look like. The strategy stated that a more inclusive education system is one where:

- students with disability are learning to their fullest capability
- parents and carers are treated like partners in their child's education
- teachers possess the necessary skills to effectively educate children with disability, and feel confident doing so
- school leaders wholeheartedly support and enable inclusive education practices
- specialists work alongside teachers, providing support and guidance.

We are making progress in addressing the gaps in our understanding, improving our use of data, and measuring how we are affecting outcomes for students with disability. These all require ongoing improvements that we are committed to building into our system and our practice.



Tracking and reporting the progress of students with disability

→ On Track

We continued work on the Assessment for Complex Learners trial, which is identifying and testing assessment tools to effectively assess outcomes for students with disabilities. We are currently undertaking trials and research on a number of assessment tools in both mainstream schools and schools for specific purposes. We are working with 20 schools to deliver an early pilot of the Passport for learning, which we will build out to a randomised control trial in 2021. A further 70 schools are piloting four other tools, and we are also undertaking qualitative research on the Students with Additional Needs tool. We will use the findings of our work to build our evidence-base of the most effective ways to measure learning progress for students with complex needs.



At a system level, we remain focused on improving the reliability and validity of our data and developing indicators to measure systemic impacts of the Disability Strategy and outcomes for students with disability.

→ On Track

In the past year, we've built the foundation to develop an outcomes measurement system. This work began with in-depth research to develop and refine potential measures based on what the evidence tells us is effective. We reviewed international best practice measures and considered our findings in the context of the outcomes outlined both in the Disability Strategy and other relevant outcomes frameworks. We have also undertaken a detailed analysis and stocktake of our data to generate insights and identify gaps and opportunities.

Through this work, we identified a suite of potential measures and indicators across the three student domains of the Disability Strategy: learning, wellbeing and independence. We layered these against limitations of available data, how these measures might be used to inform decision-making across the different levels of our education system.

We are now testing and validating these potential measures and working through how we can address the identified data gaps as a priority. This work has further highlighted the complexities in tracking and reporting outcomes for students with disability, which we are working hard to better understand and address. We will continue to report on our findings as development of this work progresses.

We keep building the way we use data in our schools and in our decision-making to improve supports for students with disability. Each year, we seek feedback from students, parents and carers, and teachers about student engagement and wellbeing through the department's Tell Them from Me survey.

✓ Delivered

In the [Tell Them from Me](#) survey in 2019, we asked all parents new questions about whether their child's school supports inclusivity and access, if the built environment supports learning and if their child is enrolled at their first choice of public school (Recommendation 11 of the Parliamentary Inquiry).

The 2019 Tell Them from Me survey found that:

92%

of parents with a child without a disability or special needs in a mainstream school stated that their child was enrolled in their first choice school.

89%

of parents of a child with disability or special needs who are enrolled in a mainstream school answered that their child was enrolled at their first choice of school.

87%

of parents of a child in secondary school both with and without a disability stated that their child was enrolled in their first choice school.

→ On Track

We are investigating potential accessibility barriers to the Tell Them From Me survey for students with disability, who may currently require additional support or adjustments to complete the survey. We will use the findings to identify potential improvements that may enable students with disability to complete the survey independently or with less support.

→ On Track

We have partnered with UNSW to develop and trial an **accessible survey method for students with high support needs** to improve their participation. The trial will involve students with high supports needs (moderate to severe intellectual disability and/or autism) from schools for specific purposes and mainstream schools which have support classes. We engaged UNSW to work alongside teachers to design, test and evaluate an accessible survey and method for this cohort of students. We will use the findings of this trial to build our evidence base and support our teachers around what works to improve the participation of students with high support needs.

“ This is amazing, for our students to have a voice. Quite often, families ... or teachers and school learning support officers are the voice for our students. By doing the survey in the variety of ways that we are able to do that now, it really gives that authentic voice. ”

**Michelle Davies, Principal,
Chalmers Road School**



→ **On Track**

We remain focused on improving the validity of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data in collaboration with the Australian and other state and territory governments, and our schools, and on the alignment between the government schools funding model and the needs of students with disability.

✓ **Delivered**

We undertook an **Educational Pathways Data project** to explore education-to-employment pathways for young people aged 15 to 24 in NSW through school, tertiary education and into work. The aim of the project is to identify the education-to-employment pathways that students take, understand how their circumstances and pathways influence education and work outcomes and develop options to improve student outcomes. People with disability make up part of the study cohort. We are currently engaging with people with disability and disability advocates so that they have the opportunity to provide input on how findings relating to people with disability are released publicly. We are also exploring how to maximise current and future work to inform decision making, shape policy, target programs, track performance and conduct evaluations.

Investing in research to build our evidence base on effective practices and supports for students with disability

✓ **Delivered**

We invested in research to improve our understanding of the prevalence of autism and mental health in our schools. The research found enrolments of students with autism in NSW schools grew 12.2 per cent from 2013 to 2018, and that enrolments of students with mental health needs grew 6.4 per cent in the same period. These increases were found to be due to better identification of autism and increasing public awareness of the impact of mental health reflecting Australian and international trends.

→ **On Track**

We commissioned an independent academic to conduct a **review of the relevant research on support for students with disability**, including effective practice for students across disability types, severity and different educational settings. The purpose of the review is to understand the rigour of the existing evidence base and whether there is consistency in the outcomes measured. It will also examine the nature and extent of disabilities researched and whether any reliable findings can be drawn about the factors that lead to the best outcomes for students with disability. The review will build our evidence base for teachers and schools, and its findings will inform the department's policies and ongoing reforms. It will also enable NSW to contribute to the evidence base and, ultimately, support practice change at a systemic level.

→ **On Track**

We will undertake new research to build our evidence base of successful practice and pedagogies to improve outcomes for **high potential and gifted students with a disability**, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The research will directly inform the implementation of the High Potential and Gifted Education Policy. We will gain insights into the prevalence, demographic background and factors influencing the assessment and

identification of high potential and gifted students with disability within our public schools. We will use this to share successful practices in schools, and to inform professional learning and online resources to support schools and teachers in their practice.

→ **On Track**

We have partnered with Edith Cowan University and invested in research on **School-based Provision of Physical Activity for Students with Disability**, undertaking a comprehensive review of national and international best practice in the delivery of adaptive physical activity in physical education and sport. We will investigate how teachers across all educational settings – K to 12,

schools for specific purposes, support units and mainstream settings – improve outcomes for students specifically through access to high-quality resources, training, equipment, facilities, increased inclusivity and relevant modifications. This research will inform future delivery of inclusive practices for students with a disability.

→ **On Track**

Through research we are improving our understanding of the interaction between physical learning environments and support and outcomes for students with disability, starting with a review of the current literature and evidence around designing learning environments to maximise inclusion.





Future priorities

The release of the Disability Strategy in 2019 marked an important shift within the NSW education system. It publicly recognised the need to focus our efforts on improving outcomes for students with disability across all government schools in NSW.

We know that delivering the initial focus areas of reform that we committed to in the Disability Strategy were the first important steps to improving outcomes and experiences for students with disability in NSW and enhancing support for our teachers and school staff.

The strategy provides a clear expression of the department's commitment to continuously improving the NSW education system. We want to ensure all schools and classrooms have the support they need to educate and include the range of children and young people in their local community. As this progress report demonstrates, there is much more happening across the department to support students with disability than the specific activities the Disability Strategy identified.

Over the coming year, we will focus on delivering the 'on-track' initiatives identified in this progress report.

We will also continue to **build on a whole-system approach** to improve the experience of students with disability.

We need to improve the way we collect, connect and share our data, and how we use it to draw actionable insights. We will work with our strategic partners as we implement an **outcomes measurement system** for students with disability and develop a framework to facilitate our data maturity. This will inform and guide the identification of gaps, opportunities and essential improvements necessary to uplift the system overall to benefit students with disability.

In 2020, our **Innovation Program** has focused on school-led innovation. In 2021, we will focus on identifying opportunities to share the experiences of our school led innovation trials and consider whether there is a good basis to scale these ideas to more schools. We will also

look at opportunities for innovation that will drive systemic change and build the evidence to support this.

We are working closely with the NSW Education Standards Authority to deliver a new curriculum on an ambitious timeline. The NSW Government released its response to the [Review of the NSW Curriculum](#) in June. 'An inclusive curriculum' is one of the design principles of the review, reflecting public consultation in which "the clear preference was for a single curriculum that recognised students' differing levels of attainment and learning needs and that enabled 'appropriate adjustments to be made to teaching and learning' to ensure that every student was engaged, challenged at an appropriate level and made excellent progress towards high achievement."

In planning for the successful implementation of new syllabuses, we will be maintaining a strong focus on the imperative to **support all students to access the curriculum**, and considering what support our teachers will need to do this well.

We will continue to **build the capability of our school-based staff**, supporting them with professional learning options and resources to build their inclusive practice and improve the experience of students with disability.

In 2021, we will also focus on the implementation of the **Student Behaviour Strategy** and supporting our schools to adopt a new approach to effective behaviour support for our students. We will recruit behaviour specialists to provide expert advice to schools in the area of complex and challenging behaviours. Behaviour support is critical to promoting engaging and effective classrooms and lifting student performance. We are committed to developing additional professional learning to enhance workforce skills to respond to changing student behaviour. We will strengthen existing support structures by providing wrap-around support measures, including establishing a panel of pre-qualified behaviour service providers schools can engage to obtain the best solutions and support in their school.

We will continue to keep students at the centre of what we do and seek to **enhance student participation and voice** across our reform agenda. Through the student voices online hub we will increase the representation of students with disability and provide them opportunities to participate in the online community.

The Inclusive Education Statement for students with disability, launched in August this year, furthers our commitment to improving learning and wellbeing for students with disability in every school. Phase one focuses on developing practice resources to support the strengthening of inclusive practice across all public schools. We will continue to build on this suite of practice resources. We will release the inclusive education for students with disability policy, which will support and reinforce the six principles of inclusive education. We will continue to listen

and work with students, parents and educators to develop these resources and the policy.

In future years, our annual report on progress will adopt a new approach. It will retain its connection with the important focus areas and work under way through the Disability Strategy. It will also reorient our strategic direction to our forward agenda, as we move into the next phase of our work.

We will continue to embed our work clearly within the broader departmental strategic context. This approach recognises the strong connections required across the department's reform agenda to support students with disability. We remain strongly committed to improving the educational experiences and outcomes for all students in NSW, with an unyielding focus on our students with disability.






We acknowledge the homelands of all Aboriginal people and pay our respect to Country.

For more Information

If you have any questions about this progress report, or to request a text-only version, please email:

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