



## Discussion Paper #3

# "Quality Provision of Education for Students with Disabilities and Additional Learning Needs"

### Translating evidence and professional wisdom to inform policy and practice

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring that all students, including those with disabilities and additional learning needs, are provided with quality education so that they can fulfil their potential.

For inclusive education to be meaningful, the essential link between **equity** and **quality** provision of education must be recognised and incorporated into policy and planning for students with disabilities and additional learning needs.

#### Why is this issue important?

The recently released Disability Standards for Education 2005 set new benchmarks for education and training providers which all Victorian government schools must comply with. The Standards give students with disabilities the right to education and training opportunities on the same basis as students without disabilities.

These new benchmarks include the right to comparable access, services and facilities, and the right to participate in education and training unimpeded by discrimination, including on the basis of stereotyped beliefs about the abilities and choices of students with disabilities.

The Standards cover:

- enrolment
- participation
- curriculum development
- student support services, and
- the elimination of harassment and victimisation.

#### What does the evidence and professional wisdom tell us?

The work of Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore (1995) identifies a number of key elements of school effectiveness. The Effective Schools Model, adapted

from this work, cites the following characteristics of an effective school:

- professional leadership
- a focus on teaching and learning
- purposeful teaching
- shared vision and goals
- high expectations of all learners
- accountability
- schools as learning communities
- schools as stimulating and secure learning environments.

All of these factors contribute to the provision of quality education for students with disabilities and additional learning needs. They can be categorised under three headings:

- 1) Whole-school processes that promote inclusive education and quality teaching
- 2) Classroom-based practise that is responsive to individual needs and diverse learning styles
- 3) Effective monitoring and review mechanisms at all levels of the system.

#### How do we translate the research evidence into policy and practice?

##### Whole-school processes

Research on school effectiveness shows a strong link between whole-school approaches to planning and the quality provision of education services. These approaches depend on strong leadership and the development of a shared vision among staff, students, parents and a school's leadership team.

In achieving equity and quality for students with disabilities and additional learning needs, approaches to school planning for students with disabilities and additional learning needs should be strategic, comprehensive and embedded, rather than fragmented or 'added-on'.

Inclusivity and a commitment to quality education should be reflected in a school's curriculum, teaching and learning, organisation, ethos, community links and partnerships.

Effective schools reflect an ethos of working collaboratively with parents/carers/guardians in assessing and meeting the needs of students with disabilities or additional learning needs. As the primary source of knowledge about the student, parent/guardian/carer involvement is central to achieving student success.

This is particularly important in determining reasonable adjustments that may need to be made, as required under the Disability Standards for Education. Adjustments may need to be made to school buildings, curriculum content, assessment procedures and methodologies, the format and suitability of teaching materials, learning activities, modes of delivery and teaching styles.

Finally, school wellbeing policies should reflect the value of diversity and the right of every student to feel physically and psychologically safe at school.

### **Classroom-based practices**

The Disability Standards for Education require schools to take reasonable steps to ensure that curriculum programs are designed in such a way that all students are able to participate in and access equal opportunities for assessment and accreditation.

Effective schools have high expectations for all learners, and recognise that all students have the potential to learn. To maximise opportunities for students with disabilities and additional learning needs to succeed, policy and practice should reflect:

- collaboration between teachers and students, parent/guardian/carers, education and health professionals to develop criteria for agreed understandings and responses about a student's behaviours, needs, communication skills, learning styles and preferences
- curriculum-based individual education plans developed by a student's support group that set out the student's short-term and long-term learning goals
- teaching and learning strategies that are adapted according to a student's background experiences, individual personality and individual goals
- opportunities for the student to develop knowledge, skills and behaviours in a range of domains and contexts
- opportunities for all students to participate in classroom activities with other students.

Setting, monitoring and reporting on targets through the individual education planning process will help to

ensure that each student has an appropriate, challenging and effective educational program. Individual learning plans also provide an important focus for reporting to parents.

### **Effective monitoring and review mechanisms at all levels of the system.**

Schools, regional offices and central office have a shared responsibility in meeting the commitment to quality education for students with disabilities and additional learning needs under the Department of Education and Training's School Improvement and Accountability Framework:

- schools are responsible for the achievement of its students and for the provision of equity and quality in its programs
- regional offices are responsible for the performance of schools and for the provision of support and advice
- central office is accountable to government and the community for the overall performance of the system and for establishing appropriate policies and frameworks that can assist sustained improvements in schools.

### **Issues**

A strong accountability system dedicated to student improvement is the hallmark of any healthy education organisation.

The recently released Disability Standards for Education provide a new framework for action in meeting the challenge of providing equity and quality for students with disabilities and additional learning needs.

This policy brief seeks to encourage reflection and discussion about how to build on existing good practice in schools in a systemic and sustainable way.

***Student Wellbeing Branch  
Office of School Education  
Department of Education and Training***