



Hon Peter Collier MLC
Minister for Education; Aboriginal Affairs; Electoral Affairs
Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Our Ref: 34-65003

Mr Bob Buckley
A4 Convenor
Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia
convenor@a4.org.au

Dear Mr Buckley

Thank you for your correspondence dated 29 January and 8 February 2016 regarding bullying of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

I note that your media release illustrates the experiences and feelings of children with ASD from across Australia and highlights the difficulties these children can experience within the school environment.

The Department of Education welcomes the Senate report, and all similar evidence and information, which can inform and strengthen its programs and responses to support students with ASD. The emphasis in the Senate report on personalised learning affirms the Department's focus on addressing the individual learning needs of every student with a disability so he or she can achieve their academic potential.

The Department is aware of its obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act (1992)* and the *Disability Standards in Education (2005)*, which require educational provision for students with a disability on the same basis as that for students without a disability, including the requirement when necessary to make adjustments to the learning programs of these students. Western Australian schools understand that not all students with ASD have cognitive impairment. Many of these students have the potential to achieve outstanding academic results equal or superior to their year-level peers.

The Department recognises that students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder have specific social and support needs and can be vulnerable to bullying. Bullying of a student in any form is unacceptable.

The Department's *Student Behaviour* policy requires principals to document a whole school plan for positive student behaviour that includes measures to address all forms of bullying. The *Student Behaviour* procedures require the principal to support positive student behaviour in ways that make the best interests of the child a primary consideration, incorporate personalised adjustments based on student need that are culturally, developmentally and psychologically appropriate, support the growth of self-regulation and peer-regulation and reduce the need for adult intervention.

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Public schools are expected to collect data on student behaviour to inform planning to build and maintain positive student behaviour. The Department monitors and reports system-level data on behaviour-related measures such as suspension, including the intimidation of other students.

Schools are able to access a variety of resources, strategies and research to inform the prevention and management of bullying. A number of evidence-based preventative programs and strategies are supported in schools. Programs such as *Friendly Schools Plus*, *Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies*, *Aussie Optimism* and *Positive Parenting Program* are examples of such initiatives. The Department's online protective behaviours curriculum and resources support teachers to teach students lifelong skills that promote wellbeing and develop respectful relationships.

Further, the Department contributes to the national *Bullying. No Way!* website, which provides teachers with a range of teaching resources on the issue of bullying. Principals, in collaboration with their school communities, decide on the resources and programs that best meet the needs of their students.

The Department has a range of supports in place to address the academic, personal and social learning needs of students with ASD, which include:

- early intervention programs that provide the necessary skills for students with ASD to successfully transition to mainstream school;
- the provision of specialist programs for secondary-aged students with ASD in selected schools;
- a highly skilled school psychology service; and
- a specialist team of ASD teaching consultants who work in schools to improve outcomes for students with ASD.

In particular, when a Consulting Teacher (Autism Education Service) is supporting a student with ASD, they will work with the school to plan how best to meet the needs of that student and develop partnerships with their parent, key school staff and support staff such as the school psychologist. As part of their role, the Consulting Teacher designs, demonstrates and models strategies and resources to support the student and a personalised learning plan is developed in consultation with the student and their parents.

I acknowledge the important work of Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia and the support it provides for individuals and families across Australia.

Thank you for taking the time to write to me.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Collier'.

Hon Peter Collier MLC
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

- 4 MAR 2016