

Government Response to *A Different Kind of Brilliance: Report of the inquiry into support for autistic children and young people in schools*
Report 6 of the Education and Health Standing Committee

Ministerial Response

In accordance with Standing Order 277(1) of the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly, the Education and Health Standing Committee directs that the Premier and the Minister for Education report to the Assembly as to the action, if any, proposed to be taken by the Government with respect to the recommendations of the Committee.

Response to Findings

The table below outlines the response of the Government to each of the report's findings and recommendations.

Recommendation	Government response	Comment
1. That the Premier provide funding for a comprehensive epidemiological study into the prevalence of autism or autism likelihood in young children in Western Australia.	Support in-principle.	<p>The State Government supports the intent of the Recommendation and acknowledges the importance of data collection and analysis with respect to the presence of neurodiversity in Western Australia.</p> <p>The State Government notes that a broad and up-to-date epidemiological study on the prevalence of autism in Western Australia will be published shortly by <i>Frontiers in Psychiatry</i>. This Recommendation will be carefully considered upon review of this report.</p>
2. That the Minister for Education direct the Department of Education to use trend data from within and outside Australia to predict and prepare for the current and future needs of autistic children within the WA school system.	Further consideration required.	<p>Broadly, the State Government supports the use of trend data and notes that timely accurate data provision and analysis is an important enabler for agencies with the responsibility for ensuring robust planning and delivery of supports for children with autism. The Department of Education may benefit from ongoing engagement with public sector autism diagnostic services (Department of Health and Department of Communities) to develop a joint State Government approach to monitoring and responding to the increasing prevalence of autism.</p> <p>Further consideration is required regarding the resources and cross-agency collaboration needed to access and report on the available data to make it suitable for predicting autism prevalence in Western Australia.</p>
3. That the Minister for Education ensure that all relevant legislative and policy frameworks align with the	Accept in-principle.	The State Government supports enhancing cross-government collaboration to ensure the interpretation and application of the Guideline strengthens

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<p><i>National Guideline for supporting the learning, participation and wellbeing of autistic children and their families in Australia (the Guideline).</i></p>		<p>access to quality supports aimed at improving student health (inclusive of mental health) and education outcomes.</p> <p>The Guideline could be considered as part of the <i>School Education Act 1999</i> review to better safeguard students with disability and to strengthen access, inclusion and services across the education system. The Chair of the expert panel guiding the review, Professor Andrew Whitehouse, is an author of the Guideline and is familiar with its content and relevancy to the Act. Relevant Department of Education policy and framework reviews can be considered in terms of supporting the implementation of the Guideline.</p>
<p>4. That the Minister for Education support the development of a cross-sector WA neurodiversity education strategy, led and co-designed by autistic and neurodiverse people, that focuses on improving learning and wellbeing outcomes for autistic and neurodiverse students at school.</p> <p>The strategy should be funded for implementation and include the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • measurable performance indicators at school and system level • a commitment to undertake further research on and evaluation of evidence-based practices to support autistic students at school 	<p>Accept in-principle.</p>	<p>The Department of Education acknowledges the importance of working with people with lived experience of neurodiversity when considering educational matters.</p> <p>The State Government acknowledges that substantial planning will be required to facilitate participation and inclusion in the development of a Western Australia neurodiversity education strategy. Cross-sector collaboration, in particular between the Department of Health and the Department of Education, would be required to ensure that health-related supports and insights are integrated into educational practices. This would also maximise the benefit of new approaches developed to improve access to services. The Inquiry into Child Development Services makes recommendations for expanded models of service delivery and workforce planning.</p> <p>The State Government notes the related recommendations emanating from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability and the need to ensure that autistic and neurodiverse people are appropriately engaged in related improvements.</p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> periodic review. 		<p>Recommendation 7.13 of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability calls for the creation of a ‘National Roadmap to Inclusive Education’ for students with disability, recommending that the Education Ministers Meeting identify the National Roadmap to Inclusive Education in its 2024 report to National Cabinet as one of its priorities and include it in its work plan.</p> <p>The commencement of reform work provides an opportunity to collaborate on joint approaches that aim to improve learning and wellbeing outcomes for autistic and neurodiverse students.</p>
<p>5. That the Minister for Education strengthen training and resources available for teachers and school leaders in relation to developing effective Individual Education Plans.</p>	<p>Accept in-principle.</p>	<p>There is already significant support provided to teachers in public and non-government schools to assist in the development of reasonable adjustments and documented planning.</p> <p>The Department of Education’s Student Wellbeing and Care strategy was released in June 2024, and establishes a clear way forward to address student wellbeing in Western Australian public schools. Commencing in Term 3, 2024, resources will be released that are designed to support schools in implementing the strategy and strengthen student wellbeing. Resources include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> case management and documented planning guidance Student Services online self-paced professional learning modules, including a case management module face-to-face professional learning, including trauma-informed approaches. <p>The State Government supports efforts to enhance the provision of evidence-based training and resources for teachers and school leaders in the context of disability, noting that this aligns with the intent of the WA State Disability Strategy 2020-2030.</p>

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		<p>In addition, the Inquiry into Child Development Services noted the need for improved collaboration between health and education; there is an opportunity to enhance the provision of training across sectors under this recommendation.</p>
<p>6. That the Minister for Education continue to work with Western Australian universities to change their core content to include a mandatory component on inclusive education and supporting autistic students, and that universities be required to report on their progress at six-monthly intervals.</p>	<p>Accept in-principle.</p>	<p>The Department of Education continues to develop ways in which pre-service teachers (PST) can develop skills to support students with disability. This includes an initiative to provide financial support for final-year pre-service teachers working as education assistants (EAs) in education support settings. Applicants can apply for the grant throughout the 2024 school year. The Department of Education is currently receiving and assessing applications for eligibility.</p> <p>In addition to this measure, the Department of Education is continuing to investigate and progress other education support incentives and strategies, in consultation with the university sector.</p> <p>These efforts to improve inclusivity align with the intent of the WA State Disability Strategy 2020-2030.</p>
<p>7. That the Minister for Education ensures that additional support, in the form of professional learning content and in-class modelling and coaching, is targeted towards early career teachers in relation to supporting autistic students.</p>	<p>Accept.</p>	<p>Support for early career teachers through professional learning and in-class support is a priority for the Department of Education.</p> <p>The Department of Education supports teachers to transition from university to teaching by providing the Graduate Teacher Induction Program (GTIP) within the first 30 months of teaching. The GTIP consists of four professional development modules and an opt-in in-class coaching program. The Department of Education is exploring the development of an additional GTIP professional learning module that will include content related to supporting students with autism. The module will assist the implementation of other Department of Education initiatives, including the Supporting the teaching and learning of students with disability and complex behaviour framework and the Quality Teaching Strategy.</p>

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		<p>In addition, the Department of Education provides pre-service teachers with funding and additional support when completing their professional experience in an education support setting in the Perth metropolitan area.</p> <p>The State Government supports efforts by governments to enhance the provision of professional learning and coaching for staff who support Aboriginal children and families in the context of disability, noting that this aligns with the intent of the <i>WA State Disability Strategy 2020-2030</i>.</p>
<p>8. That the Minister for Education ensure that funding is available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to undertake dedicated, culturally safe professional learning in relation to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander autistic students, particularly in regional areas.</p>	<p>Accept in-principle.</p>	<p>The State Government identifies Aboriginal people as a priority population for service planning and delivery, and support efforts by governments to enhance the provision of culturally appropriate professional learning for staff who support Aboriginal children and families in the context of disability, noting that this aligns with the intent of the <i>WA State Disability Strategy 2020-2030</i>.</p> <p>Through the <i>Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework</i> (the Framework), schools are supported to build and maintain mutually respectful relationships with Aboriginal students, their families, and their local Aboriginal communities and to embed local Aboriginal languages, cultures and histories. The Department of Education provides professional learning, advice and guidance to build the cultural responsiveness of staff at all levels of the organisation, driven by the Framework. The Department of Education continues to co-develop plans and initiatives, with Aboriginal people, that will further strengthen and support cultural responsiveness.</p> <p>The State Government also supports increased engagement and partnering of an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation with a mainstream organisation such as the Autism Association of Western Australia, to develop appropriate resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.</p>

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<p>9. That the Minister for Education ensure that scholarship funding is made available for teachers to undertake postgraduate study in autism and inclusive education, to build workforce capability and increase access to expertise in supporting autistic students.</p>	<p>Accept in-principle, subject to budget implications.</p>	<p>The State Government is supportive of scholarship and/or employment pathway programs in the area of disability, noting that this aligns with the intent of the WA State Disability Strategy 2020-2030.</p> <p>The Department of Education currently offers registered teachers the opportunity to participate in a fully funded Leap program (including relief, travel, and accommodation). This is a strategic workforce initiative to build the supply of specialist teachers by supporting qualified teachers to train in learning areas of need. In 2024, the Department of Education expanded the Leap program to include a graduate certificate in Education Support for Years 7 to 10.</p>
<p>10. That the Minister for Education ensures that competence and completion of training in inclusive education is incorporated into the selection requirements for applicants seeking appointment as a school principal.</p>	<p>Accept in-principle.</p>	<p>The State Government supports this recommendation, in the context of inclusive education settings and as reflected in the WA State Disability Strategy 2020-2030.</p> <p>All public school principals are required to complete Principal Eligibility Modules within six-months of their first principal appointment. While no modules specifically relate to 'inclusive education', the Managing Student Services module covers Duty of Care which includes consideration of an inclusive community.</p> <p>Where necessary, the Department will provide principal-specific training and resources in inclusive education. Resources will be housed in the inclusive education hub currently in development which includes a multi-tiered system of support resources, professional learning on autism, specific learning disorders and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and resources that exemplify effective classroom practice.</p>
<p>11. That the Minister for Education ensures that a program of ongoing professional learning in relation to evidence-based practices to support</p>	<p>Accept.</p>	<p>This aligns with the intent of the WA State Disability Strategy 2020-2030.</p> <p>A range of professional learning, inclusive of evidence-based practices to support students, is currently available to Western Australian public school</p>

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autistic students is available and targeted towards school principals.		educators. The Department of Education continues to provide and develop evidence-based professional learning for leadership staff and teachers in education support and mainstream settings. All professional learning has been developed with input from subject matter experts and through a consultation process that includes the voice of autistic parents and carers. In addition, all professional learning is regularly reviewed and updated to ensure alignment with current research.
12. That the Minister for Education invest in professional learning programs for educators that build both sound theoretical knowledge of evidence-based practices to support autistic students, as well as practical skills in implementing these practices.	Accept.	<p>This aligns with the intent of the WA State Disability Strategy 2020-2030.</p> <p>A range of professional learning, inclusive of evidence-based practices to support students, is currently available to Western Australian public school educators, including access to the Schools of Special Educational Needs. The Department of Education continues to provide and develop evidence-based professional learning for leadership staff and teachers in education support and mainstream settings. This includes, but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Key Support Teacher guided coaching program using a gradual release model over two years that provides targeted professional learning for regional-based teachers and follow-up in-school coaching. • An internship program every two years for 10 metropolitan-based teachers who are seconded to work at the School of Special Educational Needs: Disability (SSEN:D) for one term where they receive targeted professional learning, residency opportunities in a Specialised Learning Program for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and side-by-side coaching from a SSEN:D consulting teacher. They then return to their school with an agreement to work across their network schools to build capability. They are supported for a further 18 months by SSEN:D through ongoing coaching and professional learning. • Consultation with the Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators Association (WAESPAA) to develop a bespoke suite of professional learning modules, aligned to the Department of Education's Teaching for Impact strategy that aims to build teachers' capacity to

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		address the teaching and learning needs of students with complex needs and disability.
<p>13. That the Minister for Education ensure that tools and resources are developed and made available to school leaders and schools to comprehensively assess the inclusivity of their school culture for autistic students.</p>	Accept.	<p>The Department of Education has previously made available the Education Services Australia's School Survey tool, through which schools could administer the National School Opinion Survey and other school-related surveys including the new School Culture surveys. Education Services Australia has decommissioned the survey tool. Suitable replacements are currently being investigated supporting the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.</p> <p>The Department of Education's Quality Teaching Strategy brings together programs, services and supports for principals and teachers to build cultures of teaching excellence that develop, implement and sustain effective classroom practice. A component of this includes a School Culture Survey.</p> <p>The Department of Education has contracted the Centre for Social Impact UWA to consult with students with disability, parents and carers on the hallmarks of inclusive education and neurodiverse-friendly schools. The findings will inform the development of professional learning and resources to support school leaders in establishing inclusive learning environments.</p> <p>The Department of Education's School of Special Educational Needs: Disability is collaborating with the Curtin University Autism Research Group (CARG), under the leadership of Professor Sonya Girdler to find the best tool for determining inclusivity. Under consideration is the Assessing Quality of Program Environments for Children and Youth with Autism: Autism Program Environment Rating Scales (APERS).</p> <p>Additionally, as part of the Department of Education's Supporting the Teaching and Learning of Students with Disability, and Complex Behaviour</p>

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		<p>framework, online learning modules are under development. These include tools and resources to assist schools in assessing inclusion in their schools including promoting the role of Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ensuring that children have a voice in decisions that are being made about them and assessing the equity base of school decision making and procedures.</p> <p>The review of the <i>School Education Act 1999</i> is exploring the various roles and responsibilities under the Act. The review will consider whether promoting an inclusive culture should be a prescribed responsibility for any of the duty-holders under the Act, such as the Director General, principals and/or teachers.</p>
<p>14. That the Minister for Education provide clarification and guidance for schools on their authority to approve flexible attendance and subject loads for autistic students who require it.</p>	<p>Accept.</p>	<p>Agencies note this aligns with the intent of the WA State Disability Strategy 2020-2030.</p> <p>The Department of Education provides extensive information and support to schools on the application of section 24 of the Western Australian <i>School Education Act 1999</i> on the Department's intranet, Ikon. Schools are provided with guidance through each step of the process including documentation and procedures related to appointing a coordinator, recording attendance, and reviewing the arrangement. Principals can be provided with additional support through the Schools of Special Educational Needs and the School Psychology Service.</p> <p>The review of the <i>School Education Act 1999</i> is exploring whether the general attendance provisions should be amended to be more flexible.</p>
<p>15. That the Minister for Education ensures that the Department of Education develops further ways to promote the benefits of inclusion and</p>	<p>Accept.</p>	<p>This aligns with the intent of the WA State Disability Strategy 2020-2030.</p> <p>The Department of Education is supportive of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission). This includes Recommendation 7.13, which calls for</p>

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encourage school communities to celebrate diversity.		<p>Education Ministers to develop a “National Roadmap to Inclusion”. The roadmap is a stated priority and should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • detail the outcome measures, targets, actions and milestones for delivering the Disability Royal Commission’s recommendations for inclusive education • provide public transparency on how the recommendations will be implemented, and progress tracked and publicly reported. <p>The Department of Education is working with the Centre for Social Impact UWA to conduct consultations to understand the perspectives and insights of students with disability and their parents and carers regarding inclusive education. Key findings will inform the work of the Department of Education Disability and Inclusion Consultative Committee and the implementation of the Supporting the teaching and learning of students with disability and complex behaviour framework.</p> <p>The review of the <i>School Education Act 1999</i> is entirely focused on removing barriers and promoting inclusion. A key component of the review is to explore whether the Act should introduce a set of principles to promote inclusion and recognise the individual needs of each learner.</p>
<p>16. That the Minister for Education ensures that the functional needs assessment tool being developed by the Department of Education is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aligned with the Autism CRC’s framework for assessing, differentiating and reporting children’s functional strengths and support needs 	Further consideration required, subject to the outcomes of the trial and budget implications.	<p>Agencies noted the alignment of this recommendation with the recent Legislative Council Select Committee report into Child Development Services in WA, Recommendation 12 that, <i>the Department of Education utilise assessments of students’ functional needs rather than medical diagnoses to determine which students are given ‘individual disability allocation’ funding.</i></p> <p>In addition to moving toward a functional needs assessment approach, agencies noted the report recognises that diagnostic assessments are likely to remain an element of eligibility for disability to ensure individuals are provided with appropriate supports and interventions. Ensuring a balance</p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implemented with appropriate resources and training support, and progressed as a matter of urgency. 		<p>between reliable ASD diagnosis and a focus on functioning is recommended, noting that this may have funding implications.</p> <p>There is also an opportunity to explore synergies to ensure children get the supports they need, based on timely and appropriate assessments.</p>
<p>17. That the Minister for Education progress Recommendation 7.12 (c) of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, regarding adopting a strengths- and needs-based disability funding model that aligns with the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability.</p>	<p>Further consideration required.</p>	<p>The parts of Recommendation 7.12(c) that require state and territory governments to use a disability funding model that aligns with an enhanced Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD), before the details of such enhancements have been determined and agreed, and the Australian Government's needs-based funding arrangements, are not supported. The latter fails to recognise the need for states and territories to continue having discretion to allocate State funding to schools according to their own needs-based funding arrangements, which is a longstanding threshold issue in State-Commonwealth negotiations.</p> <p>The NCCD is not currently used to determine school-level funding allocations under the Department of Education student-centred funding model (SCFM). Alignment with the NCCD categories would require an overhaul of the existing Individual Disability Allocation funding methodology, which would impact funding allocations at the school level. This would require careful management and a transition strategy.</p> <p>The Department of Education has initiated a staged procurement process to identify and engage independent parties to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify an existing functional needs assessment tool that the Department of Education can adapt adapt, trial and pilot the tool in order to validate it is suitable for the Department of Education's purposes develop an implementation strategy and resources.

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		Once trialled, the functional needs-based assessment tool may be used to inform future funding allocations based on the current level of functioning and presentation of students with disability in Western Australian public school settings under the existing SCFM.
18. That the Minister for Education progress Recommendation 7.12 (d) and (e) of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, regarding improving transparency on use of disability funding.	Further consideration required.	<p>Any changes to current school reporting obligations would require extensive collaboration and negotiation with unions and professional bodies, with consideration given to any possible increase in school-based workloads. Changes to current data collection and reporting systems are likely to have a significant financial impact and extensive training and implementation timelines.</p> <p>The State Government will await the outcome of national-level discussions on reporting requirements, which are still to be agreed under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement and associated bilateral agreements currently being negotiated between the Australian Government and states and territories.</p>
19. That the Minister for Education direct that the Department of Education's application of Applied Behaviour Analysis in relation to autistic students be independently reviewed and evaluated.	Accept in-principle.	<p>The Department of Education has a strong focus on supporting schools to select a range of evidence-based practices that meet the identified needs of students with autism and recognises that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to supporting students with autism.</p> <p>The Department of Education also acknowledges that there is often a misconception within schools and the community about what Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is and is not. ABA is a framework for delivering a range of evidence-based educational and behaviour support practices/strategies, not a single type of intervention.</p>
20. That the Minister for Education review the service model and resourcing for the School of Special Educational Needs: Disability (SSEN:D) to ensure that consultant	Further consideration required.	The Department of Education works in partnership with schools to build their capability to support students with disability to achieve success, and where possible, works in partnership with schools, families and third-party providers such as therapists to support students.

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teachers are available to engage directly with students and families.		Agencies noted there is an opportunity to build on collaborative approaches across government and non-government services and to consider alternative models of service delivery and supporting children with disability including co-location and mobile service models and expanded school-based allied health services. This is aligned with the findings and recommendations of the Inquiry into Child Development Services (Recommendations 15 and 16).
21. That the Minister for Education ensures that the Department of Education significantly expands its range of publicly available information and resources on evidence-based practices to support autistic students at school, and promotes its availability so that families and schools can access the same information.	Accept in-principle.	<p>The State Government notes the opportunity for improved collaborative approaches in the provision of publicly accessible, high-quality information and resources, and consistency of information regarding supports and pathways available for students and families.</p> <p>The State Government also notes cross-over in recommendations of the NDIS Review final report and key themes of the Inquiry into Child Development Services.</p>
22. That the Minister for Education commit to collecting and publicly reporting educational equity data sets, disaggregated for students with disability and other equity cohorts.	Accept in-principle.	<p>Implementation is subject to the response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission) which includes data development and collection.</p> <p>Agencies note that improved data and information collection and accessibility is an important enabler of accountability and is consistent with the intent of the WA State Disability Strategy 2020-2030.</p> <p>The review of the <i>School Education Act 1999</i> is exploring whether the Act should include data collection and reporting requirements as a mechanism for reflecting on and progressing inclusive practices.</p>
23. That the Premier support the development of a whole-of-government neurodiversity strategy,	Accept in-principle.	The State Government supports the development of a whole-of-government neurodiversity strategy to help improve the lives of autistic and neurodiverse Western Australians.

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<p>led and co-designed by autistic and neurodiverse people, that2 focuses on improving life outcomes for autistic and neurodiverse Western Australians.</p>		<p>There are a number of significant reforms currently underway related to this area - including the Commonwealth’s NDIS Review and development of ‘foundational supports’, and the National Autism Strategy. Further work to develop a WA Strategy will follow once the outcomes and impacts of these reforms are known.</p> <p>The WA Government notes further development of a whole-of-government neurodiversity strategy would be led by the Department of Communities.</p>