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**Road Map to Inclusive
Education: Developing School
Policy Reforms for Australian
Schools (K-Y12)**



**AUSTRALIAN
Autism Alliance**



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Global Consulting Group



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Executive Summary

This report serves as policy reform consideration for the development of the Australian National Autism Strategy. The report is divided into gap analysis identifying priority areas for the education sector and at government levels. The areas of issues for schools and school concern school children wellbeing and employability, training and development for teaching staff, effective individualised learning plan, education access and anti-discrimination frameworks. Following enhancement on these focuses aims to ensure inclusive education and mental wellbeing of Autistic students (K-Year 12).

To diagnose existing counterproductive aspects in current government and institutional regulations, a three-prong framework was implemented for each sector (schools and governments). For schools, the three-prong approach considered inclusion modules, antibullying frameworks and staff learning and development; where in federal and state governments, the three-prong framework shifted to process efficiency in establishing individual education plans, training modules for current and future teachers and financial fundings to schools and students. A gap analysis identified for major issues hindering the accessibility of the Autism community in classrooms, particularly in receiving appropriate levels of assistance for traversal and academic development. This section highlighted current state evidence alongside potential risks from these problems and the negative impact towards inclusive education.

Research on international institutions and statutes was conducted in the United States, Finland and the United Kingdom for recommendation references. The observation on overseas institutional and judicial systems responded to issues from the gap analysis, concerning teaching standards in special education, schools' advocacy for neurodiversity and the level of government intervention in institutions. The findings outlined relevant frameworks that would be recommended for the Australian jurisdiction and education providers. In consideration of the national capacity, the application of overseas policies was examined at par with existing legislations and possible expansions on current policies.

To conclude, schools and governments should share accountability in addressing the needs of Autistic students. Responding to current state issues identified by applying international models, the recommendations for policy reform aims to improve accessibility to diagnostic and assistive services by ensuring equal response to all levels of functionality. Therefore, this report recommends introduction of specific personnel and surveillance at every related environment across classrooms and governmental operations.



Context

Background of the Australian Autism Alliance

The Australian Autism Alliance has initiated this report in response to the Autism community's lack of accessibility. Established in 2016, the Alliance represents a "United Voice". The Alliance brings together key Autism organisations representing people on the Autism spectrum, their parents and carers, service providers and researchers who aim to realise the potential of Autistic Australians. It has become a diverse network combining representatives, experienced and expert voices. The Alliance consists of several relevant Autism support organisations including A4 (Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia), Amaze, and state-based establishments including Autism SA, Autism Tasmania, and Autism Queensland¹.

Background of the Autistic students in Australian Schools

Traits of Autism typically emerge from early childhood where toddlers may present repetitive or restrained behaviours, lack of communication skills and difficulties in social interaction with peers. In 2015, it is estimated 83,700 children and youth diagnosed with Autism and disability². Current assessments of Autism include series of behavioural observations alongside cognitive assessments for children's interaction skills.

From 2002 to 2018, there had been a substantial increase in children diagnosed with Autism, most prominently between age 5 to 19². The rising prevalence was suggested by increasing attention to early diagnosis of Autism. Within this census, 85% further reported difficulty at school while 28% of this attended special schools. The Australian Autism Alliance reports that Autistic students are worse off relative to most other cohorts across the levels of education from early childhood through primary and secondary school and further education including tertiary and vocational qualifications.

Barriers to education can deter school retention for Autistic students

The ABS hence identified 5 most typical educational barriers for Autistic school children and young adolescents. Autistic students mainly struggle with:

1. Fitting in socially (59.7%)
2. Learning challenges (55.3%)
3. Communication difficulties (51.5%)
4. Intellectual difficulties (26.8%)
5. Sport participation (18%)

¹ "Australian Autism Alliance | Australia's Strong Voice for Autism." Australian Autism Alliance, australianautismalliance.org.au. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. "Autism in Australia." *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare*, 2017, www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/autism-in-australia/contents/autism. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.



These disadvantages experienced by Autistic students can result in pre-mature school completion after year 10, skewing the distribution of students pursuing higher education. In 2018, 32.4% Autistic students acquired education below Year 10.

There has additionally been an underrepresentation of Autistic students in Vocation Educational and Training. Only 17.9% of Autistic people attaining a Certificate III or IV, diploma or advanced diploma as highest education, relative to 29.4% of people with disability.

University completion is further lower relative to the rest of the cohort. Autistic students are half as likely to receive bachelor's degree or higher (8.1%) as all people with disability (16.1%) while people with no disability are admitted to universities 31.2% of the time.

The effect of low school retention post year 10 can contribute to the deterioration in the employability of Autistic people. There has been approximately half struggling to change to or get preferred jobs while 30% experienced underemployment³.

Significant obstacles to effective education engagement and trainings for teaching staff

While learning environments can be challenging for Autistic students, a sophisticated approach directed towards student's social-emotional and learning development has not been established. As a result, barriers in communication, social interaction, personalised learning styles, remain unresolved. Often schools fall short of meeting individual learning needs while overlooking individual strengths in other areas. Key issues reported in the Alliance survey include:

1. A culture of low expectations and damaging assumptions of low capability
2. Little to no adjustments were made by the institution and teaching has been inconsistent
3. The lack of upskilling for education staff lead to low understanding of Autism amongst educators and trainers
4. The lack of positive support has led to deterioration in emotional wellbeing
5. Transitional support is currently not in place.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics. "Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings." www.abs.gov.au, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 24 Oct. 2019, www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release.



Problems

Policy issues were identified through research on the educational sector (K - Y12) across Australia, and on the government sector (state and federal). Individual three prong framework was conducted on each sector with the focus on effectiveness in combatting bullying, establishing learning adjustments and enforcing mandatory actions of educational agencies.

Current state in schools

1. Policy modules:

This area targets the coverage of Autism related topics and the attention intended towards Autistic students in classrooms. Relevant information that fits this priority areas includes inclusion models promoting neurodiversity on campus, the role and appearance of neurodiversity in diversity models. It is further noted that explicit modules designated to Autism are crucial in raising awareness for students and teachers of a neuroaffirming environment.

2. Antibullying frameworks:

While most Autistic students experience socialisation and communication barriers, antibullying frameworks act to limit discrimination and violence against Autistic students. This priority areas pivots at creating an accessible bullying reporting system for students with communication challenges and creating preventative measures in hindsight.

3. Learning and development:

This priority area focuses on the trainings available for teaching staff to provide sufficient support to Autistic students in classrooms. This includes enforcing continuous evaluation and supervision of teaching staff when working with Autistic student, launching effective supportive programs, and reinforcing the effect of learning adjustments.



Current state in federal and state governments

1. Guidelines and certification:

While education and vocational qualifications to identify staff specialising in working with special educational needs, it is crucial to expand the current pool of teachers qualified for SEN roles. This priority area includes incorporating specific Autism modules in teaching degrees, consolidating learning adjustment guidelines, and enforcing school actions. The recommended actions within new guides and qualifications will help assert neuroaffirming classrooms in mainstream schools.

2. Financial funding:

Financial fundings are currently means for schools to receive support to construct assistive programs for Autistic student. Fundings are currently shared between the state and federal government with equal leverage in both governments. While states are often self-governed, fundings fluctuate depending on various restrictions and classifications of SEN related spendings. This priority area focuses on providing clear classifications in school spending and federal monitoring to states on processing grants to schools.

3. Process efficiency:

To receive individualised learning plans, Autistic students must satisfy the eligibility of respective learning development financial supports. This priority areas focuses on enhancing application processes, responding to parents and Autistic student in a timely manner and shortening waiting list. By simplifying screening procedures, this enables schools to promptly intervene with educational challenges faced by Autistic student.



Gap Analysis

With the objective to strengthen mental wellbeing and educational access for Autistic students, a gap analysis examines the current state for Autism related initiatives in educational agencies and state and federal departments of education. The goal is to diagnose underlying obstacles in providing neuroaffirming classrooms and to seek recommendations that enhance the progress of inclusive education.

Priority areas (Schools)	Problems
Policy modules	<p>Little coverage on neurodiversity in inclusion models</p> <p>Inclusion modules in bullying policies are introduced to combat cyber bullying, physical and emotional abuse (i.e. harassment and verbal and physical assault) amongst teaching staff and school children due to discrimination against disabilities. The modules typically encourage diversity in the followings: sexual orientation, racial and cultural identity, and religion, with a heavy focus on social disadvantage⁴. Nonetheless, there is little to no mention of Autism in both schools and state-wide antibullying frameworks⁵. The lack of specific resources and targeted policies that address Autistic students further extends the gap of bullying awareness towards this group despite inclusion being touted as such an important part of anti-bullying. The lack of inclusion models for Autistic students is reflected by only 15.8% of people know how Autism affects students' behaviors and 3.7% understanding how to support them⁶. 17.7% further believed that schools could refuse student enrollments on the basis Autism while 13.9% associate Autistic student with special schools⁶. The blurred image of neurodiversity undermines assistive resources towards Autistic student. Generalized common resources for neurodiverse students such as neuroaffirming courses therefore results in a lack of direction in implementing reasonable learning adjustments.</p> <p>No specific modules on neurodiversity</p>

⁴ "Diversity and Inclusion." *Studentwellbeinghub.edu.au*, studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/educators/topics/diversity-and-inclusion/.

⁵ *Disability Policy*. Victoria, Australia, Carrum Downs Secondary College, June 2016, cdsc.vic.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Disability-Policy-June-2016.pdf. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

⁶ Jones, Sandra, et al. "Australia's Attitudes & Behaviours towards Autism; and Experiences of Autistic People and Their Families: Autism and Education ." AMAZE, 26 Sept. 2018.



Bullying frameworks work to enforce zero tolerance objectives in schools by monitoring bullying cases on campus. Common actions of schools are establishing reporting and antibullying systems inclusive of regular workshops and awareness campaigns. Schools are often guided by national bullying frameworks and diversity modules that have meagre documentations on neurodiversity⁴. In most of the inclusion models, topics around Autism are mainly embedded with umbrella term of disability⁷. In situations that Autistic students may face communication challenges³, embedded implications of Autism in antibullying frameworks result in ineffective practices and responses from teaching staff. While there is a lack of proactivity at school management level, student peers are not made aware of reporting on behalf of neurodiverse classmates. The aggregation of disability additionally deescalates the urgency to tackle discriminate and violence against Autistic students. Over time, the absence of neuroaffirming responses in schools can discourage school retention of Autistic student as an outcome of traumatic series and neglected wellbeing.

Recommendations

1. Schools should establish neurodiversity experts for more standardised level of care.
2. Schools should disclose assistive program progress and grievance hearing procedures to enforce transparency to the public and parents.

⁷ *Bullying of Students - Prevention and Response*. 21 Mar. 2011, education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2010-0415. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.



Priority areas (Schools)	Problems
Antibullying frameworks	<p>Blanket responses to bullying can be ineffective</p> <p>Current bullying policy responses often rely on self-reporting. Given socialisation and communications barriers, third party reporting on behalf of Autistic students is much needed to mitigate further occurrences. While both the student and peers are reluctant to identify victimisation, public school report on bullying number is currently unreliable. Despite schools may have special needs teachers responding to bullying, students required to directly approach relevant teaching staff is counterintuitive to communication struggles of Autistic students. It is further found that Autistic students may know the definition of bullying however are unaware of actual victimisation scenarios⁸. In both silencing bullying and incapable of identifying their own situations, socialisation setbacks of Autistic students are generally overlooked in schools. In most bullying cases, students likely only inform caretakers and parents as their situation worsens⁸. Another reason of delayed reporting is students having less faith in school's action due to a lack of transparency in this space. Improving teacher responses and knowledge of Autism can help facilitate self-reporting and student's comfort in reaching out. Current reliance on self-reporting and lack of teacher training structure a loose framework for Autistic students in identifying and getting help from bullying.</p> <p>Lack of preventative causes against bullying</p> <p>While schools generally have investigation plans for bullying, they lack a focus on preventative causes of bullying of Autistic students. The Senate Committee hence points to schools' lack of account for social and communication challenges faced by Autistic students⁹. With a target in self-reporting, Autistic student unable to speak up are placed in greater vulnerability. Provided schools coordinate antibullying campaigns, national providers of anti-bullying workshops however have no specific modules on neurodiversity to students or teachers¹⁰. Blanketing causes of</p>

⁸ Sagers, Beth, et al. "Understandings and Experiences of Bullying: Impact on Students on the Autism Spectrum." *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, vol. 41, no. 2, 28 Sept. 2017, pp. 123–140, www.cambridge.org/core/journals/australasian-journal-of-special-education/article/understandings-and-experiences-of-bullying-impact-on-students-on-the-autism-spectrum/56A2B7B3E51403240C865D5B0BFDD866, <https://doi.org/10.1017/jse.2017.6>. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

⁹ "Chapter 12: Education." Parliament of Australia, 2020.

¹⁰ "Educating, Informing and Empowering Your Community SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY PROGRAMS." Bully Zero.



	<p>bullying between neurodiversity and other discriminations, Autistic students are not fully understood and accepted by their peers or educators. In combatting victimisation, teachers left without appropriate practices become incapable of consulting Autistic students¹¹. For bullying that intensifies, antibullying approach is restricted to redeeming the aftermath. The delayed identification to bullying therefore contributes to trauma being the second most common reasons for Autistic student to withdraw from mainstream schools¹². While approximately half of Autism community (students and families) prefer mainstream schooling, the inadequacy in protecting Autistic students will diminish the equal access to preferred education³. While segregations in schools are to be abolished by 2051¹³, schools antibullying policy will be insufficient to protect neurodiverse students in an inclusive environment.</p>
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Recommendations

1. Schools should establish neurodiversity experts for more standardised level of care.
2. Schools should offer extended school year services and transitional programs to students.
3. Schools should disclose assistive program progress and grievance hearing procedures to enforce transparency to the public and parents.
4. Schools should integrate pedagogic support into student's curriculum to enforce holistic development.

¹¹ September 28, Lynne Sykes |, and 2019. "Values for Life." *Educational Infrastructure Services Australia*, Educational Infrastructure Services Australia, 2019, www.eisau.com.au/listing/values-for-life/. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

¹² *Autism Queensland Response to the NDIS Consultation Paper: Supporting Young Children and Their Families Early, to Reach Their Full Potential*. Autism Queensland, 23 Feb. 2021.

¹³ "Final Report - Executive Summary, Our Vision for an Inclusive Australia and Recommendations." Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, 29 Sept. 2023.



Priority areas (Schools)	Problems
Learning and development	<p>School teachers lack continuous trainings and resources in response to the Autism spectrum.</p> <p>While the supportive programs may appear to be an extensive list, educators and students have expressed existing barriers in their education, encouraging low school retention after the completion of Year 10³. Provided a high tendency of Autistic students requiring greater assistance on complex schooling needs, the Autism community urges additional support than currently available trainings and development to teachers¹⁴. Furthermore, nearly half of the Autistic adults (48.2%) and 22% of parents/carers on behalf indicated that no adjustments were made by the institution¹³. The pre-existing struggles in learning leading to low school retention hence alludes to more accountability for education standards in schools. With little appropriate support and environments provided to students, Autistic student may develop behavioural concerns over schooling term¹⁴. Concerning student’s socialisation and employability, SEN teachers’ credentials are to be standardised by states and federal systems to ensure learning adjustment qualities. Furthermore, inadequate support is being provided can prolong a lack of Autism understanding, specifically in mainstream schools. There is currently much uncertainty around best practice for Autistic students. 63% teachers are reporting that they are not well equipped enough with the knowledge, strategies, or resources to successfully integrate children with more complex Autism¹⁵.</p> <p>Lack of ongoing evaluation of training and assistive programs</p> <p>The lack of ongoing evaluation at implementation of training and assistive programs may result in schools unable to establish effective and continuous support Autistic students⁹. With little review of learning and development hinders improvement on current policies. A premature end to outdated program provides no incentive to cultivate a neuroaffirming environment in schools. The Disability Standards for Education is founded with many irregularities with loose monitoring over reasonable learning</p>

¹⁴ Sagers, Beth, et al. “Australian Autism Educational Needs Analysis -What Are the Needs of Schools, Parents and Students on the Autism Spectrum? FINAL REPORT.” AutismCRC, 2018.

¹⁵ “CHAPTER 5.” *Www.aph.gov.au*, www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/students_with_disability/Report/c05. Accessed 8 Oct. 2023.



adjustments¹⁶. Compliance audits are currently not continuously conducted to ensure that schools are carrying out their training and educational programs. In schools that are not being screened, non-abidance by the Act contribute to negligence to Autistic student in classrooms. Furthermore, the DSE has no stipulation on disclosure of Autism related programs in schools, enabling a lack of ongoing evaluation at implementations stages and improvement. Under little public scrutiny, schools need not habitually working with students and caregivers to record and report data. This is further shown through 15.4% of parents reported they had communication support¹⁴. For communication being a crucial and large factor in maximising support to Autistic student, current gaps between schools and parents can dampen training and educational programs efficacy.

Underutilisation of supportive programs

To support Autistic students, schools are encouraged to construct a holistic learning environment with counselling services in place. This includes but not limited the current range of training of teachers, on-site psychologists, and workshops for Autistic students. The large implementation cost of this program is partially covered by Schooling Resource Standard. The standards set out minimum threshold of public funding for special education, shared between state and federal governments. Where in schools are promised with financial support, 98% of public schools however receive support below Schooling Resource Standard¹⁷. The financial constraint amplifies school's difficulty in providing appropriate Autism support. In the effort to sustain counselling and education assistance, 90% of public school principals had to divert funds from other areas to support students with disability¹⁵. Insufficient fundings from the government currently sees existing Autism supportive programs being pushed back by schools. Schools' inability to finance professionals working with Autistic student can hence put these programs to a pre-mature end, creating shortage of service under the surge in demand for assistance. A limited access to an all-rounded support in schools will eventually shrink school retention in Autistic students after completion of middle school³.

¹⁶ Clarke, Marcus. "2020 Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005 - Department of Education, Australian Government." *Department of Education*, Department of Education, 2021, www.education.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005/2020-review-disability-standards-education-2005. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

¹⁷ "New Campaign for Full Funding of Public Schools | Australian Education Union (AEU) Victorian Branch." *Www.aeuvic.asn.au*, 2 Aug. 2023, www.aeuvic.asn.au/new-campaign-full-funding-public-schools#:~:text=AEU%20Federal%20President%20Correna%20Haythorpe. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.



Recommendations

- 1.** Training institutions should incorporate evidence-based practices for incoming cohorts.
- 2.** Federal governments should legislate mandatory standards in working with Autistic students for existing teachers. State should work to monitor teachers on behalf
- 3.** Federal governments should legislate mandatory certification in working with Autistic students for incoming teachers. States should work to monitor teaching cohort on behalf.



Priority areas (Governments)	Problems
Guidelines and certification	<p>Separate courses and outdated modules</p> <p>At the completion of a teaching degree, most teachers are not required of taking any electives relevant to diverse education needs inclusive of working with Autistic students¹⁸. With most bachelor's degrees in education at mainstream universities does not integrate neurodiversity modules¹⁹, special needs teachers must take a separate degree to specialise in working with Autistic student²⁰. This indicates incoming teachers need to undertake an extra course of study to gain practice in working with Autistic student, discouraging teachers that look for shorter tertiary studies. Online courses are provided by universities and the Autism Teaching Institute to existing teachers. There are currently 10 levels of institutional recognition ranging from high school certificates (e.g. VET course in Victoria) to Graduate levels and above²¹. Despite the extensive paths of acquiring certifications to teachers, skills within this designated staff pool vary drastically while being short of professionals with high level working experience with Autistic students. While teachers' credential in working with Autistic student remains uncertain, online modules for continuous training and development present insufficient practice in the Autism space. The Autism Teaching Institute only provides 7 modules concluding theoretical evaluation and resource management for Autistic student in schools²². Likewise in universities special education disciplines, there has been an absence of clinical practices in neurodiversity¹⁸. Without tangible experiences and mandatory placements, staff are still amateur in creating a neuroaffirming space for students. The lack in expertise can also contribute to the delayed conversation in individualised education plans,</p>

¹⁸ "Study an Education Degree at Flinders University." *Flinders University*, 2014, www.flinders.edu.au/study/education. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

¹⁹ "Education - D3001." *Study at Monash*, www.monash.edu/study/courses/find-a-course/education-d3001. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

²⁰ "Primary and Secondary Inclusive and Special Education - D30015." *Study at Monash*, www.monash.edu/study/courses/majors-minors-specialisations/specialisations/primary-and-secondary-inclusive-and-special-education-d30015. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

²¹ *Australian Qualifications Framework*. National Library of Australia, Australian Qualifications Framework Council, Jan. 2013, autismteachinginstitute.org.au/?media_dl=728. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

²² "Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma Courses | Autism Teaching Institute." *Autism Teaching Institute*, Autism Teaching Institute, autismteachinginstitute.org.au/diploma-course/. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.



	<p>limiting the access of assistance Autistic student receive in classrooms and beyond.</p> <p>Ambiguous consideration guidelines for learning adjustments</p> <p>Both the Education Disability Standards and Disability Discrimination Act stipulate Autistic student’s entitlements, obligations for schools and reasonable adjustments. These documents only vaguely outline “reasonable” actions schools should undertake²³. These ambiguous guidelines grants education providers the discretion to interpret governmental expectations. With no mentions for tangible actions that “reasonable adjustment”, schools are not given any guidance or examples of enforcing a specific action. The responsibility to create a “reasonable adjustment” is placed on both the provider and the student through consultation. Whether the provider and student have the capacity to create an effective action is unknown with no suggestions for help, or an expert opinion. Families and carers for Autistic students further question the efficacy of current learning strategies tailored to their children where most find resources are still insufficient⁹. While guidelines lack enforceability, it is difficult for schools to seek specific trainings to their teaching staff in the Autism space. Despite part of these trainings are navigated by the government, teachers have little confident in creating targeted solutions to Autistic student²⁴. With loose regulations in the DSE and the statute, unaddressed doubts amongst school leadership and teaching team hinders fair access to education. It is further found that not all practices are evidence based, often requiring parents to request higher-quality remediation rather than a functional learning plan.</p> <p>No mandatory actions for schools</p> <p>DSE and the Disability Discrimination Act require schools to non-selectively provide education to students with disability to ensure equal access to education. While Autistic students are free to enrol in mainstream schools, many parents and carers are unsatisfied with the level of adjustment tailored to their children. Despite the legal binding nature in legislations, schools have the loophole to refuse students with disability at enrolment. The lack of internal governance in schools additionally amount for 40% disabled students being excluded from school</p>
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²³ Australian Government. “Disability Discrimination Act 1992.” *Federal Register of Legislation*, Attorney-General’s Department, 1992, www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2018C00125. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

²⁴ “2020 Review of the Disability Standards for Education (2005) AUSPELD Submission.” 2020.



	<p>activities²⁵. Granting private schools greater independence hence enables these providers to select against Autistic student. Dubious disclosures on Autism assistive programs can further arise under the current suggested transparency from the DSE²³. Without penalty schemes and deterrence throughout education standards, a large gap in the awareness of Autistic students' entitlements in classrooms perpetuate⁹. The eventual lag in response to Autistic student educational needs is therefore detrimental mental wellbeing alongside the ability to grapple the learning pace with peers. In such case, 40-50% of Autistic students are expected to complete year 10 as their highest level of education per past observations³.</p>
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Recommendations

1. State and federal governments should regulate deadlines on co-signing and finalising individualised education plan.
2. Federal governments should legislate mandatory standards in working with Autistic students for existing teachers. State should work to monitor teachers on behalf.
3. Federal governments should legislate mandatory certification in working with Autistic students for incoming teachers. States should work to monitor teaching cohort on behalf.
4. Training institutions should incorporate evidence-based practices for incoming cohorts.

²⁵ Cologon, Kathy. "Excluded and Refused Enrolment: Report Shows Illegal Practices against Students with Disabilities in Australian Schools." *The Conversation*, 28 Oct. 2019, theconversation.com/excluded-and-refused-enrolment-report-shows-illegal-practices-against-students-with-disabilities-in-australian-schools-125812. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.



Priority areas (Governments)	Problems
Financial funding	<p>Difference in promised and actual fundings to schools</p> <p>The Commonwealth and states share the contribution of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) of public schools²⁶. The Commonwealth is expected to contribute 20% while states are expected to contribute 75%+²⁷. However, schools in states including Victoria, NSW, Queensland, and Tasmania are claiming to be underfunded from projections by the state departments. The leverage for state has been enabled by the statutory loophole for states to claim expenditures not included in the SRS estimation²⁸. As a result, states are able to make decrease claims on public transport expenditure and depreciation of school infrastructure irrelevant to disability programs. The loophole hence leads to an underfunding situation to schools by \$6.7 billion per year till 2029²⁹. Running initiatives with limited finances, 1 in 10 students in public schools are not funded³⁰. Public schools are essentially unable to utilize their promised funding to expand their support to Autistic students' learning development. In addition, the volatility and reduction in funding can become an excuse and shield by schools at overlooking the needs of Autistic students.</p> <p>Selective financial funds limit access to educational support</p> <p>Under the current NDIS funding model, children diagnosed with "ASD Level 2 or 3" are automatically eligible for funding while those with</p>

²⁶ "Schooling Resource Standard - Department of Education, Australian Government." *Department of Education, Australia, Department of Education, 2023, www.education.gov.au/recurrent-funding-schools/schooling-resource-standard*. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

²⁷ Clark, Shannon. "School Education." *Www.apf.gov.au*, Parliament of Australia, 2022, www.apf.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BriefingBook47p/SchoolEducation. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

²⁸ Ore, Adeshola. "NSW and Victoria to Push Albanese Government to Close Public School Funding Gap." *The Guardian*, 6 June 2022, www.theguardian.com/education/2022/jun/07/nsw-and-victoria-to-push-albanese-government-to-close-public-school-funding-gap. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

²⁹ Ore, Adeshola. "Private School Funding in Australia Has Increased at Five Times Rate of Public Schools, Analysis Shows." *The Guardian*, 15 Feb. 2022, www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/feb/16/private-school-funding-has-increased-at-five-times-rate-of-public-schools-analysis-shows. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

³⁰ "AEU : #ProudToBePublic: INVITATION to JOIN the PUBLIC EDUCATION DAY CELEBRATION." *Www.aefederal.org.au*, 25 May 2023, www.aefederal.org.au/news-media/media-releases/2023/may/250523. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.



	<p>Level 1 are required of additional proof of learning needs³¹. The selective scheme is pointed out as a hinderance to holistically support neurodiversity in classrooms with some Autistic students receive special adjustment depending on Autism severity⁹. The current funding model essentially excludes funding for Autistic students not deemed with “extreme” learning disabilities but still require modifications in schools⁹. To ensure an optimal education access, parents are faced with huge difficulties in demonstrating their children’s need for funding against highly selective screenings. Over 1 in 3 Autistic students are unable to obtain funding under current eligibility criteria despite needing extra support³². This leaves many slight to mild Autism cases vulnerable in school for not being prioritised in any funded support. With failed access to additional guidance at school, mildly Autistic student can easily become the target of bullying when falling behind school curriculums.</p>
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Recommendations

1. Federal government should simplify application to requiring single-practitioner evaluation for Autism diagnosis across all states.
2. Federal government should further enforce National School Reform Agreement to ensure public schools are fully funded.

³¹ “NDIS and Access Requirements for Autism | NDIS.” *Www.ndis.gov.au*, 20 May 2018, www.ndis.gov.au/news/528-ndis-and-access-requirements-autism. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

³² Koulas, Katie, and Monique Blakemore. “Yellow Ladybugs.” 9 Oct. 2016.



Priority areas (Governments)	Problems
Process efficiency	<p>Ineffective third-party involvement</p> <p>There is a high tendency of stress and anxiety for Autistic students, their families, and schools. To mitigate emotional triggers, the crucial components for an effective practise in Autism intervention include family collaboration and involvement in devising learning modifications³³. Despite the comprehensive courses of action provided by studies, many schools remain passive in providing learning adjustments to Autistic students¹⁴. With concerns arising the sufficiency of current adjusted curriculums, only a minority of parents find schools are taking on an acceptable level of initiatives³⁴. Inquires to the Parliament additionally show that schools are not properly addressing support to Autistic students in their larger educational programmes, curriculum, and environment⁹. Rather than implementing a more systemic approach in special schools, mainstream schools are strongly dependent on the knowledge and expertise of individual teachers and school administrators. With volatile reliance on teaching staff and no systematic solutions, leading to Autistic students not being supported. In the inquiry, learning adjustments can be unsuitable for many Autistic student.</p> <p>Prolonged appeal processing</p> <p>Learning plan implementation lag often emerge at the difficulty of applying for funding. While schools undergo multiple approval stages, most state-funded assessment services have very long waiting lists of up to 12 months for an assessment appointment³⁵. State governments currently fund schools to support students with disability including Autism through disability programs³⁶. The process in receiving this program is lengthy with parents first assessing student's eligibility in</p>

³³ Sharma, Umesh, and Erin Leif. "How Teachers in Mainstream Schools Can Support Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder." *Monash Education*, 16 July 2019, www.monash.edu/education/teachspace/articles/how-teachers-in-mainstream-schools-can-support-students-with-autism-spectrum-disorder. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

³⁴ Jones, Sandra. *Results from Consultation Survey to Inform a Submission into the Federal Senate Select Committee on Autism*. ACU Engagement , 8 Apr. 2020.

³⁵ "Medicare for Children | Autism Awareness Australia." *Www.autismawareness.com.au*, Autism Awareness Australia, www.autismawareness.com.au/funding/children/medicare. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

³⁶ "Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD) | Victorian Government." *Vic.gov.au*, 2021, www.vic.gov.au/program-students-disabilities-psd. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.



	<p>disability categories with the school administrators. Parents must accumulate all student's medical records and evaluations prior to this conversation with the school. School leadership team then evaluate whether a student support group is feasible under a designated category in disability program fundings. An Educational Needs Questionnaire involves multiple doctors, psychologists, or speech pathologists working with the Autistic student. Prolonged funding lodgement is resulted practitioner appointment delays. The delivery lags between documents can risk implementation lag in financing assistive programs. Where in students moving through primary to middle and to senior school, they are required of a funding review or reappraisal. The screening steps above are therefore repeated over the course at the uncertainty of funding. In a highly complex application system, Autistic students may end up disassociating from the pace of their peers from receiving insufficient learning adjustments at school.</p>
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Recommendations

1. Federal government should simplify application to requiring single-practitioner evaluation for Autism diagnosis across all states.
2. State and federal governments should regulate deadlines on co-signing and finalising individualised education plan.



International Models

Matrix: key findings of overseas school policies, upskilling programs, and legislations applicable to the Australian National Autism Strategy.

United States	
Statute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Individual with Disability Education Act (IDEA)³⁷ was enacted in 1990 targeting neurodiversity and other physical disabilities. • The Act stipulates the rights to receive free education, mandatory individualised plan with assistive technology³⁸ and consent to diagnostics, protecting the access to inclusive education. • Children under the age of 6 are entitled to participate in early intervention under pt303 while states are encouraged to ensure sufficient pool of professionals working with Autistic students³⁹. • Paraprofessionals are restricted from working with Autistic student under pt303.31. Schoolteachers involved in must be qualified by the state's department of education³⁷. • Autistic students are free to receive assistive technology and extend school year services during school holidays to ensure consistency in developmental skills⁴⁰.
School policies and training programs	<p>Clinical practice as compulsory for Special Education Credential Programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers must pass 3 units clinical practice modules at California State University Bakersfield to be certified for teaching Autistic

³⁷ *Individuals with Disability Education Act*. 1990, sites.ed.gov/idea/statute-chapter-33/subchapter-i. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

³⁸ "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act." *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, 1990, sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/a/300.6. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

³⁹ "Individuals with Disability Education Act." *Unblock.federalregister.gov*, 1990, www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-III/part-303.

⁴⁰ "Your Child's Rights: Autism and School." *Autism Speaks*, www.autismspeaks.org/autism-school-your-childs-rights#:~:text=Your%20special%20needs%20child%20has. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.



	<p>students. 10-week placements are conducted every semester throughout the course⁴¹.</p> <p>Son-Rise Program consists of 30 modules accounting for evidence-based practices to parents and caregiver.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The program advocates for extensive developmental curriculum with a holistic focus on socialisation, cognitive and motor skills⁴². <p>Transition programs are established to introduce alternative career pathways for Autistic students at any year level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Autism Academy of Learning provides vocational and college credit programs to students. The vocational program collaborates with job coaches to enhance student's employability in the fields of passion as of applicant's eligible age at 14⁴³. College Credit Plus is an alternative program to assist with students in across Year 7 to 12 who are college ready. Partnered with public colleges, the tuition fees are omitted while students can experience tertiary work prior to college admission⁴⁴.• Soaring Eagle Academy in Chicago offers SEA Transition Program consisting of hands-on experiences related to microbusiness, living and art making skills. The program complements in-house therapy within student's daily schedule, creating alternative career outlooks upon school completion⁴⁵. <p>Pedagogic and therapeutic sessions are integrated into student's daily schedule in schools.</p>
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⁴¹ "California State University, Bakersfield." *Www.csub.edu*, www.csub.edu/catalog/2023-2024-special-education-credential-programs.

⁴² "Autism Social Curriculum & Developmental Model | the Son Rise Program." *Autism Treatment Center of America*, autismtreatmentcenter.org/the-son-rise-program-social-curriculum/. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

⁴³ "Vocational Program." *The Autism Academy of Learning*, www.theautismacademy.org/vocational-program.html. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

⁴⁴ "College Credit Plus." *The Autism Academy of Learning*, www.theautismacademy.org/college-credit-plus.html. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

⁴⁵ "The SEA Transition Program." *Soaring Eagle Academy*, soaringeagleacademy.org/transition-program/. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Soaring Eagle Academy arranges a designated time for students to receive occupational and therapies during school time. SEA additionally enforces student social emotional development through peer social groups⁴⁶. <p>Harassments are resolved through comprehensive grievance procedures with hearing stages.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Autism Academy of Learning enforces a transparent grievance framework to settle complaints about harassment via Title IX. At the resolution, third parties are encouraged to supply evidence on behalf of the victims. Within a timely manner, evidence is cross-examined then live hearings and appeals are arranged with a facilitator. Remedies are provided formally after restorative justice or mediation⁴⁷.
Impact on students, parents, and the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Free vocational programs and bridging courses increases accessibility to alterative careers pathways. For students who wish to pursue tertiary education are enabled through credit earning programs during school, increasing chances of admission while boosting post-year 10 school retention.• Standardised approval and clinical practices for special needs teachers create consistency across teaching quality in classrooms. This ensures learning adjustments are executed with sufficient experiences in best practices.

⁴⁶ “Daily Schedule.” *Soaring Eagle Academy*, soaringeagleacademy.org/daily-schedule/. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

⁴⁷ “Summary of Major Provisions of the Department of Education’s Title IX Final Rule Issue the Title IX Final Rule: Addressing Sexual Harassment in Schools.” Autism Academy of Learning.



Finland	
Statute	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legislations fully integrate Autistic students' needs into the basic education policy rather than creating a separate set of policies.• The Basic Education Act (1998) yields equal treatment and the right to free basic education. The act mandates inclusive education including setting goals and defining Autistic services. The Basic Education Act introduces pre-primary education to help with prevention-based approaches⁴⁸.• The Health Care Act (2010) aimed to protect the rights of children, allocate responsibilities to municipalities, and introduced a student health plan. The student health plan from Finnish Student Health Service outlines wellbeing measures such as the amount of healthcare and bullying and harassment protection⁴⁹.• The Special Education Strategy supports students with earlier support and prevention-based approaches of problems relating to learning, development, or social interaction. The document enforces supportive resources and pedagogic experts, reasonable class sizes and the adaptation of the syllabus⁵⁰.
School policies and training programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schools focus on holistic development approach in support their students in multiple areas. Therapies and curriculum adjustments pivot at social-emotional, physical, cognitive, linguistic, and transversal development of students⁵¹.• Curriculum adjustments consider 8 concepts surrounding holistic learning, sustainable practices, teacher's role in learning, learning anywhere and anytime, learning through playing and exploring, social learning experience and traversal skills and learning areas. Non-academic aspects are additionally embraced in this space through devising engagement in social inclusion, shared daily activities in the functional aspects, indoor and outdoor physical settings and emotional aspects for students⁵¹.

⁴⁸ *Basic Education Act*. 1998, www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1998/en19980628.pdf. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

⁴⁹ "Student Health Care." *Ministry of Social Affairs and Health*, Finland, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, stm.fi/en/student-health-care. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

⁵⁰ van Kessel, Robin, et al. "Autism and the Right to Education in the EU: Policy Mapping and Scoping Review of Nordic Countries Denmark, Finland, and Sweden." *Molecular Autism*, vol. 10, no. 1, Dec. 2019, molecularautism.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13229-019-0290-4, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13229-019-0290-4>. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

⁵¹ "Finland's Approach to Special Needs & Inclusion." *HEI School*, 17 June 2022, www.heischools.com/blog/finlands-approach-to-special-needs-inclusion. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning adjustments are tailored the students' learning style by establishing individualised communication folders and activity boards. Teachers are required to receive national, regional and school specific trainings from industry experts⁵².• Group rehabilitations are implemented during and outside schools to improve attention, language, neuropsychiatric and social-emotional skills. Rehabilitation can be conducted both on campus or at home⁵¹.
Impact on students, parents, and the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Holistic learning approach creates long term benefits for students in enhancing socialisation and verbal abilities. Continuous rehabilitations and therapies can help students to adapt to the school environment while portable services ensure perpetuity in students' development.• Tailoring teaching approach to students' learning style can amplify the effect of evidence-based practices and create a more sustainable individualised learning plan. Teaching staff with suitable traits and skills can be allocated to individual students.

⁵² "Onerva." *Valteri*, www.valteri.fi/en/school/onerva/. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.



United Kingdom	
Statute	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Special Education Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice 1994⁵³ is the provisioning regulations which help Autistic schoolchildren. This code complements the Education Act 2011⁵⁴ and Special Education Needs and Disability Act 2001⁵⁵ to enforce the accountability of local authorities in carrying out their duties to assess and provide for special education.• The education, health and care (EHC) plan are devised by local authorities and is available for people aged up to 25. If parents believe their child is eligible for benefits, they can apply for an EHC plan. Applicants are required to submit any school, nursery or childminder report, doctor's assessment and a statement letter outlining the child's needs. The EHC plan is structured into 12 sections considering parents and the child's interests, health and education provisions and personal finance arrangements⁵⁶.• Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) are required for all mainstream schools. SENCos are qualified teachers and have undertaken the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination (NASENCO) within 3 years of becoming SENCo. SENCos are given an option for further specialising in Special Education Need and disabilities (SEND) areas including mental health first aid and accredited early years award⁵⁷.

⁵³ *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice LEAs, Head Teachers and Governors of Schools, Early Education Practitioners and Other Interested Parties*. Nov. 2001, assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7cac22ed915d7c983bc342/special_educational_needs_code_of_practice.pdf. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

⁵⁴ "Education Act 2011." *Legislation.gov.uk*, 2013, www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/21#:~:text=An%20Act%20to%20make%20provision. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

⁵⁵ "Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001." *Legislation.gov.uk*, 2001, www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2001/10/contents. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

⁵⁶ Gov.uk. "Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)." *GOV.UK*, www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs/extra-SEN-help#:~:text=before%20September%202014-. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.

⁵⁷ "Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) Job Profile | Prospects.ac.uk." *Prospects.ac.uk*, Prospects, 2019, www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles/special-educational-needs-coordinator-senco. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.



<p>School policies and training programs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schools must publish an SEN information report after Ofsted inspection to disclose their provisions and support for disabled and special education needs students⁵⁸.• Ongoing monitoring is coordinated by class mentor, Special Educational Needs Coordinator and school leadership team. This is to identify students who are not making progress in class or those whose behavioural needs are affecting their ability to engage in curriculum work.• Schools aim to invite collaborations between teachers and parents and students at decision making. To ensure students' needs are addressed, early identification is encouraged while partnering with experts in education, health and social care.• Animal assisted therapies at school to improve emotional wellbeing of Autistic students and others with behavioural issues or medical conditions. This service is optional to students and parents⁵⁹.
<p>Impact on students, parents and the public</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The employment of special education experts with high level qualifications can collate student needs responsively. SENCOs are able to monitor individual student's progress in engaging in school activities. For proper implementation of special education teaching experts, SENCOs should be required of minimum clinical practice experiences alongside nationally recognised graduate credentials.• Extra therapies and continuous review of learning adjustments help to strengthen a neuroaffirming environment. Public disclosure of school performance after external inspection reassures teaching quality in special education.

⁵⁸ *Inspection of Castle Hill Academy*. Nov. 2019.

⁵⁹ "Castle Hill Academy - Animal Assisted Therapy." *Www.castlehillacademy.co.uk*, www.castlehillacademy.co.uk/ANIMAL-ASSISTED-THERAPY/. Accessed 7 Oct. 2023.



Recommendations

The recommendations below target 4 key areas corresponding to the gap analysis and findings from international models. Policy reform recommendations are distributed into short (0-6 months), medium (6-12 months) and long term (12-24 months). Stakeholders affected include parents, students and the public while those actioning the recommendations are schools, training institutions and state and federal governments.

Key areas of consideration

1. Standardise systems

Systems and framework standardisation involves introducing mandatory actions to schools and limiting difference between state and federal support to students. This area requires schools to implement specific policy components to maintain consistency in resource allocation. The federal government is recommended to regulate communications with state departments.

2. Ease applications

Easing application includes decreasing wait times in obtaining an Autism diagnosis for NDIS fundings and lowering funding threshold to improve accessibility to assistive programs and fundings. This area requires the government to amend current funding eligibility for student's learning and development in schools.

3. Increase transparency

Increase transparency in communications in assistive program progress and grievance hearings via public disclosure. This area aims to enforce a timely manner in resolving violations against students and providing holistic support in classrooms. Schools are required to document curriculum adjustments and internal movements in inclusive education.

4. Increase scope of services

Increase scope of services includes in house therapies to enable holistic learning. This area includes focusing on occupational and speech therapies and development in transversal skills such as social-emotional, physical, cognitive, and linguistic development. Schools are encouraged to utilize resources that are chosen according to each student's particular learning styles, needs and limitations.



Recommendations

Recommendations	Rationale	Implementation	Expected outcome
<p>Schools should disclose assistive program progress and grievance hearing procedures within the next 3 months to enforce transparency to the public and parents.</p>	<p>By introducing a specific timeline in grievance procedures regarding violation (i.e. harassment, abuse, bullying), students and teacher are held liable for victimisation of Autistic students. Establishing policies in resolution and remedies for violations, students' wellbeing will be protected under transparency at investigation and hearing phases.</p> <p>Schools should disclose learning adjustment milestones to encourage continuous improvement in special needs teaching quality. Public feedback and documentations can create constructive strength and weakness evaluation throughout an academic year.</p>	<p>Schools should publish their assistive program progress and grievance procedures per school term on accessible platforms such as their school website or newsletter. Evaluations are to include reflections of their performance, strengths, weaknesses and future actions to address potential risks and issues identified.</p> <p>Schools should additionally disclose detailed information of decision making around bullying/grievance hearings, changes to curriculum or any further action take to ensure equality and support. Grievance hearings procedural steps should consist of encouraging third party to report victimisation on behalf of the student, submission of evidence and cross examination with parties involved. Standards of evidence for grievance hearings should be publicly standardised to allow for public scrutiny and ensure consistency amongst hearings. Mandatory hearings should be established alongside categories of remedies in response to the situation. Quick links should hence be provided for tracking development in the neurodiversity space.</p>	<p>Carers and parents are informed of school's approach to address student wellbeing and ensure the child is safe on school ground. For any disagreement with hearing outcomes, appeals allow for more transparent scrutiny by the public at the facilitation of a designated mediator. Open review of learning adjustment will encourage continuous evaluation of programs provided for curriculum adjustments. Mitigations of risks and amplification of program strengths can be identified in a timely manner.</p>



Recommendations	Rationale	Implementation	Expected outcome
<p>Schools should offer optional extended school year services and transitional programs to students within the next 12 months.</p>	<p>The transition between school stages can be challenging for Autistic students. Unfamiliarity of a new environment and the demand for students to be flexible can overstimulate Autistic students. While funding for support services by the NDIS at age 7, student's transversal skills can deteriorate without adequate assistance. As the student progresses through their schooling years, critical skills and knowledge become more complex, with greater needs to develop employability skills. Transition programs can be provided to allow Autistic students the opportunity to explore career options, while developing employability skills or specific onsite job skills. Extended school year services should be offered to students during school breaks to prevent developmental regression of skills.</p>	<p>Transitional program</p> <p>Transition programs can be implemented to acquire microbusiness skills and hands-on experiences in potential career opportunities as of middle school. These programs can involve 30 credit hours of core coursework focused on communication skills, employment, and transportation with 9 credit hours of elective courses. These employability and upskilling activities can be integrated in the current curriculum of project-based learning subjects or health classes in schools for year 7-9⁴⁵. Towards the completion of Year 9 and 10, schools should consult parents and students about their choices in career of whether the student wishes to enrol into vocational courses or remain in school to complete year 11 and 12⁴³. By year 10 to 12, students will either kick start their alternative pathways or select to admit into universities.</p> <p>Extended school year service</p> <p>Extended School year services⁴⁰ should be made an option for Autistic students. During the longer schooling breaks, many students lose knowledge and skills with</p>	<p>Transitional programs enable students to discover alternative career pathways post schooling through Year 7-12. Students are given the opportunity to integrate hands-on experiences including business and art projects in project-based learning subjects. A student's individual interests are gauged through project learning and roadmap non-academic career options. Students are given the option and support in navigating their desired outlook post studies. Extended school year services aim to help students retain their knowledge and skill levels. This prevents them from regressing when school is not in session. For jurisdictions adapting extended school year services, students have shown improvements in</p>



Recommendations	Rationale	Implementation	Expected outcome
		<p>students performing, on average, one month behind where they left off. This provides an optional individualized instructional program for eligible students with disabilities that is provided beyond the regular school year. This program is tailored specifically to the student based on their Individual Education Plan to improve their critical skills during these schooling breaks.</p>	<p>mathematics, language, arts and in terms of social-emotional outcomes⁶⁰. With an ongoing implementation, substantial reductions in unexcused absences, chronic absenteeism and suspensions are observed.</p>
<p>Schools should integrate pedagogic support into student's curriculum within the next 12 to 24 months to enforce holistic development.</p>	<p>The incorporation of occupational and speech therapies will help to improve development in transversal skills including aspects of verbal, cognitive, neuropsychiatric and social-emotional. Students will learn holistically at school to boost non-academic abilities. The employment of therapists will maximise resources tailored to student's individual learning methods. This will help to target specific challenges the student may be facing to avoid regression in skill development.</p>	<p>Schools should introduce group rehabilitation sessions targeting attention, language, cognitive and social emotional skills. Within student's day to day schedule, a specific timeslot will be designated to activities or individual appointments for pedagogy. Programs should range from therapy rooms, group therapy in classrooms to supplementary care in student's home. To assess the effectiveness of pedagogy for students, a set of criteria should be created focusing on sustainable evidence-based practices, student socialisation and development in transversal skills. These evaluations should be conducted on a bi-weekly to monthly basis.</p>	<p>The concept of holistic learning will influence learning plans to be further customised to attend multiple aspects of student needs during school time. While students can access to therapies on a more frequent basis, holistic learning through pedagogy will help to enforce a neuroaffirming school environment. The presence of assistive program hence encourages school retention by combatting</p>

⁶⁰ Minot, David. "Helping Children with Social Skills Difficulties: The Benefits of Extended School Year Instruction." *Autism Spectrum News*, 1 Apr. 2013, autismspectrumnews.org/helping-children-with-social-skills-difficulties-the-benefits-of-extended-school-year-instruction/. Accessed 8 Oct. 2023.



Recommendations	Rationale	Implementation	Expected outcome
<p>Schools should establish neurodiversity experts within the next 12 to 24 months for more standardised level of care.</p>	<p>The introduction of neurodiversity experts will help to resolve the currently incohesive and disorganized approach to Autism policy. Mandatory neurodiversity departments will create a cohesive view on best practice approaches. This will further increase communications between expert recommendations and school policy to anchored neuroaffirming assistive programs and curriculum adjustments.</p>	<p>Government schools should be required to have one teacher to have undergone neurodiversity training. Trainings should be a course equivalent to a master's level degree with state and federal approvals⁶¹. While for existing special needs teachers who wish to nominate themselves for being a coordinator in the neurodiversity space, they should provide proof of minimum 5 years working with Autistic students. Neurodiversity experts/coordinators should be the point of contact in organising continuous training programs per school semester and devise individual education plan with parents.</p>	<p>student's learning barriers with greater flexibility.</p> <p>Neurodiversity experts will help bridge the gap between school's treatment to Autistic student and best practices from experts and academic research. Neurodiversity experts will create a designated avenue in which specific policies can be channeled and advocated. Furthermore, it will allow for continuous improvement of guidelines which can be rolled out much more easily through refresher courses. Thus, the inclusion of neurodiversity experts will allow for governments to implement policies in another, more implicit way which foregoes having to contact and follow up with every school.</p>

⁶¹ "Mandatory Qualification for SENCOs." GOV.UK, 5 July 2023, www.gov.uk/government/publications/mandatory-qualification-for-sencos. Accessed 8 Oct. 2023.



Recommendations	Rationale	Implementation	Expected outcome
<p>State and federal governments should regulate deadlines on co-signing and finalising individualised education plan within the next 3 months.</p>	<p>Sufficient planning around student's curriculum adjustments prior to school commencement helps to optimise teaching staff's response to consultation feedback from parents and students. This ensures relevant materials and practices are prepared at the start of a school year and prevent learning plan implementation lag. Deadlines for creating individual education plans limits the delays in consultation and diagnostic assessments. This establishes school response to student learning needs in a timely manner.</p>	<p>According to the current procedures in setting up an individual learning plan⁶², the process consists of assessment appointment and report, continuous consultation with parents and co-signing. In reviewing learning plans, students should be able to attend diagnostic assessments within 7 days after contacting with parents and receive report within 10 days after the appointment. Meetings with parents should be scheduled between 5 and 10 days as of the delivery of report. In proceeding to actioning the learning plan, schools are given 20 to 30 days to co-develop and co-sign with parents. Prior to commencement of school, schools should provide neurodiversity and special education training to relevant teaching staff with respective materials.</p>	<p>A timely manner in implementing learning plan corresponding to parents' feedback helps enforce a year-long neuroaffirming environment for students. An efficient curriculum adjustment hence reassures parents that the child is receiving support requested from them. While individual learning plans align with student's learning needs and parent's observation, assistive materials are provided in a relevant and sufficient level. As a result, consistency for student development is maintain, preventing any hinderance in academic or improving social emotional skills.</p>
<p>Federal governments should legislate mandatory</p>	<p>To ensure teachers are responding to education needs of Autistic students in class, teachers should provide sufficient qualification to work in this</p>	<p>The federal government should establish minimum hours of special education and neurodiversity trainings for existing teachers to complete. Per Autism Teaching</p>	<p>Teachers currently working with Autistic students will have sufficient experience in adapting student needs</p>

⁶² "How to Develop an Individual Education Plan | Education.vic.gov.au." *Www2.Education.vic.gov.au*, 18 Aug. 2022, www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/individual-education-plans-ieps/guidance/how-develop-individual-education-plan. Accessed 8 Oct. 2023.



Recommendations	Rationale	Implementation	Expected outcome
<p>standards in working with Autistic students for existing teachers in the next 6 months. State should work to monitor teachers on behalf.</p>	<p>space. By stipulating minimum standards for special needs teachers, teachers will be incentivised to further advance in diverse learning and better support Autistic students. State and federal approval will improve current teaching quality across schools.</p>	<p>Institute’s graduate certificate, participants should be expected to obtain 300 to 360 hours of additional training at acquiring advance certification²². The number of training modules should be extended to gaining field experience in evidence-based approaches. While teachers examine their need to upskill, the government should create a set of standards to assess the capacity of the teacher in working with Autistic students. To become approved by the Department of Education at federal and state level, the teacher should prove to have at least 2 years working with neurodiverse children and have attained level 4 (Certificate IV) qualifications with sufficient theoretical and practical knowledge²¹. The teacher being evaluated should be required to submit a statement of intention to complete additional course for neurodiversity specialisation.</p>	<p>in classrooms. To meet legal minimum, teachers will undergo professional development to retain job position in schools and help contribute to a neuroaffirming environment. Collaborations between parents and experienced teaching staff will ensure individual education plan is enacted to adjust with student learning needs.</p>
<p>Federal governments should legislate mandatory certification in working with Autistic students for incoming teachers in the next 12 months. States</p>	<p>To prevent a lack of special needs and Autism knowledge in pre-service teachers, teachers should prove sufficient qualification to work in this space. By requiring mandatory certification for teachers in special needs training, teachers will be better equipped with identifying and supporting Autistic students. State and federal recognition will</p>	<p>The federal government should integrate certification through their examinations requiring aspects of special needs and Autism knowledge. This can be done by mandating approval of teaching qualifications only if they have taken one of the required special needs and disability courses at the federal level. Examinations for teachers will thus be monitored and implemented by the state to</p>	<p>Upon completion of the training courses, teachers have indicated less frustration due to not knowing how to help and were more confident about</p>



Recommendations	Rationale	Implementation	Expected outcome
<p>should work to monitor teaching cohort on behalf.</p>	<p>standardise teaching quality across institutions.</p>	<p>have Special needs and Autism knowledge and qualifications given out if fulfilled. Requiring the teachers to have special needs training as a part of their curriculum makes it so that they don't need to seek out certification outside of their standard training.</p>	<p>how to help⁶³. Teachers will be less likely to discriminate students against their disabilities and adapt a professional manner to affirming diverse learning needs. The cultivation of a neuroaffirming environment will boost the efficacy of curriculum adjustments and create greater comfort for students in inclusive education.</p>
<p>Federal government should further enforce National School Reform Agreement to ensure public schools are fully funded within the next 12 to 24 months.</p>	<p>Providing additional funding to public schools to meet the SRS costs an additional \$6.6 billion per year, the improved education quality and increased workforce productivity resulting from this would lead to economic benefits between \$17.8 to \$24.7 billion per year after 20 years⁶⁴. This essentially means the long-term expected payoff is 2-4 times larger</p>	<p>Commonwealth should increase its commitment to the SRS from the current cap of 20% to at least 25%. Loopholes used by states to claim irrelevant expenditures to escape from fulfilling their commitments should be eliminated in the new reform agreement. The long-term expected payoff should be a huge incentive for the Commonwealth and states to recognize the short-sightedness of the</p>	<p>Public schools will have more resources to continue supportive programs through Autistic students' schooling years. Continuous programs will reduce the barriers in classroom learning and ensure progress in student transversal and academic</p>

⁶³ Carroll, Annemaree, et al. "The Impact of Teacher Training in Special Education on the Attitudes of Australian Preservice General Educators towards People with Disabilities." *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 2003, pp. 65–79, files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ852365.pdf. Accessed 8 Oct. 2023.

⁶⁴ Littleton, Eliza, et al. *The Case for Investing in Public Schools: The Economic and Social Benefits of Public Schooling in Australia*. 2023.



Recommendations	Rationale	Implementation	Expected outcome
	<p>than the annual cost of meeting the SRS for public schools.</p>	<p>current funding situation and take up a larger responsibility.</p>	<p>development. With sufficient support, this will help to revert the decrease in school retention rate post year 10 studies.</p>
<p>Federal should simplify application to aligning with national standards for Autism diagnosis across all states within the next 12 months.</p>	<p>The optimal quantity of practitioner evaluation should be determined for learning adjustment application. This will avoid contradictions in diagnosis between clinicians which contribute to overlooking less prominent functional needs. Reducing required assessments helps to reduce waiting times in receive application approval where students can access learning adjustment in a timely manner.</p>	<p>The National Guideline for the Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders suggests that a single-practitioner evaluation can be optimal for an Autism diagnosis given fewer functionality needs⁶⁵. Number of documents required for application should be uniformly adopted by states in Australia. A student can either be required of a diagnosis through psychologist, a speech therapist or a pediatrician, or a group of clinicians. The diagnosis report should entail students' educational difficulties and potential barriers faced in school.</p>	<p>Requiring diagnostics from one practitioner will avoid unnecessary barriers for Autistic student including long waiting period between appointments. This additionally prevents inconsistent access to fundings and support, reducing time for reviewing and resource wastage, parent's frustration, and entrenchment of disability⁶⁶. With shortened application timeframes, this will drastically reduce the barriers for Autistic student to get diagnosed and</p>

⁶⁵ Whitehouse, Andrew, et al. *A National Guideline for the Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Australia Summary and Recommendations a National Guideline for the Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Australia SUMMARY and RECOMMENDATIONS* Research Executive Committee. AutismCRC, 2018.

⁶⁶ "Chapter 10." 2015.



Recommendations	Rationale	Implementation	Expected outcome
			obtain the funding necessary for their support, reverting the decrease in school retention rate.
<p>Training institutions should incorporate evidence-based practices within the next 8 months for incoming cohorts.</p>	<p>To prepare future and existing teachers to work with Autistic student, trainings to teaching staff and school leadership team should incorporate clinical practices. In placement and project modules, teachers should be examined for their ability in carrying out functional routine, pivotal response teaching, discrete trial teaching and other relevant approaches. While best practices vary in method, adequate implementation can lead to up to 80% overall fidelity in targeting learning needs of Autistic students⁶⁷.</p> <p>Current and incoming teaching staff are encouraged to participate in continuous classroom coaching to maintain optimal accuracy of the best practices⁶³. Ongoing evaluation can encourage multiple adaptations to best fit their changing learning needs.</p>	<p>Teachers are required to obtain at least 2 clinical practice placements through their degrees or advancement. For current teachers, schools should allocate experts in evidence-based practice for on-the-job evaluation of teachers working with Autistic students. With on-site practices, teacher's productivity is maintained while acquiring clinical skills. For students completing a degree in teaching, placements and evidence-based approaches should be designated as a compulsory subject. Teachers should pass placement modules to complete their tertiary studies.</p> <p>The Autism Teaching Institute should expand on graduate certificate modules with mandatory clinical projects²². Teachers should additionally verify for their adaptation in evidence-based practices with schools and assessor testimonial upon course completion.</p>	<p>A high fidelity in evidence-based approaches can increase curriculum adjustment efficacy. A significant improvement in student engagement in class will proactive advancement in school supportive programs to further students' transversal skills.</p> <p>Clinical practices improves teaching quality as teachers become more confident in tailoring learning adjustments to the child's needs. Continuous monitoring over time can help teachers target multiple aspects of students personal and academic development.</p>

⁶⁷ Stahmer, Aubyn C., et al. "TRAINING TEACHERS to USE EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES for AUTISM: EXAMINING PROCEDURAL IMPLEMENTATION FIDELITY." *Psychology in the Schools*, vol. 52, no. 2, 28 Nov. 2014, pp. 181–195, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21815>. Accessed 14 Jan. 2020.



Recommendations	Rationale	Implementation	Expected outcome
			Evidence-based approaches help construct a neuroaffirming environment with experienced teachers working with Autistic students. An adequate level of support and responsive school management will encourage post year 10 school retention.

This policy brief has been prepared by the Global Consulting Group in collaboration with Australian Autism Alliance

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