



**Submission to**

**Department for Education about**

**Anti-Bullying Rapid Review 2025**

24 June 2025

## About the Submitter

JFA Purple Orange is an independent, social-profit organisation that undertakes systemic policy analysis and advocacy across a range of issues affecting people with disability and their families.

Our work is characterised by co-design and co-production and includes hosting a number of user-led initiatives.

Much of our work involves connecting people with disability to good information and to each other. We also work extensively in multi-stakeholder consultation and collaboration, especially around policy and practice that helps ensure people with disability are welcomed as valued members of the mainstream community.

Our work is informed by a model called *Citizenhood*.

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## 1. Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should draw on the Model of Citizenship Support as a useful lens through which to inform the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review.

**Recommendation 2:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should co-design training, resources and responses to anti-bullying with priority populations (including children/young people with disability and parents with disability) to the greatest extent possible.

**Recommendation 3:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should acknowledge the over representation of students with disability and work towards a national anti-bullying practice that aims to reduce the prevalence of students with disability being bullied in our schools.

**Recommendation 4:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should acknowledge that all children/young people have the right to an inclusive education at their local mainstream school and provide a clear pathway for the creation of a co-designed comprehensive national transition plan to end the segregation of people with disability in education settings, including clear timebound transition stages. It should endorse a final deadline to ensure segregated settings and practices are eliminated nationally within the term of *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031*.

**Recommendation 5:** The Commonwealth Department of Education acknowledge the importance of implementing and adequately funding Foundational Supports in our education system where all children can access supports and learn together without segregation.

**Recommendation 6:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should prioritise leadership development for senior staff, including Principals, to help build inclusive school cultures, recognising the key role leaders play in fostering safe, respectful, and welcoming environments for all students.

**Recommendation 7:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should ensure that any new national anti-bullying standard includes enhanced teacher training and professional development focused on inclusion. This should include:

- Education on disability rights, diversity, and inclusion for the whole school community;
- Professional development for school staff on inclusive education practices;
- Training for educators on preventing and addressing bullying with attention given to priority cohorts, including people with disability; and
- Student education on responding to bullying and being active, supportive bystanders.

**Recommendation 8:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should recommend that all aspects of schools (including infrastructure, information sharing, communication methods etc) align with Universal Design principles and that the curriculum and teaching methods are developed in line with the principles of Universal Design for Learning.

**Recommendation 9:** The Commonwealth Department of Education recognise the importance of implementing the Australian Disability Strategy 2021-2031 (ADS), the recommendations of Disability Royal Commission (DRC) Final Report, and the NDIS Review in reducing the prevalence of bullying children/young people with disability.

**Recommendation 10:** The Commonwealth Department of Education, through the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review, should recommend the introduction of additional Disability Inclusion teacher roles funded in all schools to work with school communities to promote improved outcomes for children/young people/parents with diverse range of disabilities.

**Recommendation 11:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should consider the extent to which there is adequate access to expert support from medical/health and allied health professionals and make recommendations to improve access to additional services as required.

**Recommendation 12:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should ensure that work towards a consistent national standard on anti-bullying practice complements and aligns with efforts to reduce and eliminate the use of restrictive practices, and seclusion of students with disability.

**Recommendation 13:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should allocate sustained and dedicated funding to implement strategies to reduce the prevalence of bullying in our education system. Funding should be at levels that allow for consistent evidence-based, effective practice by schools, and equitable outcomes.

**Recommendation 14:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should improve and increase data collection of children/young people with disabilities, and other priority cohorts, in schools, in line with recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission. Data should be nationally consistent and made publicly available in de-identified forms.

## 2. Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review 2025. As you are aware, experiences of bullying of students in school can have lifelong consequences on mental health, health and wellbeing, as well as impact future education and employment pathways and prospects. This is certainly the case for people with disability who may be subjected to higher prevalence of stigma, ableism and bullying.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) recently found that 12.1 per cent of children and young people aged 0 and 24 years lived with disability, and that 37.5 per cent of children aged 0 -14 years with disability had a parent with disability<sup>1</sup>. Children/young people with disability are more likely than those without disability to be bullied <sup>1 2 3</sup>. A recent Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) Youth Education survey (2024-2025) found that 75 per cent of disabled students were bullied last year, while 72 per cent were excluded from school activities or events<sup>4</sup>, an increase from a similar survey in 2022<sup>5</sup>, which found that 70 per cent had been bullied, and 65 per cent excluded from school activities or events. In general, as the recent Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2025), *Children and young people with disability 2022: summary results from the 2022 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC)*. Available via: <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/children-and-young-people-disability-2022>, accessed in June 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Pinquart M. Systematic Review: Bullying Involvement of Children With and Without Chronic Physical Illness and/or Physical/Sensory Disability-a Meta-Analytic Comparison With Healthy/Nondisabled Peers. *J Pediatr Psychol*. 2017 Apr 1;42(3):245-259. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27784727/>. PMID: 27784727.

<sup>3</sup> Kavanagh, A., Priest, N., Emerson, E., Milner, A., King, T. (2018), 'Gender, parental education, and experiences of bullying victimization by Australian adolescents with and without a disability', *Child: Care, health and development*, Volume 44, Issue 2: March 2018, 332-341, available via: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cch.12545>, accessed in June 2025.

<sup>4</sup> Children and Young People with Disability Australia (2025), Media release: Three in four disabled students are bullied or excluded at school – and it's getting worse, new survey reveals, April 2025. Available via: , <https://cyda.org.au/three-in-four-disabled-students-are-bullied-or-excluded-at-school-and-its-getting-worse-new-survey-reveals/>, accessed in June 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, C., Dickinson, H., Faulkner, A. (2023) *"I think the teachers need more help" Voices of experience from students with disability in Australia*. CYDA Youth Education Survey 2022. Report prepared for Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), Melbourne. Available via: , <https://cyda.org.au/three-in-four-disabled-students-are-bullied-or-excluded-at-school-and-its-getting-worse-new-survey-reveals/>, accessed in June 2025.

Exploitation (Disability Royal Commission (DRC)) found, people with disability are also more likely to experience abuse and harm through their lives<sup>6</sup>.

Types of bullying that children/young people with disability (both invisible and visible disability) might experience, compared to those without disability, include ableist language/slurs, bullying targeted at the exploitation of support needs (for example, removing access to a mobility aid/device), targeting physical differences and abilities, and/or social exclusion as a direct result of their disability or access needs. Children/young people with disability may also experience bullying in relation to intersectional identities.

According to the 2022 reporting on Australia's Disability Strategy Outcomes, 58% of people with disability aged 20-64 had completed Year 12 or equivalent<sup>7</sup>. We often hear from parents that negative attitudes and bullying are key reasons why their children/young people with disability shift to segregated schools, undertake home-schooling or drop out of school.

If we are to end the prevalence of bullying against children/young people with disability and give them greater chances to pursue social and economic goals in their future, we must end the segregation, stigma and ableism being experienced by people with disability in our community. This starts with our children at school. In this submission we will highlight the importance of creating inclusive, welcoming and safe school environments that are accessible and equipped to cater for all students in the community, and how doing so will reduce instances of bullying.

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<sup>6</sup> Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation (2023), *Final Report, Volume 1, Executive Summary, Our vision for an inclusive Australia and Recommendations*, Available online via: <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report>, accessed in June 2025.

<sup>7</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2025), Outcomes - Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031: Year 12 Completion, available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/australias-disability-strategy/outcomes/education-and-learning/year-12-completion>, accessed in June 2025.

We welcome this rapid review and the efforts to find better ways to prevent, intervene and respond to bullying.

## 2.1. About JFA Purple Orange

JFA Purple Orange is an independent social profit organisation that undertakes systemic policy analysis and advocacy across a range of issues affecting people with disability and their families. We also host a range of peer networks for people with disability including people with intellectual disability, physical and sensory disability, younger people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and people in regional South Australia. Our board, and many of our staff are people with disability. As such, we are in a unique position to provide a genuine insight into issues affecting people with disability, including on topics such as schooling and education.

The work of our organisation is underpinned by the Model of Citizenship Support. This model sets out a framework for how people can be supported to build their chances of a good life and maximise their *Citizenship*.

The work of JFA Purple Orange is anchored on the principles of *Personhood* and *Citizenship* and is guided by values centred on human rights and social inclusion. Every human being seeks to build a good life for themselves. As set out in the Model of Citizenship Support,<sup>8</sup> a good life is characterised by the presence of:

- Authorship of an individual's own life according to personally defined priorities and goals, termed *Personhood* (sometimes described as choice and control), and
- Having active valued roles in community life and the economy, termed *Citizenship* (often referred to as inclusion).

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<sup>8</sup> Augustine, L., Bjereld, Y., Turner, R. (2022), The Role of Disability in the Relationship Between Mental Health and Bullying: A Focused, Systematic Review of Longitudinal Studies, *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 2024: 55:893-908. Available online at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10578-022-01457-x>, accessed in June 2025.

A good life largely depends on the availability of life chances – the assets and opportunities available to a person. Unlike *citizenship*, *Citizenhood* is a dynamic experience: it can rise and fall.

The Model asserts that our life chances comprise four different, but interrelated, types of assets we can call upon, termed the Four Capitals. These are:

- Personal Capital (how the person sees themselves),
- Knowledge Capital (what the person knows and can apply),
- Material Capital (money and the tangible things in our lives), and
- Social Capital (having people in our lives who we know and know us).

These apply to any person and can help explain what might be helpful for someone to build a good life for themselves. Educational opportunities are fundamental to a person's life chances and impact all of the Four Capitals. Bullying, exclusion or segregation in and from these opportunities will significantly decrease a person's life chances. As such, an individual's participation in education heavily influences their ability to have authorship of their own life and to take up valued roles in the community and economy leading to building a good life.

To further explore this framework for how people can be supported to build their chances of a good life and maximise their Citizenhood, we encourage the Department to access the full paper on the Model of Citizenhood Support via our [website](#).

**Recommendation 1: The Commonwealth Department of Education should draw on the Model of Citizenhood Support as a useful lens through which to inform the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review.**

### 3. Co-design

Co-design is an inclusive, collaborative process whereby a diverse range of people with relevant skills, experience or interests come together to provide advice and make decisions on a project, policy, program or initiative. People from priority groups can provide unique insights into their experiences. Co-design ensures that the diverse perspectives of communities are considered, and programs and policies are designed to respond to the needs of the people they seek to support. We encourage the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review to access our Guide to Co-Design with People with Disability, which was itself co-designed, via our [website](#).

Hearing from children/young people who are experiencing bullying directly about what works, and what doesn't work, and working with them towards solutions (via or in addition to co-design processes) is vital.

JFA Purple Orange recently spoke to students with disability in relation to another submission on education. They told us about the importance of:

- Students being listened to;
- Having staff and school leadership who care about bullying and act to make sure it is addressed;
- Having someone who can advocate for a student if the student needs support for that to occur; and
- Treating 17-18 year olds in ways that are respectful of their age (i.e. like adults, not children).

They also spoke of:

- Teachers not reading their individual access plans, or not understanding how they can make the school accessible.
- Teachers making negative comments about individual access plans ("who told you that you have to have that" etc);

- Teachers not having enough administration time to respond to access plans or making the necessary adjustment needed;
- Students having to ‘mask’ to get through the day, but then teachers and school staff not believing that students had a disability or are neurodiverse;
- Indirect discrimination (being made to feel not welcome in the classroom and school community);
- Situations where children/young people being bullied for standing up for parents with disability, and anecdotally reprimanded for standing up against the perpetrators; and
- The significant stress of being forced to defend themselves because help was not forthcoming.

**Recommendation 2:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should co-design training, resources and responses to anti-bullying with priority populations (including children/young people with disability and parents with disability) to the greatest extent possible.

### 3.1. Over-representation of students with disability

An Inquiry into Suspension, Exclusion and Expulsion Processes in South Australian Government Schools in 2020, found that serious problems existed at the schools’ level in ensuring adequate provision of support and adjustments to students with disability<sup>9</sup>. It additionally found that the South Australian Department of Education’s then policy and procedures for appeals were not meeting international human rights obligations according

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<sup>9</sup> Graham et al., (2020). *Inquiry into Suspension, Exclusion and Expulsion Processes in South Australian government schools: Final Report*. Page 18, The Centre for Inclusive Education, QUT: Brisbane, QLD. Available from: <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/docs/support-and-inclusion/engagement-and-wellbeing/student-absences/report-of-an-independent-inquiry-into-suspensions-exclusions-and-expulsions-in-south-australian-government-schools.pdf>, accessed in June 2025.

to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)<sup>10</sup>. Unfortunately, many of these issues are continuing.

The recent South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People in South Australia, Helen Connolly, in the “Missing Out” report in 2025, noted strong concern about “the systemic exclusion of children and young people living with disability from education settings”<sup>11</sup>. She highlighted that “Children and young people living with disability experience social exclusion, high rates of suspensions and exclusions and fewer post-school opportunities. They are often excluded from school or community activities due to behaviours or circumstances which form part of their disability/ies”<sup>12</sup>.

**Recommendation 3:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should acknowledge the over representation of students with disability and work towards a national anti-bullying practice that aims to reduce the prevalence of students with disability being bullied in our schools.

## 4. Segregated education heightening the prevalence of bullying

Segregated educational arrangements (having people with disability attend separate ‘special’ schools, or units, away from other students) contributes to negative and ableist attitudes towards people with disability and to the prevalence of bullying experienced by

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<sup>10</sup> Graham et al., (2020). *Inquiry into Suspension, Exclusion and Expulsion Processes in South Australian government schools: Final Report*. Page 17, The Centre for Inclusive Education, QUT: Brisbane, QLD. Available from: <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/docs/support-and-inclusion/engagement-and-wellbeing/student-absences/report-of-an-independent-inquiry-into-suspensions-exclusions-and-expulsions-in-south-australian-government-schools.pdf>, accessed in June 2025.

<sup>11</sup> Connolly, H. Commissioner for Children and Young People, South Australia (2025). *Missing out. Systemic discrimination of South Australian children and young people*. April 2025. Available online via: <https://www.ccyp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Screen-Missing-out-FINAL.pdf>, accessed in June 2025.

<sup>12</sup> Connolly, H. Commissioner for Children and Young People, South Australia (2025). *Missing out. Systemic discrimination of South Australian children and young people*. April 2025. Available online via: <https://www.ccyp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Screen-Missing-out-FINAL.pdf>, accessed in June 2025.

children/young people with disability. As Commissioners Bennett, Galbally and McEwin noted in the DRC final report:

*“When individuals, organisations and governments exclude and segregate people with disability, it renders these individuals ‘unseen and unfamiliar’.<sup>13</sup> This generates and perpetuates attitudes, beliefs and behaviours towards disability by reinforcing the belief that people with disability are ‘different’, ‘other’ or ‘special’.<sup>14 15</sup> They then named this as a form of ableism.*

JFA Purple Orange advocates for ending segregation (both ‘special schools’ and ‘units’) in education settings. We believe that all children/young people with or without disability should be receiving a high-quality inclusive education and have genuine choice to attend their local mainstream school with the assurance of being welcomed, supported, included and safe. Sadly, for too many children/young people with disability in Australia, this is not the case. Yet, decades of research and evidence<sup>16</sup> tells us that inclusive education (attending the same schools and classes as their peers) best prepares students with disability for life and success. As is stated in General Comment 4 on Article 24 the Right to Inclusive Education for the UNCRPD, “Inclusive education is central to achieving high quality education for all learners, including those with disabilities, and for the development of

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<sup>13</sup> Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation (2023), *Final Report, Volume 1, Executive Summary, Our vision for an inclusive Australia and Recommendations*: Footnote 52, page 189 “Transcript, Gwynnyth Llewellyn, Public hearing 28, 11 October 2022, P-142 [5–10].” Available online via:

<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report>, accessed in June 2025.

<sup>14</sup> Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation (2023), *Final Report, Volume 1, Executive Summary, Our vision for an inclusive Australia and Recommendations*: Footnote 52, page 190 – “For example, Transcript, Gerard Quinn, Public hearing 31, 12 December 2022, P-52 [3–5]; Submissions of Counsel Assisting the Royal Commission following Public hearing 28, 9 December 2022, p 34 [122]; Queenslanders with Disability Network, Submission in response to Rights and attitudes issues paper, 5 August 2020, ISS.001.00326, p 5; Rosemary Kayess & Therese Sands, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Shining a light on social transformation, Report prepared for the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, September 2020, p 10.” Available online via:

<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report>, accessed in June 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation (2023), *Final Report, Volume 7, Inclusive education, employment and housing: summary and recommendations*, Available online via:

<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report>, accessed in June 2025.

<sup>16</sup> For further information about inclusive education, check out the following resources: Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education website at <https://acie.org.au/>; Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education website at <https://allmeansall.org.au/research/>; and Alana website at [http://alana.org.br/wpcontent/uploads/2016/12/A\\_Summary\\_of\\_the\\_evidence\\_on\\_inclusive\\_education.pdf](http://alana.org.br/wpcontent/uploads/2016/12/A_Summary_of_the_evidence_on_inclusive_education.pdf).

inclusive, peaceful and fair societies.”<sup>17</sup> Research also demonstrates that students without disability benefit immensely from inclusive education<sup>18</sup>. These benefits include a more positive sense of self, enhanced communication and language development, increased awareness of diversity, and a higher quality education that is better suited to individual needs<sup>19</sup>.

We are told by children/young people with disability and other people in their lives that every person should be able to participate in their local community and attend the school of their choice. The majority of people from the disability community we interact with indicate a strong preference for inclusive education in a mainstream setting and support transitioning away from segregated “special schools”. By having a separate system of “special schools” we are setting up a different path of expectation for the children/young people who attend these schools, their families, and in the broader community. It is more likely that children/young people who attend segregated schools will transition to segregated employment.

Australia has been criticised for resourcing and supporting “special class” and “special school” placements, which constitute segregated settings and are incompatible with Australia’s binding obligations under Article 24 of the UNCRPD, which calls for the transfer of resources from segregated to inclusive education settings.<sup>20</sup> The Australian Government claims that they meet the obligations under Article 24 through an education system that

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<sup>17</sup> UN General Assembly (2016), General Comment 4: Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education, [https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/CRPD\\_General\\_Comment\\_4\\_Inclusive\\_Education\\_2016\\_En.pdf](https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/CRPD_General_Comment_4_Inclusive_Education_2016_En.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Hehir, T and Pascucci, S & C (2016), A summary of the evidence on Inclusive Education, available at: [https://alana.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/A\\_Summary\\_of\\_the\\_evidence\\_on\\_inclusive\\_education.pdf](https://alana.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/A_Summary_of_the_evidence_on_inclusive_education.pdf), accessed in June 2025.

<sup>19</sup> Cologon, K. (2019), Towards inclusive education: a necessary process of transformation, Report for Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), available via: <https://cyda.org.au/towards-inclusive-education-a-necessary-process-of-transformation/>.

<sup>20</sup> Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2017), List of issues prior to the submission of the combined second and third periodic reports of Australia, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fAUS%2fQPR%2f2-3&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fAUS%2fQPR%2f2-3&Lang=en)

allows for funding of different education modalities including “special” options.<sup>21</sup> However, the funding and operation of segregated school settings (special class, disability unit, or “special school”) is at odds with the rights iterated in Article 24 of the UNCRPD. According to a study comparing the impact of inclusive education reforms on students with disability, results show that the different reform journeys in Australia and the United States of America have produced different outcomes for students in each country, with segregation increasing in Australia and decreasing in the USA.<sup>22</sup> The study found that the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) and the Disability Standards for Education (DSE) reforms have failed to bring about important improvements in access to regular schools and classes for students with disability.<sup>23</sup> Further:

*“Instead, special school placements have substantially increased following the introduction of the DDA and the DSE, meaning that, paradoxically, more students are segregated into these settings following legislative reforms designed to reduce this. Although both the DDA and the DSE have led to a reduction in the rate of exclusion for students with disabilities, this rate remains concerningly high and the reforms cannot be considered to have successfully addressed the persistent issue of exclusion for this reason.”<sup>24</sup>*

The results of this study demonstrate *“the urgent necessity of enacting stronger mandates to support student placement in regular classes.”<sup>25</sup>* Despite significant reforms such as the introduction of the DDA and DSE, Australia’s mainstream education system is currently lacking the essential capacity to welcome and include all local young people eligible for enrolment. Our recommendation of a single standard in education enabling every child to

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<sup>21</sup> Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2019), Combined second and third periodic reports submitted by Australia under article 35 of the Convention, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fAUS%2f2-3&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fAUS%2f2-3&Lang=en)

<sup>22</sup> de Bruin, K. (2019), The impact of inclusive education reforms on students with disability: an international comparison, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, DOI: 10.1080/13603116.2019.1623327.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> de Bruin, K. (2019), The impact of inclusive education reforms on students with disability: an international comparison, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, DOI: 10.1080/13603116.2019.1623327.

attend their local neighbourhood school and participate in a successful education provides the means to address this, by setting the imperative that every Australian school develop the essential capacity to welcome and include all local young people.

We recognise and acknowledge that some families have made the decision for their child to attend 'special' schools or units, often because of poor previous experiences with mainstream provision (sometimes to do with experiences of bullying). It is not about condemning parents for the choices that they make but ensuring that choices are genuinely available to them. Indeed, many children/young people with disability are currently enrolled in "special education" options due to the absence of any genuine choice or alternatives because many local schools are not currently inclusive of students with disability. However, we emphasise that these decisions have been based on the fact that as current mainstream education settings are sadly not inclusive to students with disability, these families do not have a genuine alternative. JFA Purple Orange strongly believes that the resources (including the special skillset of current educators in these segregated settings) spent on segregated or special education settings would be better utilised ensuring mainstream education is safe and inclusive for all children/young people with disability.

**Recommendation 4:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should acknowledge that all children/young people have the right to an inclusive education at their local mainstream school and provide a clear pathway for the creation of a co-designed comprehensive national transition plan to end the segregation of people with disability in education settings, including clear timebound transition stages. It should endorse a final deadline to ensure segregated settings and practices are eliminated nationally within the term of *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031*.

## **5. Implementing Foundational Supports in our schools**

JFA Purple Orange acknowledges the work currently being negotiated between the Commonwealth Government and State and Territory Governments towards developing Foundational Supports for all people with disability. These are additional supports that are

available within the community, and education settings alike. A huge part of this will be children with disability under the early intervention scheme. This provides us with the unique opportunity to create inclusive schools where all children can access additional supports, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, social and team building skills (just to name a few) with their peers. If implemented correctly, it can assist in making all mainstream schools genuinely inclusive for all students and negate the need for 'special' education settings. If this is done correctly, it will go a long way in stamping out the prevalence of stigma, ableism and bullying towards children/young people with disability in our schools as well as later in life in both social and economic settings.

**Recommendation 5:** The Commonwealth Department of Education acknowledge the importance of implementing and adequately funding Foundational Supports in our education system where all children can access supports and learn together without segregation.

## 6. Building inclusive school culture

Despite progress over the years, negative attitudes about disability and towards people with disability are still heavily prevalent and heavily impact the life chances of people with disability in our communities<sup>26</sup>. Children/young people with disability can experience long-lasting harm if they experience ableist bullying and exclusion. We have heard from people with disability that early adversity, stigma and negative experiences can influence their own aspirations, as well as those of their teachers, supporters and family members, and have longer term impacts in terms of harm, educational achievement, career prospects and community participation.

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<sup>26</sup> The Centre for Social Policy Research at Australian National University (2024), Community attitudes towards people with disability, ADS Survey Wave 1 Report Summary, available at: <https://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2024-03/4541-ads-report-summary.pdf>, accessed in June 2025.

In order to combat this, inclusion must be embedded in all aspects of school life, including culture, policies and everyday practices. School communities need to develop habits of inclusion, so individual students with disability are not routinely excluded because they are seen as different. Often circumstances where a child is excluded, isolated and/or bullied can lead to a family withdrawing them from a mainstream school and placing them in a specialist setting, further exacerbating negative attitudes and future bullying incidents. Students and their parents and supporters tell us that when students feel a genuine part of their school community, they do better in the classroom and have better outcomes academically, socially, and emotionally.

Perhaps the most critical role in creating a successful inclusive culture is the role of leadership; the Principal is central to facilitating systemic change and leading staff to adopt new inclusive attitudes and practices.<sup>27</sup> School leaders need to be values-driven and genuinely committed to every child being welcome and fully included at their school, regardless of that child's ability and background. Students and their parents and supporters tell us that when the Principal has a commitment to inclusion then that flows down: to staff, to students, and to the broader school community. As we have found in our work with schools on the Inclusive School Communities Project<sup>28</sup>, school leaders are essential in developing and imparting a clear vision of what an inclusive classroom looks like and how it functions.

JFA Purple Orange has also recently received a grant through the DSS Inclusion and Accessibility Fund - Community Attitudes funding round. Our project, 'Together We Learn,' will teach Year 5/6 students about disability and promote more inclusive attitudes and behaviours. We will develop a Unit of Work and training resources for primary school teachers, to build their confidence and capacity teach about diversity and inclusion and help

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<sup>27</sup> Inclusive Schools Network (no date), <https://inclusiveschools.org/category/resources/leadership-for-inclusive-schools/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://inclusiveschoolcommunities.org.au/>

to shift negative attitudes. Project such as this – that build understanding from a young age – are a vital way to prevent bullying and mistreatment of students with disability.

**Recommendation 6:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should prioritise leadership development for senior staff, including Principals, to help build inclusive school cultures, recognising the key role leaders play in fostering safe, respectful, and welcoming environments for all students.

## 7. Confidence and Capacity of Educators

An issue we often hear is the lack of awareness, understanding and training about disability and inclusion in schools. This highlights the absence of mandatory teacher training and professional development on disability inclusion. Consultations we have conducted have found that students with disability often feel different from their peers and feel excluded; some children/young people reported instances where teachers treated them differently or insensitively. A parent described a meeting at her child’s new school with the principal and a teacher before the child started; the teacher stated “I’m not a special education teacher and I don’t want to be. So, I’m not sure how your daughter’s going to manage in my class.” Another parent was told by a teacher “we can try and make an adjustment but eventually we need them to adapt to fit in with their peers”. These experiences are not uncommon, exposing fears among both parents and educators about capacity to teach diverse classrooms of students.

In order to create an inclusive school environment, free of stigma and ableism, teachers need to feel more confident in their skills in teaching a diverse classroom of students.<sup>29</sup> The international report on the results of the 2018 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS 2018) by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

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<sup>29</sup> Haines, M., Jackson, R., & Williams, R., (2012), Building Inclusive School Communities. A project report prepared by JFA Purple Orange for the Minister for Education and Child Development, South Australian Government. Confidential Draft. JFA Purple Orange, Unley, South Australia. 168pp.

reported that only 38 per cent of teachers in Australia felt “well prepared” or “very well prepared” for teaching in a mixed-ability setting.<sup>30</sup> Further, the 2022 *Australia’s Disability Strategy Survey - Community Attitudes* revealed that only 63 per cent of educators were confident about disability and responding positively to people with disability<sup>31</sup>. This was the lowest confidence level reported across all professional sectors collected in the survey<sup>32</sup>. Interestingly, the TALIS 2018 reported only 58 per cent of teachers in Australia had “teaching students with special needs” included in their recent professional development activities.<sup>33</sup>

Of the parents consulted by JFA Purple Orange to inform previous submissions, they emphasised the need for more training of school staff on inclusion, access, the rights of people with disability, and how to assist students to reach their full potential. A participant in our consultations commented:

*“I think it needs to come through the training of the teacher. So, anybody who wants to become a teacher should have specific training in teaching children living with disability. So, it’s just part of the course built in, so that they have some idea of children with different needs and have the support.”*

Core professional training and continuing professional learning for teachers needs to include mandatory content on teaching to a diverse classroom as well as modifying the curriculum to a range of abilities. Additionally, we suggest emphasis be given to improving teaching as a profession and ensuring educators are driven by evidence-based best practice.

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<sup>30</sup> OECD (2019), TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I): Teachers and School Leaders as Lifelong Learners, TALIS, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1d0bc92a-en>.

<sup>31</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023), *Reporting on Australia’s Disability Strategy (2021-2031) Australia’s Disability Strategy Survey - Educator Attitudes* page, available via: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/australias-disability-strategy/outcomes/community-attitudes/educator-attitudes> accessed in June 2025.

<sup>32</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023), *Reporting on Australia’s Disability Strategy (2021-2031) Australia’s Disability Strategy Survey - Community Attitudes* page, available via: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/australias-disability-strategy/outcomes/community-attitudes> accessed in June 2025.

<sup>33</sup> OECD (2019), TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I): Teachers and School Leaders as Lifelong Learners, TALIS, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1d0bc92a-en>.

If educators and school staff are not confident in implementing universal design principles, making reasonable adjustments, behaving inclusively, and teaching inclusion, the impacts for children/young people with disability and parents with disability both in terms of experiences of stigma, and discrimination can be strong. We have heard from parents with disability about access barriers that they face in raising concerns with schools about the needs of children/young people with disability. One parent reflected: *“How can I raise concerns about my child’s experiences, both with bullying, and having their adjustment needs met, if the processes to raise concerns are not accessible to me?”*

It is also equally important to provide all students with education and awareness on how to be a good ally and what to do when they are a bystander to bullying. This is essential in ensuring bullying prevention and intervention. Research shows that most instances of bullying are witnessed by peers, bystanders, and that non-action can reinforce the bullies behaviour as acceptable.<sup>34</sup> Witnessing this and not acting also has negative lasting effects on the bystanders themselves. However, studies have also shown that providing students with the skills to respond to bullying as a bystander can have a positive effect on the prevalence of bullying.<sup>35</sup>

**Recommendation 7:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should ensure that any new national anti-bullying standard includes enhanced teacher training and professional development focused on inclusion. This should include:

- Education on disability rights, diversity, and inclusion for the whole school community;
- Professional development for school staff on inclusive education practices;
- Training for educators on preventing and addressing bullying with attention given to priority cohorts, including people with disability; and

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<sup>34</sup> Oh, I & Hazler, R 2009, ‘Contributions of personal and situational factors to bystanders’ reactions to school bullying’, *School Psychology International*, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 291-310.

<sup>35</sup> Hawkins, D, Pepler, D & Craig, W 2001, ‘Naturalistic observations of peer interventions in bullying’, *Social Development*, vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 512-527.

- **Student education on responding to bullying and being active, supportive bystanders.**

## **8. Mainstream schools must be accessible**

All schools should be accessible to all people; this includes students, their parents and supporters, and staff. Accessibility is the quality of being easy to reach, enter, obtain, use, understand, or appreciate.<sup>21</sup> When a building or space is accessible it allows everyone the ability to access and use it appropriately. An environment should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to use it; this is a fundamental condition of good design.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the advancements made by international and national agreements such as the UNCRPD and the DDA, people with disability continue to face barriers to accessing and participating in education. Our consultations with young people with disability and their parents and supporters indicate that these barriers range from accessing the curriculum to accessing the physical environment of education settings. JFA Purple Orange conducted a focus group with students with disability who had recently left school about their education experiences; a participant, who uses a wheelchair for mobility, explained how lack of access meant he had to leave the school:

*“They had classrooms free downstairs; they were not willing to move this class and it meant that I had to exit that school. I think they wanted to get me out of that school to not be a problem anymore ...”*

Inaccessibility in schools can contribute to rising tensions amongst students and subsequently to bullying. Misunderstandings can easily occur, for example, if an environment is too noisy, and a child with a hearing impairment doesn't hear a request, the educator may assume the child is not paying attention and enforce disciplinary action. The child may feel like they are being misunderstood and ignored and their peers may assume

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<sup>36</sup> Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, <https://universaldesign.ie/about-universal-design>

they are a 'naughty' student. Similarly, if information is communicated in complex language and a child/young person with intellectual disability doesn't understand (nor have support to assist them to understand), their peers may perceive their response as disruptive or annoying, and frustrations can quickly mount. Alternatively, if not all classrooms and school facilities can be accessed for those who use mobility aids, children with disabilities can be excluded, heightening stigma and negative attitudes between them and their peers. Such impacts can lead to children/young people with disability becoming more and more isolated or segregated from others, and higher chances of being bullied.

Universal Design (UD) is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability, or disability, without the need for adaptation or specialised design.<sup>37</sup> Student populations encompass a range of abilities, cultural backgrounds, learning styles, and education needs; teaching practices need to maximise learning for the widest possible array of characteristics in the student population.<sup>38</sup> UD is underpinned by seven generic principles and these can be adapted to reflect the education setting:

1. Equitable educational experience
2. Flexible material and instruction
3. Predictable structure and instruction
4. Perceptible information
5. Mistakes are tolerated
6. Eliminate unnecessary physical effort
7. Physical accessibility.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, Definition and Overview of Universal Design (UD), <https://universaldesign.ie/about-universal-design/definition-and-overview>

<sup>38</sup> Inclusive School Communities, Accessibility and Universal Design, <https://inclusiveschoolcommunities.org.au/resources/toolkit/accessibility-and-universal-design>

Accessibility happens when we discover and break down barriers and create opportunities for everyone to participate fully in their school and community.<sup>27</sup> Children /young people with disability have a right to an education in the same way that other students do, and this right is supported if facilities are designed, planned, and built to give the best access, participation and learning.<sup>28</sup>

In the education context, we encourage the use of a Universal Design for Learning framework for inclusive curriculum design.<sup>39</sup> The three principles of this framework are:

- Provide multiple means of engagement to interest, motivate and challenge learners.
- Provide multiple means of representation to give learners options to acquire information and knowledge from curriculum content.
- Provide multiple means of action and expression for learners to demonstrate what they have learnt.

**Recommendation 8:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should recommend that all aspects of schools (including infrastructure, information sharing, communication methods etc) align with Universal Design principles and that the curriculum and teaching methods are developed in line with the principles of Universal Design for Learning.

## 9. Cross-Departmental work and access to expert staff and innovative approaches

We are cognisant that siloed responses to bullying can be part of the problem<sup>40</sup>. We emphasise that the national and state response to the ADS, the DRC Final Report and the NDIS Review (in reconsidering the Applied Principles and Tables of Support and the roles

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<sup>39</sup> This was developed by CAST, see <https://www.cast.org/what-we-do/universal-design-for-learning/>.

<sup>40</sup> Connolly, H. Commissioner for Children and Young People, South Australia (2025). *Missing out. Systemic discrimination of South Australian children and young people*. April 2025. Available online via: <https://www.cryp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Screen-Missing-out-FINAL.pdf>, accessed in June 2025.

and responsibilities of different sectors (such as Education and Disability services) that deliver supports to people with disability), will also play a vital role in tackling the prevalence of bullying in our education settings. It is imperative the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review acknowledge the importance of these reforms and the need to collaborate across agencies on this most important work.

We welcomed innovative approaches, such as, in South Australia – the introduction of an Assistant Minister for Autism, a State-wide Autism Strategy, and Autism Inclusion teachers in public primary schools. We suggest that there be further roles created similarly to support children/young people/parents with other types of disabilities.

Whilst we acknowledge the investment in the National Student Wellbeing Program, we can envisage that the qualifications, experience and expertise of qualified student wellbeing officers or chaplains would vary widely, and it is unclear to us the extent to which expertise in bullying response and disability rights expertise is consistently present. We emphasise the need for there to be access to psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, behaviour support specialists, medical, health, other allied health professionals as needed to support good outcomes.

**Recommendation 9:** The Commonwealth Department of Education recognise the importance of implementing the Australian Disability Strategy 2021-2031 (ADS), the recommendations of Disability Royal Commission (DRC) Final Report, and the NDIS Review in reducing the prevalence of bullying children/young people with disability.

**Recommendation 10:** The Commonwealth Department of Education, through the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review, should recommend the introduction of additional Disability Inclusion teacher roles funded in all schools to work with school communities to promote improved outcomes for children/young people/parents with diverse range of disabilities.

**Recommendation 11:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should consider the extent to which there is adequate access to expert support from medical/health and allied

health professionals and make recommendations to improve access to additional services as required.

## 10. Reducing and eliminating restrictive practices/seclusion

Children/young people with disability can be at increased risk of experiencing restrictive practices or seclusion, sometimes as part of inadequate responses to concerns regarding bullying. This can occur both in situations where the child/young person with disability is alleged to be the person using bullying behaviours and when the child/young person with disability is being bullied. The consequences for those experiencing restrictive practices/seclusion can be severe.

A variety of state and territory governments re-stated commitments to reducing and eliminating restrictive practices across all settings, including education, as part of their response to the DRC<sup>41</sup>. Actions designed to improve monitoring of, and to reduce and eliminate restrictive practices and seclusion (including in education settings) are also in progress in response to a range of DRC recommendations.

Key steps towards minimising and eliminating restrictive practices/seclusion include both education, but also then working through alternatives with the help of expert allied health professionals, including behaviour support practitioners. In our view, authorisation of restrictive practices should only occur when accompanied by the provision of Positive Behaviour Support services for a person to proactively reduce and ultimately eliminate any need for restrictive practices.

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<sup>41</sup> Government of South Australia (2024), South Australian Response to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. Available via: [https://dhs.sa.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/169757/Disability-Royal-Commission-South-Australia-Response.pdf](https://dhs.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/169757/Disability-Royal-Commission-South-Australia-Response.pdf), accessed in June 2025.

**Recommendation 12:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should ensure that work towards a consistent national standard on anti-bullying practice complements and aligns with efforts to reduce and eliminate the use of restrictive practices, and seclusion of students with disability.

## 11. Funding and Resources

It is critical that efforts to address the underlying causes of bullying, and implement new national anti-bullying standards are adequately funded, and that the funding mix matches the need in different places and communities.

Equitable funding is essential to dismantling systemic barriers and ensure that every student can learn and thrive in a safe, respectful environment.

**Recommendation 13:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should allocate sustained and dedicated funding to implement strategies to reduce the prevalence of bullying in our education system. Funding should be at levels that allow for consistent evidence-based, effective practice by schools, and equitable outcomes.

## 12. Data collection

As was reiterated recently in the “Missing Out” report by South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People in South Australia, Helen Connolly: *“Gaps and inconsistencies in data definitions and reporting limit our understanding of the experiences of children and young people living with disability”*<sup>42</sup>. Improved and coordinated data, monitoring and oversight is a vital component of ensuring that the experiences of children/young people with disability improve and that rights are adequately upheld.

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<sup>42</sup> Connolly, H. Commissioner for Children and Young People, South Australia (2025). *Missing out. Systemic discrimination of South Australian children and young people*. April 2025. Available online via: <https://www.cryp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Screen-Missing-out-FINAL.pdf>, accessed in June 2025.

**Recommendation 14:** The Commonwealth Department of Education should improve and increase data collection of children/young people with disabilities, and other priority cohorts, in schools, in line with recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission. Data should be nationally consistent and made publicly available in de-identified forms.

## 13. Conclusion

Addressing bullying is vital to ensure that children/young people with disability are not harmed in settings that are intended to support their learning and development, and in ensuring better health/mental health outcomes. Addressing bullying is also vital in ensuring that children/young people with disability have equitable access to education, employment and life prospects now and into the future.

In the development of that national standard, we urge close attention to the experiences of people with disability. We reiterate the need for co-design of responses, for accessibility, and for the end of segregated school settings.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback as part of this review.

We are available to discuss the issues raised in this submission further. To arrange this, please contact Tracey Wallace, Strategy Leader, JFA Purple Orange, on (08) 8373 8333 or [traceyw@purpleorange.org.au](mailto:traceyw@purpleorange.org.au).

### **A note on language:**

JFA Purple Orange recognises and respects that people have individual preferences for terminology and language used to discuss disability. Some people prefer person-first language (e.g. 'person with disability') whereas others may prefer identity-first language (e.g. Disabled, Autistic, Deaf). We have used person-first language in this letter. Our language guide, entitled Language Matters is available on our [website](#).