



SUBMISSION OF AUSTRALIAN COALITION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION (ACIE)

2025-2026 Pre-Budget Submission

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[Australian Coalition of Inclusive Education](#) (ACIE) welcomes the opportunity to make the following submission regarding priorities for the 2025–26 Budget.

BACKGROUND

1. ACIE is a national coalition of 25 not-for-profit organisations and has a combined representative membership of over 1.2 million. It brings together organisations with significant expertise in inclusive education and disability advocacy, and spans national and State and Territory based organisations, disability advocacy organisations, student and youth organisations, educators, and family and carer support organisations.

2. ACIE's work is guided by a human rights and evidence-based approach to inclusive education. It looks to the principles embodied in United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD), which has been ratified by Australia, is binding on it under international law and is the most authoritative expression of the human rights of people with disability, including the right to inclusive education under Article 24 and further explained by the CRPD' treaty monitoring body, the CRPD Committee, in General Comment No. 4 (Right to Inclusive Education)¹.
3. Inclusive education in accordance with the CRPD and General Comment No.4 means the delivery of education to all students grouped by relevant age range, in general education classrooms in a way that addresses and responds to their diverse characteristics as learners, provides reasonable accommodations and supports to ensure an equitable and participatory learning experience and respects their fundamental human rights. It does not mean the delivery of education in separate, segregated, or self-contained environments or programs for students with disability, including in separate educational institutions, separate classrooms or subsections of classrooms.
4. The [Australian Disability Standards for Education \(2005\)](#) enacted under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth), further state that students with disability have the right to access and participate in all aspects of school-life on the same basis as their non-disabled peers.
5. ACIE acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work, and we pay our respects to Elders, past and present, across the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations across Australia.
6. We also wish to recognise the generations of people with disability, and their families and allies, who have worked to advance the understanding and realisation of human rights, equality, and inclusion for all. We honour and respect their vision and legacy.
7. It is critical that education receives a much needed increase in funding. Numerous inquiries² over many years have found that students with disability contend with

¹ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, *General Comment No 4: Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education*, 16th session, UN Doc CRPD/C/GC/4 (25 November 2016).

² NSW Legislative Council, *Children and young people with disability in New South Wales Educational Settings* (2024); Western Australia Legislative Assembly, *Education and Health Standing Committee, Report 6: A Different Kind of Brilliance – Report of the inquiry into support for autistic children and young people in schools* (March 2024); *Final Report of the Disability Royal Commission* (2023); *Senate Inquiry into the Issue of Increasing Disruption in Australian Classrooms* (2023); *Review of the National School Reform Agreement* (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 20220); *Review of the Disability Standards for Education* (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Education, 2020); *Strengthening School and Systems Capacity to implement effective interventions to support student behaviour and wellbeing in New South Wales public schools* (Pearce et al., 2020); *South Australian Department for Education, Report of an Independent Inquiry into Suspensions, Exclusions, and Expulsions in South Australian Government Schools*. South Australian Government, 2020); *Review of Education for Students with Disability in Queensland state schools* (Deloitte Access Economics, 2017); *NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Students with a Disability or Special Needs in New South Wales schools* (NSW Parliament Portfolio Committee No. 3, 2017); *NSW Audit Office Supporting students with disability in NSW public schools* (NSW Audit Office, 2016); *Victorian Review of the Program for Students with Disabilities* (Victoria Department of Education and Training, 2016); *Access to Real Learning: Current levels of access and attainment for students with disability in the school system, and the impact*

significant barriers when accessing school education. Students regularly experience ableism, discrimination, inadequate resourcing and expertise, gatekeeping and abuse. It is common for students with disability to have poor educational experiences and outcomes. A significant contributing factor for these unacceptable educational experiences is inadequate funding for inclusive education.

8. It should be noted that these inquiries and the direct experience of students with disability have all highlighted the critical need for broad ranging reforms. Adequate funding is essential to enable the education reforms and improvements necessary to ensure a universally accessible, quality and inclusive education system for all where students with disability can access education in general education classrooms on an equal basis with their non-disabled peers.
9. Given the particular disadvantage that is experienced by students with disability, it is seen as critical that the upcoming budget will include an increase of the federal government funding contribution to students in public education to 25% of the School Resourcing Standard funding (SRS).
10. The additional Commonwealth funding as part of the SRS funding is required and should be committed to undertaking desperately needed systemic reforms to improve the capacity of public schools to implement inclusive education that benefits all students and address the significant ongoing equity gaps in Australian education, particularly affecting students with disability, those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and those who face additional barriers to education, including:
 - reduction in class sizes, an increase in non-teaching hours, professional development and capacity building to support inclusive practices, such as planning and delivery of targeted and individualised adjustments and supports for students who need them;
 - the need for widespread implementation of universal design for learning, ensuring that learning materials and environments are designed to be accessible and flexible for all students;
 - investment in delivering social-emotional and well-being supports, including for students dealing with trauma, socio-economic disadvantage, mental health or other barriers;

on students and families associated with inadequate levels of support (Commonwealth of Australia, Australian Senate Committee, 2016); Report of the Select Committee on Access to the South Australian Education System for Students with a Disability (Parliament of South Australia, 2015); ACT Report of the Expert Panel on Students with Complex Needs and Challenging Behaviour (Shaddock, Packer and Roy, 2015); Review of the Disability Standards for Education (Commonwealth of Australia, Urbis, 2015); Review of the Experiences of Students with Disabilities in Victorian schools (Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, 2012); Review of the Disability Standards for Education (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012); NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the Provision of Education for Students with Disability or Special Needs (General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2, 2010); NSW Auditor-General's Report Performance Audit: Educating Primary School Students with Disabilities (NSW Audit Office, 2006); Australian Government Senate Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities (Commonwealth of Australia, Senate Committee, 2002).

- investment in the development of inclusive and culturally responsive school cultures;
- the use of digital and assistive technologies in schools, such as communication devices, screen readers, and adapted learning tools, which are critical for students with disability to fully participate in their education; and
- upgrade of school facilities to ensure they are universally accessible and include sensory-friendly environments.

11. It is noted that the Australian Government responded in July 2024 to the Royal Commission into Abuse, Violence, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (the Disability Royal Commission) Volume 7 of the Final Report³ with “in principle agreement” to all recommendations over which it has joint responsibility, except for recommendations 7.14 and 7.15 which were “noted”. **This included Recommendation 7.12 Improving Funding.** It is critical that this commitment is recognised in the upcoming Budget.
12. The other Recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission directly relevant to education which the Australia Government agreed to in principle were:
- 7.2 - Prevent the inappropriate use of exclusionary discipline against students with disability.
 - 7.3 - Improve policies and procedures on the provision of reasonable adjustments to students with disability.
 - 7.6 - Student and parental communication and relationships.
 - 7.8 – Workforce capabilities, expertise and development.
 - 7.10 – Complaint Management, and
 - 7.13 – National Roadmap to Inclusive Education.
13. To progress all of the Recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission which the Australian Government is jointly responsible for and to which it has “agreed in principle”, will require specific funding in addition to that mentioned above pertaining to the SRS. This additional funding needs to include costs for the significant consultation with students with disability, families, the disability advocacy sector and other education stakeholders which is essential for effective reform.
14. ACIE notes that the CRPD Committee, in its 2019 Concluding observations on the combined second and third reports of Australia⁴ (**2019 Concluding Observations**) adopted on Friday 20 September 2019⁵, highlighted “the weakness of the mechanisms and the limited funding” provided by the Australian government “for the full and effective engagement of persons with disabilities, through their representative organizations, in policy development, implementation and monitoring of actions relating to the Convention”⁶ and expressed specific concern about

³ Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, *Final Report* (Report, 29 September 2023).

⁴ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, *Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports of Australia*, 25th session, UN Doc CRPD/C/AUS/CO/2-3 (15 October 2019).

⁵ Ibid 46.

⁶ Ibid 5(d).

“insufficient funding for inclusive education in mainstream schools.”⁷. General Comment No.4 issued in 2016 had already urged all CRPD States Parties, including Australia, to “develop a funding model that allocates resources and incentives for inclusive educational environments to provide the necessary support to persons with disabilities”⁸.

15. We further note the commitment made in the Australian Labor Party’s National Platform document in relation to the achievement of equity for people with disability, to “take into account recommendations from the UN CRPD Committees 2019 Concluding Observations and the reports from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission)”⁹.
16. ACIE wishes to strongly emphasise that funding related to acting upon the Recommendations listed by the Disability Royal Commission to provide inclusive education needs to be above and beyond what is the current funding for education. The education system is currently overwhelmed and stressed and unable to provide a quality and inclusive education to students with disability, despite it being a fundamental human right. The breadth of systemic reform required is significant. For meaningful reform to occur, additional and specifically allocated funding must be available.

ACIE submits that the critical element to guide the identification and effective implementation of the education reform needed for students with disability is the immediate need to implement Recommendation 7.13 “Development of the Roadmap to Inclusive Education”. This plan is imperative as it is needed to drive implementation of an inclusive education system and sustain inclusive education, including a desegregation strategy, clear targets and an ambitious timetable, long-term objectives and sufficient and appropriately allocated resources.

17. The funding of the national roadmap to Inclusive Education must be a budgetary priority. It has been recommended in General Comment No.4 and in the CRPD 2019 Concluding observations, specifically in respect of Australia. It was also recommended by the 2016 Federal Senate review into education of students with disabilities,¹⁰ and now the Disability Royal Commission.

⁷ Ibid 45(b).

⁸ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, *General Comment No 4: Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education*, 16th session, UN Doc CRPD/C/GC/4 (25 November 2016) [70]

⁹ 2023 ALP National Platform, downloaded 14 January 2025 <<https://www.alp.org.au/media/3569/2023-alp-national-platform.pdf>>

¹⁰ See Recommendation 9 of Senate Education and Employment References Committee, ‘*Access to Real Learning: The Impact of Policy, Funding and Culture on Students with Disability*’ (Parliamentary Paper No 50, 2016).

SUMMARY

- A. The federal government funding contribution to students in public education should increase to 25% of the School Resourcing Standard funding (SRS) to ensure inclusive education.
- B. Prioritisation of funding of Recommendation 7.13 of the Disability Royal Commission
 - The funding of the national roadmap to Inclusive Education
- C. Specific and additional funding to comprehensively deliver the following recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission.
 - 7.2 - Prevent the inappropriate use of exclusionary discipline against students with disability.
 - 7.3 - Improve policies and procedures on the provision of reasonable adjustments to students with disability.
 - 7.6 - Student and parental communication and relationships.
 - 7.8 – Workforce capabilities, expertise and development.
 - 7.10 – Complaint Management.

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