



# Disability Education Reference Group

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26 February 2024

1:00pm - 2:30pm

## Communiqué

The Disability Education Reference Group was attended by 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, the Australian Education Union, Carers ACT, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Association, Imagine More and the ACT Education Directorate.

The Senior Director of the Education Directorate's Inclusion Team provided an update on the Inclusion Coaches. Recruitment for the Inclusion Coaches, Senior Inclusion Coach and Inclusion Transitions and Careers Coach began in December 2023, there is currently a vacancies and there will be another recruitment round in the future. Currently the Inclusion Coaches are in a transition phase as they leave their existing positions and begin in their new roles. Schools in the Tuggeranong network were asked to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) to outline how an Inclusion Coach would support their inclusion goals. 11 schools submitted an EOI and the 7 Inclusion Coaches have been matched to schools. Some schools with similar goals will share an Inclusion Coach. The Inclusion Coaches are primarily school-based but they will also develop resources. The resources, structures and systems which are developed to support the Inclusion Coaches will be able to be rolled out into other networks and will support school based leadership across the system. An evaluation plan is in development which will measure both the fidelity of implementation and the impact of the Inclusion Coach model.

The Chair outlined the intention of the Education Amendment Bill 2024, which is to increase flexibility and to ensure that the Act is up to date with the needs of a modern educational environment. The Bill also presents an opportunity to ensure the Act articulates the right for all children and young people to enrol in their local school. This will explicitly align the Act with the Disability Royal Commission's recommendation to provide equal access to mainstream education and enrolment by creating a legal entitlement for students with disability to enrol in their local school. The Chair also spoke about the directed alternative learning arrangements, and outlined who they are intended to include and how they are intended to be used. Members discussed some of the language in the proposed Bill guidelines and this feedback will be considered by the Legislative Amendment team.

A representative from the Education Directorate's Major Projects provided a presentation about ACT public school design principles, which are governed by Education Directorate Infrastructure Specification (EDIS) and the national Construction Code (NCC). EDIS has been specifically developed for the ACT context and is underpinned by a number of guiding principles including Universal Design, Responsive Design and Cultural Integrity. The presenter spoke about the contemporary approach to school design which includes looking at schools as a whole and how schools can be used to provide support to all students, rather than students with disability being in a particular place or a single small space in one area. The Major Projects team are currently thinking about how the Inclusive Education Strategy will be applied in design and building, with all students being able to attend their local school, with access to all areas.

Members raised the issue of ensuring that schools are designed to meet the sensory needs of students and discussed the increased costs associated with inclusive design.

A Director from the Education Directorate's Strategic Policy branch presented information about the needs base resource model. The current processes, which includes the Student Centred Appraisal of Need (SCAN) and Disability Education Program Application (DEPA), focus on students' deficits and require a disability diagnosis. The new model will be based on the understanding of needs and adjustments, and will be aligned with the processes and data from the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD). The new model will provide schools with greater flexibility about how they use the funding and new processes will help to refine workload for schools and will remove the requirement of a diagnosis. The Directorate is currently working on processes and timeframes to decommission SCAN and DEPA to ensure a seamless transition to the new model.

The Chair suggested that upcoming meetings be used to address two focus areas from the First Action Plan, with project leads responsible for providing updates and members to provide feedback based on what they are hearing on the ground. Members agreed.

Members were invited to provide updates from their organisations.