



Discussion Paper

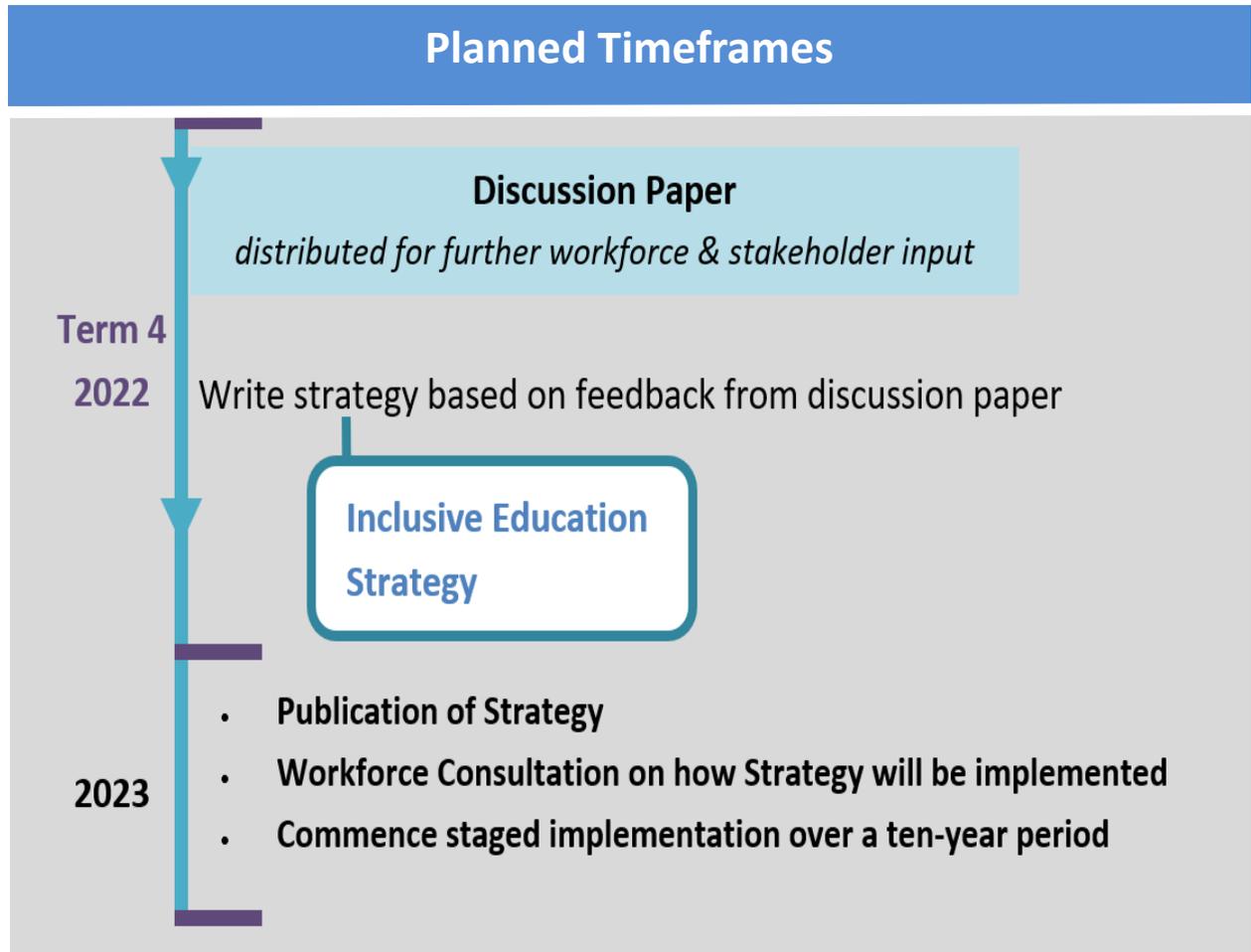
The purpose of this paper is to support the next stage of engagement as we work together with people with disability, families, communities, and our ACT Public School workforce to develop an Inclusive Education Strategy for ACT Public Schools.

The content of this paper is informed by previous opportunities for input and a review of contemporary evidence.

You can provide feedback until December 2 (Friday, week 8, term 4) by:

- Completing the survey on [EDU Engage](#) (Education Directorate staff);
- Completing the survey on [Strengthening Inclusive Education](#) page on the Education website (public); or
- Contacting the Inclusive Education Strategy Team at EDUinclusiveeducationstrategy@act.gov.au

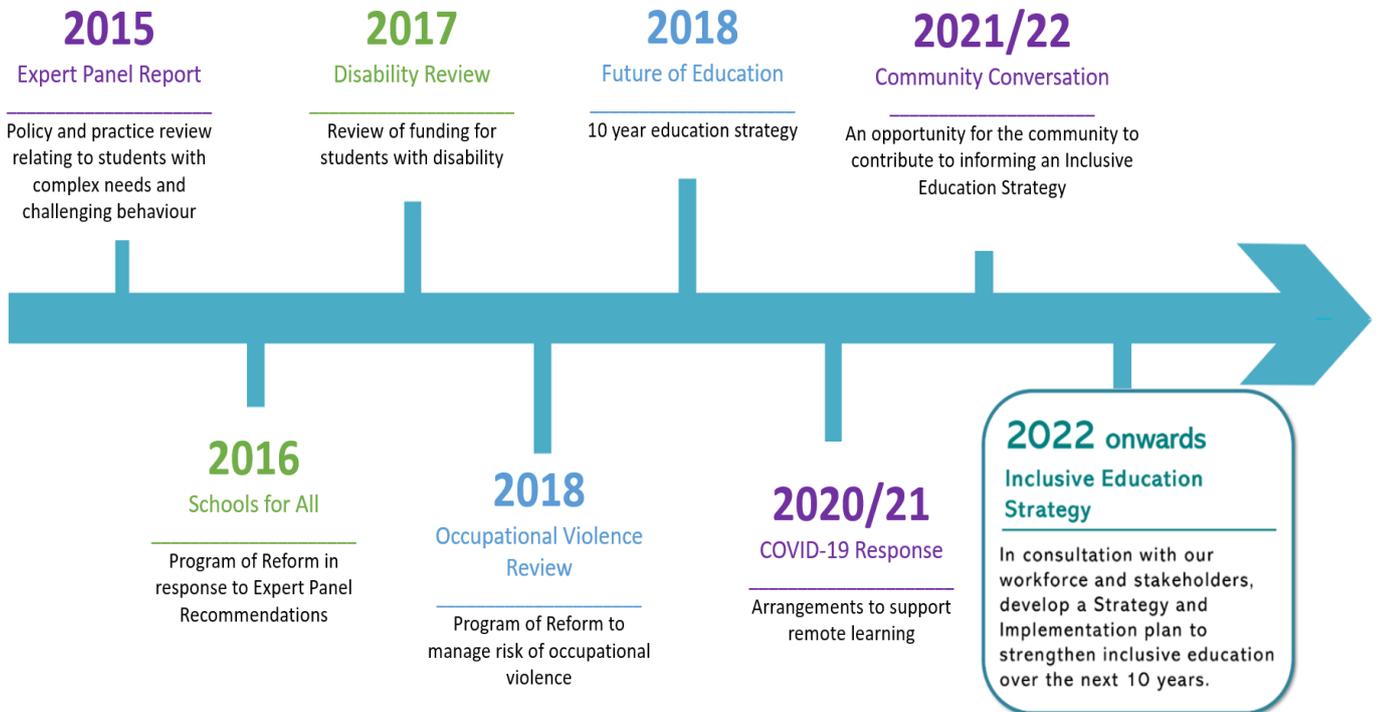
A sincere thankyou to everyone who has contributed to the strategy so far.





Overview

The ACT Government is committed to working with young people with disability, their families, our ACT Public School workforce, and the broader community to understand a range of perspectives on how to deliver the best possible learning opportunities for children and young people with disability in ACT public schools. An Inclusive Education Strategy is being developed, and will be informed by consultation with our workforce, the broader ACT community and contemporary evidence.



This work is part of the [Future of Education Strategy](#), with close alignment and shared concepts:

Future of Education Foundations

- Students at the Centre
- Empowered Learning Professionals
- Strong Communities for Learning
- Systems Supporting Learning

Future of Education Principles

- Equity
- Access
- Student Agency
- Inclusion

Future of Education Phase Two Priorities:

- Placing students at the centre, through strengthening inclusion, student agency and wellbeing
- Empowering learning professionals, by building on teaching excellence and delivering a workforce for the future
- Creating strong communities for learning, by partnering with parents and community, including a focus on early years learning
- Enhancing systems to support learning, including digital and data systems, strategic planning, legislative reforms, and infrastructure

There are national and ACT laws to ensure students with disability do not experience discrimination. The *Disability Standards for Education 2005* set out the obligations of schools to ensure that students with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as students without disability. Australia has endorsed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and other key international documents related to inclusive education.

The *United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities General Comment 4* describes the educational experiences of students with disability using the categories: Inclusion, Integration, Segregation, and Exclusion emphasising that *placing students with disabilities within mainstream classrooms without accompanying structural changes... does not constitute inclusion.*



UNCRPD advocates that **inclusion** involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences. Placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without accompanying structural changes to, for example, organisation, curriculum, and teaching and learning strategies, does not constitute inclusion. Furthermore, integration does not automatically guarantee the transition from segregation to inclusion.

In the ACT, the development of an Inclusive Education Strategy will support all public schools to strengthen inclusive education practices. It is acknowledged that delivering inclusive education for all students is a complex process, demonstrated by international examples of the challenges encountered by jurisdictions who have sought to implement fully inclusive settings for students with disability.

These examples indicate that to achieve inclusion for all students, careful planning, time and consideration in a number of areas is required. Research indicates that inclusive settings are contingent on key features such as workforce capability; resourcing; infrastructure; policy; and school culture. Therefore, it is essential to ensure these features are in place to successfully support inclusive education across ACT Public Schools.

Strengthening inclusive practice is everybody's business. What this looks like in ACT Public Schools will be designed with students, parents and carers, people with disability and with education professionals in our schools as experts in meeting the needs of children and young people. It is anticipated that the Strategy will be launched in 2023 with implementation to occur over a ten-year period as inclusive practices are enhanced and embedded in every school.

Draft Position Statement

The ACT Government is committed to strengthening inclusive education in ACT Public Schools with a vision to improve outcomes for students with disability and their families. The ACT Government recognises that inclusive education delivers positive academic, social and wellbeing outcomes for all students and is key to creating a more equitable society.

Inclusive education means that students with disability are supported to learn alongside their same aged peers and participate in school activities on an equal basis. This work to strengthen inclusive education is aligned to and will support the broader community wide work being led by the Office for Disability to develop an ACT Disability Strategy to create a more welcoming and accessible community for all people with disability.

To achieve inclusion, a focus on *equity* is critical, to ensure all students can access and participate in learning.

An **inclusive education system** will be achieved by supporting schools to be communities where:

- human diversity is valued as the status quo and making adjustments to cater for diverse learning and wellbeing needs is standard practice;
- allocation of resources is considerate of relative student need and time required for planning, training, and participation in collaborative practices;
- schools are designed for a diverse range of learners using universal design principles, allowing flexibility over time, responsive to the particular students attending, their respective needs and the safety and wellbeing of all;



- staff have the right skills, confidence, and positive attitudes towards inclusive education;
- the environment is welcoming and values all students, reflected in the school community’s beliefs, language and behaviours, and is supported by the school’s systems and processes, which facilitate positive and trusting relationships, a sense of belonging, collaboration, shared decision making and critical reflection;
- there is a robust and unambiguous articulation of how students with disability will access learning, learning goals are defined; measurement for continuous improvement is standard and appropriate reviews and modifications are made over time; and
- students are prepared, ready and confident to transition to new stages of life and learning.

Based on the feedback so far, and the evidence underpinning successful inclusive practices, the intent of the Strategy is not to reduce education options, but to strengthen inclusive practice across all schools in our system in order to provide *real choice* for students and families. Real choice involves making quality education available for all learners in every school. It is important to acknowledge that strengthening inclusive practice will take time and sustained commitment.

As we further strengthen inclusive practices across our ACT Public Schools this may involve strengthening partnerships between specialist schools and local schools to create more opportunities for students to be included in activities and classes with same aged peers and to share expertise.

It may also involve strengthening inclusive practices within disability programs in local schools so that students spend more time in classes with same aged peers and can participate fully in school activities. Many schools already have great inclusive practices in place. For those schools this may mean sharing their inclusive practices with other schools to help build a more inclusive system for all children and young people.

The Strategy will amplify, expand, and coordinate current work to ensure the ACT public education system is working towards a common goal. Every ACT Public School has a unique context with differing needs and will have a different focus. Involving the school community will therefore be vital to build the momentum for improvement and strong outcomes.

The seven proposed themes

Informed by the ACT community and a recent review of contemporary evidence, it is proposed the ACT public education system will achieve greater inclusion and equity for all students through prioritising focus on seven themes:

culture	workforce	relationships	learning	key transitions	resourcing	infrastructure
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The seven themes are critical for developing safe, respectful and supportive environments for the whole school community. For example, a school culture based on positive relationships and capability to manage diverse learning needs, will assist to facilitate prevention and early support for behaviour that may impact safety and wellbeing.

To deliver on these themes, a range of system wide supports will need to be strengthened, such as family and stakeholder partnerships, planning processes, policy and legislation, data insights and feedback, communications and technology. The systems supporting learning will need to equip schools to deliver flexible, responsive, collaborative, and innovative education for every child and young person.



The content in the following sections is informed by previous opportunities for input and a review of contemporary evidence. Most recently this has included:

- a workshop with the Disability Education Reference Group (key external stakeholders);
- workshops with the Inclusion Principal’s Advisory Group (ACT Public School Principals);
- workshops with Inclusive Education Reform Governance Group (Education Support Office Executive);
- *Community Conversation* process between September 2021 and April 2022 (independently facilitated and open to the public); and
- evidence review of national and international research and practice.

CULTURE

It is proposed that a theme on Inclusive School Cultures would consider the roles of:

- school leadership
- school community
- language

Inclusive school culture is underpinned by the values and beliefs of a school community and is demonstrated through the school community’s behaviour, communication, and actions. The Strategy will aim to ensure that all ACT Public Schools understand and value the importance of inclusive school cultures.

Culture is supported by policies, systems and processes that promote access and equity for all students.ⁱ Research suggests that leadership is a critical component of the successful implementation of inclusive educationⁱⁱ and school leaders’ approach to inclusion impacts on teachers’ attitudes and helps to shape school cultureⁱⁱⁱ.

Potential action areas

- Exploring individuals’ beliefs, attitudes, bias (conscious and unconscious) towards disability.
- Facilitating critical reflection as an individual and collective, understanding the impact of marginalisation.
- Enhancing understanding how the rights of students and staff work together to support inclusive school communities
- Bringing school communities together on the inclusion journey - to establish a shared vision and determine what inclusion should look like at each school.
- Language- understanding the impact of language and the importance of shared, strengths-based language.
- Sharing responsibility- collaborative decision making, commitment and communication.
- Capitalising on great practice already occurring through sharing and support between schools.
- Supporting school executive to lead work to strengthen inclusive culture in schools.
- Ensuring visibility of staff, parents, and students with disability – the value of lived experience.

c u l t u r e



WORKFORCE

It is proposed that a Workforce section will contain a wide range of considerations for this important topic, such as:

- workforce capability
- recruitment and retention
- preservice training & classroom readiness
- key skillsets and roles to support reform (e.g. DECO, Allied Health, LSAs)

The need for a skilled and confident workforce is well established in research, and the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability acknowledged the importance of teachers across Australia receiving initial and continuing training in how to teach students with diverse learning needs. Workforce related topics came up strongly in the Community Conversation and with a current national teacher shortage, is an important theme.

Potential action areas

- Defining core capabilities that facilitate strong inclusive practice e.g. understanding behaviour and making reasonable adjustments.
- Defining more specialist skills and access to related expertise e.g. knowledge in assistive technology and complex behaviours.
- Strengthening the evidence-based, coordinated, and comprehensive program of professional learning.
- Consideration of how best to support pre-service teachers to be ready to teach all learners in inclusive education environments.
- Creating career pathways for maximising retention and job satisfaction e.g. strategies such as formal study for staff.
- Strengthening collaborative practice through professional learning communities, mentoring, and coaching.
- Different roles to support diverse needs- e.g. Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), Disability Education Coordinators (DECOs), Allied Health. Planning for knowledge, capability, and expertise distribution in schools to support other staff to meet the needs of all learners e.g. capability in developing Positive Behaviour Support Plans and Individual Learning Plans.
- Planning for the future using enrolment forecasting data with information about students with disability to proactively meet needs.

w o r k f o r c e

RELATIONSHIPS

It is proposed that a section on Relationships will explore some topics raised during the consultation in relation to:

- student voice
- multi-agency and cross directorate partnerships
- friendships and parent connections

Relationships are key within schools and “lubricate the human machinery ... [and] improve the lives of teachers and students so that they can do their best work”. We heard through the Community Conversation that there is a critical need for strong positive relationships in ACT Public Schools and we know other Australian jurisdictions are actively working to improve communication with, and strengthen relationships between school communities and parents, and to partner more effectively with families.



Potential actions areas

- Enhancing opportunities for staff and students to get to know each other.
- Increasing awareness of ‘hidden’ disability including mental illness and language disorder.
- Strengthening processes to ensure student voice for students with disability- e.g. forums to ensure all students can have a say.
- Mechanisms to strengthen the response to parent/carer feedback.
- Focussing on how school communities in our system welcome and celebrate all students.
- Recognising the importance of a sense of belonging and considering relevant initiatives– e.g. consideration of how to ensure all students are included and have friends.
- Reviewing ESO supports for schools.
- Investigating new ways to collaborate with the NDIS and other supports to better meet the needs of school communities.

r e l a t i o n s h i p s

LEARNING

It is proposed that a section on Learning will explore some of the topics raised by families, students, and school staff.

- high expectations for all students
- strengths based and adaptable pedagogy
- improving inclusive practice in all settings
- prioritising, measuring, and reporting inclusion

Learning is a critical component of what happens in schools and the term ‘learning’ features in 5 of the 7 teacher standards.^{iv} The importance of learning was also highlighted through the Community Conversation with parents, carers, students and young people, and school staff sharing their views on learning. Importantly, learning needs to be delivered flexibly to meet the needs of all learners.

Potential action areas

- Ensuring high expectations underpin learning for all students.
- Building confidence of all teachers to differentiate the curriculum, make adjustments and use the principles of Universal Design for Learning.
- Further strengthen the confidence of all teachers to collaboratively develop, implement, revise, and report against flexible learning plans, strategies, and goals throughout the school year.
- Supporting schools and teachers to be flexible in delivery of education to ensure access for students with diverse needs.
- Accessing early support for students with differing needs and advocating for the support/services required.

l e a r n i n g



KEY TRANSITIONS

It is proposed that a section on School Transitions will consider topics relevant to:

- transitioning to school
- transitions between schools
- transitioning to life after school

AEDC data shows that more children across Australia are starting school developmentally vulnerable. Evidence shows that children who start behind usually stay behind, increasing the importance of early intervention and effective transitions into school.

Transitions between schools and the transition to life after school are also important periods for all students, however research has shown that students with disability can experience poor transitions^v

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability and participants in ACT’s Community Conversation both raised school pathways and transitions to life after school as areas to improve.

Potential action areas

- Holistic and coordinated supports from early childhood into formal schooling.
- Planning collaboratively and ensuring student agency throughout all transitions.
- Strengthening the structured & coordinated transition approaches, ensuring timely communication with students & families.
- Strengthening access to learning about post school community skills, work experience and vocational training opportunities.
- Further progress the Future of Education and Set up for Success commitments to enhancing ESO support to schools for transition planning, with a particular focus on students with disability.

key transitions

RESOURCING

It is proposed that a section on Resourcing would cover topics such as:

- needs based resource allocation model
- using resources for the best outcomes

The ACT resourcing model for students with disability is currently based on individual students meeting disability criteria and assessment of deficit. Other jurisdictions have moved away from this approach to an adjustment-based model, for example Tasmania and Victoria.

The Community Conversation and evidence review both referred to resourcing and the importance of using resourcing in ways that deliver positive outcomes for students. A revised resourcing model will consider the wholistic needs of schools in supporting students including factors such as staff time for planning, training, and establishing collaborative practices, as well as considering how infrastructure modifications and other adjustments are resourced.



Potential action areas

- Moving the resourcing narrative from deficit or problem based to needs and strengths based.
- Enabling opportunities to be creative and deliver education flexibly to meet diverse learning needs.
- Progressively moving towards an adjustment-based resource allocation model.
- Capitalising on system resources- e.g. Sites of expertise helping to grow capability across other schools.
- Using resources as effectively and efficiently as possible- including time, financial, material and human resources.
- Considering the role of different members of the student support team in schools- e.g. Disability Education Coordinators (DECOs), Learning Support Assistants (LSA), Inclusion focused Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers (HALTS), Allied Health etc.

r e s o u r c i n g

INFRASTRUCTURE

It is proposed that a section on Infrastructure will consider topics relevant to guidance and standards for:

- new schools
- upgrades & refurbishment
- universal design

The importance of the physical learning environment was highlighted in the Community Conversation and the research. Inclusive infrastructure is more than a building that is designed to a certain specification or making buildings physically accessible.

Our learning environments need to be welcoming and accessible to diverse user groups, including students with sensory processing needs and intellectual disability^{vi} and should develop the whole student – intellectually, emotionally, socially, physically, and culturally.^{vii}

Potential action areas

- Considering the vast range of ACT Public School infrastructure and individual solutions through a lens that considers the needs of a diverse range of learners i.e. from aging schools to brand new builds.
- Planning for, designing and building new local schools that offer flexible and adjustable educational approaches.
- Universal design principles to meet the needs of all learners, including in planning upgrades and maintenance of existing schools.
- Integrating relevant expertise in the initial planning phases of building and upgrades- e.g. Allied Health Professionals.
- Utilising student voice in planning new schools and upgrades.

i n f r a s t r u c t u r e

ⁱ [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#) and [Creating an Inclusive Classroom Culture](#)

ⁱⁱ Ainscow and Sandill (2010)

ⁱⁱⁱ Al-Mahdy and Emam (2018)

^{iv} [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers - All career stages](#)

^v [Post School Transitions](#)

^{vi} [School accessibility and universal design in school infrastructure](#) p15

^{vii} [School Provision Planning Guidelines for Students with Disabilities](#) p17