

## **RESPONSES FROM THE VICTORIAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING, TO QUESTIONS FROM BACKGROUND BRIEFING**

### **Q: Accountability mechanisms for special schools: how does the department ensure the quality of education, and monitor how money is spent**

The Department's accountability arrangements for schools apply to all settings, including specialist schools. All schools participate in a range of actions under the School Performance Framework that include self-evaluation, review, planning and reporting. The framework covers all areas of a school's operations, and management, including students' achievement, well-being and engagement outcomes, the school's adherence to mandatory regulation standards, and financial management and governance. All Victorian government schools, including specialists schools, publish their outcomes data and financial data in annual reports, and are reviewed by an accredited school reviewer at least once every four years, with reports from those reviews being publicly available. These arrangements are in addition to financial and enrolment audit arrangements conducted on a sample basis.

The Department has a range of policies, resources and professional learning to support our principals and teachers to personalise the participation, learning and support for children and young people with disabilities.

- The Abilities Based Learning and Education Support resource, and training program, which supports teachers working with students with intellectual and learning disabilities, and helps them to tailor their lessons and teaching methods to suit the needs of individual students.
- Disability Standards for Education - an online training course to strengthen schools' understanding of the requirements of disability legislation and the rights of students with disability under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 Professional Learning modules are available for school leaders and teachers. Work is underway to adapt and share this resource with our parent communities.
- The Inclusion Online professional learning program, available to all schools, provides tutor-led training for staff in specific disabilities, including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), dyslexia, speech and language and hearing impairment. To date over 7,000 teachers and department staff have participated in this program with 2,000 school staff who have completed the ASD module.

Resources provided to schools can be used in a number of ways to support students, including providing teaching staff, specialist staff, professional development, specialised equipment/material and education support staff. These resources are managed within the school's budget, and the use of supplementary Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD) funding is informed by the Student Support Group in place for each student.

### **Q: Pooled funding – does it mean students sometimes miss out on the individual support they need**

A key role of the Student Support Group is to identify the individual support requirements for each student, and plan for the adjustments and strategies needed at school.

Where a school received resources to support more than one student, the Principal may choose to liaise with members of the Student Support Groups to discuss and evaluate any common requirements, for example, the funding of therapy services or special needs teacher positions.

**Q: Was there a time out room at Marnebek and was it dismantled**

Time out in a different area of the classroom or different part of the school is sometimes used as an effective de-escalation strategy for students when behaviours escalate. Many classrooms also have external courtyards adjoining the classrooms for play, learning and for a quieter environment for students needing a break from the classroom. Students are always supervised by a teacher.

A learning space that was sometimes used as a time out area at Marnebek is now no longer being used for that purpose was most recently used as a maths curriculum space.

**Q: How much individual time, typically, do speech and other therapists give to students at special schools**

There is no one size fits all approach – students get the support they need for their individual circumstances. All special schools have extensive allied health teams which are there to provide specialist support for their students, including psychology and speech pathology support.

**Q: Are individual learning plans in special schools mandatory, or advised**

It is the responsibility of the Student Support Group (mandatory for students in the PSD) to undertake personalised learning and support planning for student with disabilities, including students in specialist schools.

Student Support Groups are made up of those with the most knowledge of, and responsibility for the student, who work together to establish shared goals for the student's educational future. This includes the student, their parent or carer, classroom teacher and the principal or nominated delegate.

Every student in a specialist school has a Student Support Group.

**Q: Is the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children the main IQ test used by, or endorsed by, the department, including for children with little or no speech?**

IQ testing is undertaken in Victorian Government schools for a range of purposes including:

- educational planning for gifted students and students with additional learning needs
- addressing eligibility criteria for specialist school enrolments
- addressing eligibility criteria for targeted funding programs (e.g. Program for Students with Disabilities).

For consistency, the Department recommends that the Weschler cognitive tests are administered for the PSD, however this does not preclude psychologists using other comparably valid cognitive tests in some circumstances.

The Department provides guidance to assist psychologists with complex PSD assessment issues, such as the assessment of students with little or no speech.

In keeping with best practice it is recognised that there are some students who cannot be assessed using the recommended tests due to the nature of their disability. If a test instrument other than the recommended measure is used, a statement as to why this measure was used must be provided. For students who are deemed to be unassessable, it is essential that any attempt made to conduct the

assessment is fully documented, with a clear explanation of why the assessment could not be completed, and an estimate of the student's cognitive functioning.

**Additional questions:**

**Q: Further to the individual learning plan question: I understand that while they are standard practice, principals are not required to sign off on them, and the department does not audit them?**

Personalised learning and support planning, a key responsibility of the Student Support Group, is inclusive of and/or reports to the principal.

A range of professional learning is available to school staff statewide to address disability awareness, educational planning and goal setting for students with disabilities and additional needs.

As part of the Program for Students with Disabilities, the Department receives Student Learning and Support Statements with each application. In addition, schools report on Student Learning and Support Statements in an annual survey conducted by the Department.

**Q: Also, are individual schools required to show either the department, or parents, how their funds, including disability funding, are spent?**

The Student Support Group has a key role in advising the principal on the educational program for the student, and making recommendations on the use of resources allocated through their Student Resource Package, including the PSD. Students' educational programs and the use of supplementary PSD funding are monitored and reviewed through the SSG process each term. In addition, schools undertake financial reporting under requirements of the School Performance Framework.