



Disability Education Reference Group

25 August 2023
11:30am - 1:00pm

Communiqué

Attendees at the Term 3 2023 Disability Education Reference Group included the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, the Education Directorate Director General and Deputy Director General System Policy and Reform, and representatives from the ACT Down Syndrome Association, ACT Community Services Directorate (Office for Disability), a member of the ACT Community Services Directorate's Disability Reference Group, Advocacy for Inclusion, Carers ACT, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Association, Imagine More and the ACT Education Directorate.

Minister Berry presented an overview of how the Inclusive Education Strategy (anticipated for publication later in 2023) was developed and provided a summary of the initiatives that were announced as part of the 2023-24 budget. This includes funding for Inclusion Coaches, professional learning, facilitating partnerships between specialist and local schools to strengthen opportunities for inclusion and share expertise, and work to develop and prepare for a new needs-based funding model for students with disability. Minister Berry spoke about the importance of student voice as an integral part of implementing the Strategy as well as a focus on strengthening and sharing practices.

Members welcomed the investment in upskilling staff and the prioritisation of inclusion. Some members asked questions about the definition of inclusion and how it will be applied in ACT public schools. Support for respecting the choices of parents was expressed. Members supported the introduction of Inclusion Coaches, one member advised that they are hopeful that the Inclusion Coaches will support the most progressive definition of inclusion. Another member is keen to ensure that the evaluation of the Inclusion Coaches will include the social, emotional and wellbeing impacts as well as academic outcomes.

The Principal and Deputy Principal from Charles Weston School presented an overview of the school's approach to inclusion. They talked about building their inclusive culture with families, students and staff, and the importance of listening to the school community and evolving practices to meet needs as they change. They also talked about the importance of having shared expectations and a common language and the focus on supporting the growth and wellbeing of their staff. The school has established a Student Achievement Team and Learning Resource Team to support inclusion and wellbeing, and the school uses Universal Design for Learning and Positive Behaviours for Learning.

A representative from Carers ACT outlined a number of initiatives that relate to students and families, including the Young Carer Bursary Program, Neurodiversity Respite, Carer Collective and Systemic advocacy work. Applications for the 2024 Young Carer Bursary Program are currently open for young carers aged between 12 and 25. Carers Australia are hosting webinars to support applicants, and Carers ACT are happy to help young people apply.

Members also provided updates from their organisations.