



# A better education for students with disability

An education system where children want to go to school and where they can succeed.



Association for  
Children with a  
Disability

# Amplifying what works

This report has been developed in consultation with families who have children of varying ages and disabilities. We spoke to families whose children attend government, Catholic, independent, mainstream and specialist schools, and kindergartens. We also heard from families whose children are not attending school because their disability needs could not be supported.

We started by asking families what the key factors are when things are going well with their child's education. Our recommendations focus on amplifying what works.

## 8 actions for a better education for students with disability:

### 1. Leadership that makes a difference

As families, we know that a great early childhood leader or school Principal can make the biggest difference to our child's education. Great leaders foster a culture of inclusion, promote communication between staff and families, learn from their mistakes, support professional learning for all staff, and have high expectations for students with disability. There are leaders with these skills across our education system, but we need more of them. A focus on these skills needs to be valued and embedded into leadership programs, such as those offered by the Victorian Academy of Teaching.

### 2. Effective education support staff

Most of our children receive assistance from education support staff. They can provide excellent support, but they cannot replace teachers. Too often, they have limited training and receive limited direction. These staff need more professional development, teacher-led direction, and better pay. Teachers need training on how to work effectively with support staff.

### 3. High expectations

As families we see how our children achieve what no one thought was possible. Low expectations limit options. We need to focus on what our children **can** do and raise expectations for both individual students and the system as a whole. High expectations and transparent outcomes must be embedded in all the major reforms that are occurring across our education system, from pre-prep to senior secondary pathways.

### 4. Planning for success

As families raising children with disability, we are constantly planning ahead to give our children the best chance of success. We know that being proactive is the best way to be inclusive and meet their disability needs. Good planning at kindergarten and school is central to the rights of students with disability. It involves open communication with families and students and helps address changing disability needs. It builds understanding and transparency about how individual funding is being used. Good planning results in effective reasonable adjustments that are essential to helping students succeed. Teachers need more time to plan for success.

## 5. More professional development for teachers

As families we see improvements when teachers undertake professional development. While disability-focused training has increased, there are still significant gaps. We need more strengths-based professional development opportunities that contribute to teacher accreditation.

## 6. Full-time education for all

As advocates and families, we have seen an increase in the informal exclusion of students from kindergartens and schools. COVID has presented extraordinary challenges, but its legacy cannot be that students with disability are continually placed on reduced hours or sent home early. There are also students with disability who have struggled to return to school. Transparency and accountability are essential in upholding the rights of students. We need a focus on students who are excluded and support their return to full-time education.

## 7. A sense of belonging

Our children do best when they are welcomed and celebrated. Disability is a form of human diversity, but like most adults, teachers often don't have the skills or confidence to talk openly about disability and build understanding of difference. Victoria has been a leader in promoting safe schools for LGBTIQ+ students. We need to invest in a similar student-led approaches to create schools that welcome and celebrate children and staff with disability.

## 8. More advocacy support

Demand for advocacy support from students and families has never been greater, with requests increasing by almost 85% over the past four years. Advocacy is a cost-effective approach that ensures students' rights are upheld, increases accountability, and improves education outcomes.

ACD provides advocacy support to families across Victoria and our reach reflects the diversity of the Victorian community. An investment of an additional \$1 million per year is needed to enable ACD to meet demand for advocacy support.

“ ACD's understanding of the school system is amazing. They allowed me to feel supported within this maze ”

“ Don't wait for it to go wrong. Talk to us, we can help you better understand and support our children ”

“ Children can be really inclusive. They think wheelchairs are cool! ”



## Empowering families for over 40 years

ACD advocates to improve the lives of children with disability and their families.

We are a trusted source of information and advocacy support for more than 15,000 Victorian families of children with disability. We empower families to navigate the system and speak up for the rights of their children.

### Acknowledgement of Country

Families from across Victoria were part of developing this report. We acknowledge the traditional owners of all these lands and pay our respects to Elders past and present. One consultation was held during NAIDOC week, where families talked about the importance of ensuring the indigenous history and culture curriculum is accessible to students with disability.

## For more information contact:

**Karen Dimmock, CEO, ACD**

 0448 912 786

 [karend@acd.org.au](mailto:karend@acd.org.au)

 [www.acd.org.au](http://www.acd.org.au)

