

Access and Participation

- The standards have raised general awareness of the rights of students with disabilities to attend mainstream schools. Schools and education systems have had to review enrolment policies and practices. This has enabled a more inclusive practice to be encouraged and developed in schools.
- Students with disabilities in rural and remote attend the local school, and therefore have been included in the school program.
- The disability standards have raised awareness that schools should provide adjustments for any child with a learning need.
- The standards have opened the door for students to access programs; however, the adjustments process has created inconsistencies and misinterpretation of the intent of the reasonable adjustment aspects. To make adjustments may mean additional resourcing or modifications that require funding. Funding to implement the standards needs to be provided by governments or education providers. This is a major area of concern for principals when developing adjustments to ensure access and participation are possible.

Knowledge and Awareness

- Communication of the standards has been inconsistent and left to state and territory jurisdictions to implement. Hence the strategies to overcome barriers are poorly communicated. Primary schools, having students with disabilities, have been implementing the standards due to the high number of students attending. Government schools tend to have the larger number of students with disabilities.
- Awareness around the standards has not been actively communicated due to little resourcing to communicate or implement them consistently.

Understanding and Advocacy

- The standards are clear; however, they lack clarity in application and implementation. There are inconsistencies in the interpretation of the measures to meet the standards; lack of resourcing to provide the adjustments necessary; poor professional learning options for teachers and principals; and a dearth of support services for ensuring the quality of the educational program is available. Issues with offsite excursions and options for in-school alternative programs present major challenges for principals and teachers. There is goodwill and positive intentions but limitations when additional resourcing is required.
- The standards have given people with a disability advocacy support, especially parents of disabled students. However, we see inconsistencies across Australia because the accountability is left to individual state and territory jurisdictions. Principals may, in some circumstances, be forced to redirect limited school resources to ensure the threat of a claim of discrimination is not lodged, based on the premise of how the standard is interpreted.

Non-Discrimination in Education

- As a principal of special school, mainstream primary school and preschool to Year 10 school, the standards have been implemented to ensure there was an inclusive approach to all children. Individual learning plans are a strategy that could also be used for students without a disability, but with a special need in learning. The access and participation section ensured

teachers were incorporating adjustments to enable students with disabilities to participate, but more importantly, involving the parent in the learning partnership.

- However the level of adjustment, at times, may depend on the level of resourcing available to support the strategy.
- Impact: The most significant impact has been on the increase in the number of students enrolling in a mainstream school, the use of the ILP and differentiation strategies for learning. Physical access adjustments have benefited all students and staff.

Future Improvements

- The challenge will always be about making adjustments with limited resources. Clearly, not all adjustments can be standardised due to the range in disabilities.
- The challenge is often in providing a suitable and meaningful learning program for students, in buildings not designed for access or modification, especially in secondary.
- Resourcing of students with disabilities is limited and restricting when you have a range of needs and complexities across a number of year levels.
- Support documents need to be developed that help build consistency across state and territories in the interpretation and practical application of the standards.
- Communicating the positive achievements of schools in implementing the standards.
- Ongoing professional learning for teachers and principals. Primary schools need access to specialist support services to assist with modifying and developing learning programs.
- Information and support for parents in understanding the intent of the standards and how to work with their local school.
- The growing number of students with mental health or emotional needs is impacting on school resources. Many are also not eligible for additional resourcing.
- We need consistency in definition and identification for students with a disability across all state and territories.
- We need consistency in transition strategies for students with disabilities.

Other Comments

- Curriculum and pathway programs for students with disabilities. There is an urgent need for major work in developing a curriculum that is accessible and flexible. This needs to draw on the successful experiences by practising teachers in mainstream schools.
- We need professional support and programs for new and aspiring principals on developing inclusive school communities.
- Initial teacher education courses should have mandatory subjects on adjusting learning practices for students with special needs and principles of inclusive practices that incorporate the standards.
- The Disability Standards are a stand-alone document that need to be supported with resources, which includes financial, human and physical.