

# **INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR ALL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND ADDITIONAL NEEDS**

THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE REVIEW OF  
THE PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES



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#### ACCESSIBILITY

This document is also available on the internet at You can read more about the Special Needs Plan at [www.education.vic.gov.au/specialneedsplan](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/specialneedsplan)

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## MINISTER'S MESSAGE

The Andrews Labor Government's bold promise to transform Victoria into the Education State is based on a fundamental belief that, with the right teaching and support, every student can learn and succeed.

Our Special Needs Plan for Victorian Schools – part of the Labor Government's almost \$4 billion education investment – has a vision to ensure all students with disabilities and additional needs get an inclusive, high quality education.

The first initiative of the Plan was a complete review of the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD), which provides extra funding to schools for eligible students with disabilities.

It is the most comprehensive review of the Program ever undertaken. It considers a new strengths-based approach to support and funding, the specific needs of students with autism and with dyslexia, smoother transitioning from primary to secondary schools and how education can be more inclusive.

Disability is often viewed as too difficult, and left to the end of a reform process. This Review, and our response, demonstrates Labor's commitment to placing inclusiveness at the heart of our Education State reform agenda.

Victoria has a vibrant, strong education system, with areas of excellence. Through the Education State, our Government aspires to foster that excellence and equity in every school, for every student – regardless of the school gate they enter through.

We've listened to students, parents, teachers, education support staff, principals and the community about the challenges of inclusive education – and we've heard the call for change.

Our response is the first step in striving to provide fairer, safer, more inclusive schools to improve educational outcomes – and quality of life – for students with special needs. It centres on the development of a new, personalised approach to learning for students with disabilities – because no two kids are the same.

The focus will be on their aspirations – not limitations.

There are many parallels between the PSD Review findings and our well-advanced Education State reform agenda: common themes of equity, excellence, inclusion, innovation, collaboration, transparency and improved efficiency.

The Andrews Labor Government is providing a \$22 million funding boost to better support kids with disabilities, including those with autism and with dyslexia.

We've immediately accepted 21 of the Review's 25 recommendations – and are getting on with the job.

The four remaining recommendations for a new funding model will be carefully considered alongside other reforms, including the Review of School Funding by the Hon Steve Bracks AC, the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and ongoing negotiations with the Commonwealth to fully fund the Gonski Agreement.

I would like to thank all those who contributed to the Review. I would particularly like to acknowledge and thank Dr Graeme Innes for leading the consultations and the Advisory Panel.

We owe Victoria's students and families nothing less than a great school for every community, excellent teaching in every classroom and the promise of a bright future for every student with a disability. The Andrews Government is dedicated to improving opportunities for all students – without exception.

**The Hon. James Merlino MP**  
Deputy Premier  
Minister for Education

# WHAT IS THE PSD REVIEW?

We promised to make Victoria the Education State by building an education system that produces excellence and reduces the impact of disadvantage.

Our vision is a Victorian school system which supports every student with a disability to participate and achieve on the same basis as their peers.

As part of this vision, we committed to implement nine initiatives under a *Special Needs Plan for Victorian Schools* to make schools better and more inclusive for students with disabilities.

As the first of the Plan's nine initiatives to be implemented, the Government asked for the Review of the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD Review) to investigate how schools can best support students with special needs.

The Review – the most comprehensive ever undertaken since the Program's inception – was framed around six themes:

- Excellence in Inclusive education
- Improved learning
- Better outcomes for students with autism and with dyslexia
- Improving the transition to secondary schools
- A new approach to funding and support
- Implementing reform

Consultations were led by Australia's former Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Dr Graeme Innes, and included more than 100 face-to-face consultations with parents, current and former students, principals and professionals, peak industry bodies, principal and teacher associations, disability advocates and academics. The Review also analysed national and international academic literature, received 170 online submissions, and conducted an online survey of more than 1400 respondents. The messages the Review heard were clear, consistent and convincing.

## THE SPECIAL NEEDS PLAN FOR VICTORIAN SCHOOLS

As part of the Education State, the Government has committed to inclusive education through the *Special Needs Plan for Victorian Schools*. The plan outlines nine initiatives to give every child and young person a safe, positive and supportive environment in which to learn that is suited to their individual needs.

The initiatives will improve students' achievement, engagement and wellbeing by creating fairer, safer and more inclusive schools for students with special needs.

Initiatives which we have delivered to date include:

- A new \$10 million **Inclusive Schools Fund**, already funding 33 schools to build inclusive facilities for students with disabilities as part of round 1 of the funding.
- Strengthening the **capability of teachers** to help students with disabilities. From September 2016, all registered teachers will have to have either undertaken relevant professional development in the last two years or take it before renewing their registration in September 2017. From 2016, all initial teacher education programs must also include specific learning activities about teaching students with disabilities in order to be accredited by the Victorian Institute of Teaching.
- **A new Principal Practice Leader (Education)** has been appointed to work exclusively with schools to oversee the use of restraint and seclusion and build best practice in the management of challenging behaviours.
- **Improving early years screening for learning difficulties** and disorders by enhancing the English Online Interview assessment tool.
- **A new Outstanding Inclusive Education Award** category as part of the Government's annual Victorian Education Excellence Awards to celebrate teachers and support staff who demonstrated outstanding ability in improving student achievement, engagement and wellbeing.
- All Victorian government schools are now able to access the **Abilities Based Learning and Education Support (ABLES) curriculum assessment and reporting tool** for students with disabilities to inform the development of teaching and learning programs that are appropriate to a student's current achievement. The use of ABLES with the new Victorian Curriculum will mean that every student can have their learning achievement and progress reported through the Victorian Curriculum.
- A new planning and building approach has been implemented to ensure that **all new schools - or schools undertaking significant building projects - accommodate the diverse needs of students**. The new *School Provision Planning Guidelines for Students with Disabilities* and an updated *Building Quality Standards Handbook* have been released to ensure schools are also planned and built to be inclusive in the future, while the 15 new schools being built as part of the Public Private Partnership Project will provide outstanding inclusive learning spaces.

You can read more about the Special Needs Plan at [www.education.vic.gov.au/specialneedsplan](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/specialneedsplan)

# KEY FINDINGS

The PSD Review delivered 20 key findings and 25 recommendations to help the Victorian Government realise its vision of inclusive education for all students.

The Review highlights new reform opportunities to improve education outcomes for students with special needs.

## KEY FINDINGS

The Review found that:

- while the PSD delivers substantial funding to support students with disabilities, there are significant weaknesses in its design, implementation and accountability
- these weaknesses make it challenging to support every student with disabilities to fully participate in education
- a truly inclusive education system requires more than a targeted funding model.

The key findings can be summarised as:

- Victoria lacks a clear inclusive education policy and framework
- inclusion of all students requires a sustained investment in the education workforce's training and professional learning opportunities
- there is a lack of accountability and transparency for funding and outcomes for all students with disabilities
- a more effective approach to identify and support students with disabilities is required
- the PSD's deficit-focussed eligibility criteria does not adequately support all students with disabilities
- transitional funding for students who are no longer eligible for PSD funding after Year 6-7 reassessment is required.



# OUR RESPONSE

The Andrews Labor Government is committed to improving the way our school system supports students with disabilities – including how schools are resourced – and embraces the opportunity the Review presents.

We have immediately accepted 21 of the 25 recommendations, and asked that work start now on their implementation

as we set a new agenda for *Inclusive education for all students with disabilities and additional needs*. This new agenda will have a focus on evidence-based practice and a holistic approach to maximising learning for all students, and will complement and enhance the initiatives already underway through the Special Needs Plan and broader Education State reforms.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR RESPONSE

Victoria's future prosperity starts with a quality education – for every child, regardless of location, background or circumstance. An investment in improved education outcomes for students with disabilities is an investment in our future.

That is why we have announced \$22 million in funding as part of our response. This includes:

- an extra **\$17 million funding** to better support the needs of students with learning difficulties such as dyslexia or with autism who are not eligible under the PSD
- a **\$3 million** funding boost to provide **support for students transitioning to Year 7** who are no longer eligible for funding
- a **\$2 million dyslexia and learning difficulties strategy** to deliver professional learning, advice and resources for teachers and families.

Other highlights of our response include:

- a clearer direction and stronger support for schools to implement inclusive education practices
- new guidelines and tools to help teachers develop more tailored learning plans to better meet the needs of every student – because no two kids are the same
- greater access to training and professional development for teachers, education support staff and school leaders and to better support students with a disability
- local expertise and knowledge will be used to support schools to deliver inclusive education, with special schools and mainstream schools collaborating
- greater accountability and transparency in how funding is used to improve student outcomes.

Details of the evidence base for change can be found in the accompanying [Review](#).

## Excellence in inclusive education (Recommendations 1-8)

### Recommendation 1

Develop a clear inclusive education policy and framework as well as guidance and support materials for staff working with students with disabilities. This guidance on inclusive education should articulate a vision and set the necessary expectations and direction for educating students with disabilities in Victoria.

A shared vision and policy for inclusive education will support schools to educate and support students with disabilities.

We will work with students, families and schools to develop an inclusive education policy and framework and support materials providing clear and practical advice, resources and tools. It will link to the Education State's Framework for Improving Student Outcomes, which includes *'Setting expectations and promoting inclusion'* as one of the six high-impact initiatives that schools have been asked to focus on.

### Recommendation 2

Develop a new Inclusive Schooling Index that enables schools to self-assess and measure inclusivity.

Building an inclusive culture requires leadership. Principals and school leaders are essential to drive that culture. Developing an Inclusive Schooling Index would provide schools with a critical tool to profile their own success and work with their communities on strengthening their approach to inclusion.

We will work with experts, principals, school leaders, students and their families to develop the Index as a new tool to support schools to measure, understand and improve their own inclusive culture and practices against a range of indicators.

### Recommendation 3

Develop an Inclusive Education Workforce Capability Strategy to ensure that teachers and teaching staff can better access the necessary professional learning, including evidence-based pedagogy and curriculum, to fully support the participation and achievement of students with disabilities.

### Recommendation 4

Further develop and roll out existing professional learning opportunities relevant to disability and inclusive education practices at a system, school and classroom level, to build workforce capability to support all students with disabilities.

We know that quality teaching is the most important in-school factor in improving student outcomes. As part of the Special Needs Plan, all teachers in Victoria now have to complete professional learning on teaching students with disabilities as a condition of registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching. And we will train the next generation of teachers as part of their tertiary studies by ensuring that all initial teacher education programs have a special needs component.

An Inclusive Education Workforce Capability Strategy will be developed to further support teachers in meeting these new professional learning requirements.

As part of developing the Strategy, all teachers have been asked to complete a survey developed by the University of Melbourne to gather their views on professional learning, their knowledge and skills in educating students with disabilities, and what would help them be a better teacher to special needs students. The survey will ensure the Strategy truly reflects what teachers need.

We will consult with all relevant stakeholders throughout 2016 to develop the Strategy, and will consider how it aligns with and strengthens workforce initiatives underway as part of the Education State agenda.

We've already committed \$21.6 million to support government school teachers to teach the new Victorian Curriculum – which, for the first time, includes assessment and reporting levels for students with disabilities who are working toward the Foundation level of the curriculum.

While the Strategy will consider the future professional learning needs of our workforce and potentially identify new initiatives and programs to support them, the Government will also look at how we can improve access to and participation in the range of training which already exists. This includes all existing online learning, programs, seminars, workshops and other professional learning opportunities.

#### **Recommendation 5**

To assist with capability building, leadership development and the implementation of a workforce capability strategy, undertake a feasibility study into the potential for a Victorian Inclusive Education Institute, possibly as part of the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership or Victorian Deaf Education Institute.

A Victorian Inclusive Education Institute would strengthen workforce capability by offering cross-sector professional learning opportunities, commissioning research, investigating technology that helps quality inclusive education, supports communities of practice, and collaborates with universities and not-for-profit advocacy groups to advance inclusive education knowledge and skills.

We will conduct a feasibility study this year into the potential for a Victorian Inclusive Education Institute, to explore its role and functions, including whether it could form part of either the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership or Victorian Deaf Education Institute.

**Recommendation 6**

Consider how to harness the new regional reforms and resources, particularly the multi-disciplinary teams as part of the *Learning Places* agenda, to better access the expertise and knowledge in each local area.

In September 2015 the Victorian Government delivered \$82.2 million to strengthen services and support to our education system. Under our new regional model, which began in March this year, we have provided an extra 150 staff to ensure more and targeted support to schools, early years services, students and their families.

We will continue to assess how to harness these regional reforms and resources, particularly the multi-disciplinary teams, to better access the specialist expertise and knowledge in local areas and improve support for students with disabilities.

**Recommendation 7**

Develop options to support specialist schools to become 'centres of expertise' to support local mainstream schools to implement inclusive education.

We know there is a need for more specialist support and expertise for schools to deliver inclusive education.

We recognise the importance of specialist expertise and support to better equip schools, teachers and our allied health staff to deliver inclusive education.

We agree that specialist and special developmental schools are an important existing source of skills and expertise that could be better used to help mainstream schools be more inclusive.

We will consult with specialist schools and their communities to consider options for how they could progressively become 'centres of expertise' to support mainstream schools to strengthen their approaches to inclusive education.

**Recommendation 8**

Provide guidance in relation to the role (including the extent to which they are used) and training requirements for Education Support staff to optimise the use of this key resource and better influence academic and behavioural outcomes of students with disabilities.

Education Support staff play a vital support role for schools and teachers, as well as being a valuable workforce for many students with learning disabilities. Used effectively, they can help students to learn and thrive. However, principals and teachers are often unaware of how and when to most effectively use Education Support staff.

We will work with stakeholders to provide guidance on training and role descriptions for Support Staff and provide principals and teachers with information on best practice in how and when to most effectively use Education Support staff in the classroom, including as part of collaborative student support approaches. The training will build knowledge and skills in relation to working with teachers and students to improve outcomes.



## Improved learning (Recommendations 9-12)

### **Recommendation 9**

Develop a new collaborative multi-disciplinary approach to support all students with disabilities, which considers Team Around the Learners and Response to Intervention models.

Multi-disciplinary teams are already being established across the state to provide access to a range of experts – from executive leaders to curriculum and assessment experts – and a dedicated health and wellbeing workforce. These teams work together to ensure a holistic, focused and complementary set of skills and resources for students with additional needs and disabilities. Senior Education Improvement Leaders will be at the centre of these multi-disciplinary teams, collaborating to determine what support is needed and drive coordinated action.

We will work with the multi-disciplinary teams to develop an improved collaborative approach for students with disabilities, drawing upon the deep understanding and knowledge families have of their child and the specific expertise of our workforces. The approach will consider the role of the existing Student Support Groups and their relationship to the multi-disciplinary teams, including individualised support models such as Team Around the Learner and Response to Intervention approaches. The development of the improved collaborative approach will also consider the role of the Student Support Services Officers.

### **Recommendation 10**

Develop guidelines on personalised learning and support planning to assist schools with early identification of, and response to, students with disabilities. These guidelines should consider strength-based, person-centred approaches to maximise learning outcomes and the engagement and wellbeing of students with disabilities in schools. The guidelines should set out a process to plan and monitor achievement, engagement and wellbeing outcomes for the individual.

### **Recommendation 11**

Develop and trial a new personalised support-profiling tool that identifies strengths and functional needs for all students with disabilities.

For every student to have the best chance of reaching their potential, schools and teachers must identify their individual strengths and needs. That requires input from parents, experts and teachers. Currently, the way tailored Individual Learning Plans are developed is inconsistent, and fails to adequately record and drive the progress of students. We need to make it easier for teachers working with special needs students to develop and implement consistent tailored plans for every student with disabilities. There are examples where it's working brilliantly – but we want to see this kind of planning offered to every student, and for teachers to feel fully supported in doing so.

We will work with teachers, students, families and disability experts to develop new evidence-based guidelines to help teachers develop consistent, strength-based, personalised learning and support planning. These guidelines will provide key principles, standards and processes for effective personalised learning and be broadly aligned to national standards i.e. the *Planning for Personalised Learning and Support: A National Resource*, based on the Disability Standards for Education 2005. The guidelines will have a focus on the opportunities for joint planning for those students who are also supported under the NDIS.

We will also develop a new support-profiling tool in partnership with a university. This web-based tool will gather information from teachers, families and professionals to profile each student's strengths and needs. These needs may be around a student's mobility, specific health care needs, or the challenges they face when socialising and working with their peers. Information from the school, families and relevant professionals will develop individual student profiles, to develop tailored learning plans for students with disabilities.

## INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ACTION

We're making Victoria the Education State by building an education system that produces excellence and reduces the impact of disadvantage. An inclusive education system will enable every child and young person to learn in a safe, positive and supportive environment in the setting best suited to their needs.

Our response centres on the development of a new, personalised approach to learning for students with disabilities. Effective planning for tailored learning and support begins with a sound understanding of a student's individual needs and abilities. Successful transition requires careful planning, preparation and communication. On the next page are two examples of inclusive education in action.





**Case study 1:** 'Jennifer'\* is in Year 7 at a local secondary college. She had a history of reading and learning difficulties and, despite classroom-based interventions in primary school, continued to struggle with her reading fluency and comprehension. In Year 6, Jennifer was diagnosed with dyslexia following a comprehensive educational assessment. As a part of her transition to Year 7, the college arranged a meeting with her parents and Year 6 teacher to discuss the strategies already in place for her and identify her strengths and learning needs. A personalised learning plan was developed in consultation with her new classroom teachers, detailing adjustments that would be made to the curriculum and learning provided for Jennifer.

Planned adjustments included:

- use of her interest and strength in drama to provide alternative presentation options for class tasks and projects
- adapted learning materials such as audiobooks of class texts
- use of speech-to-text software on her laptop to help with homework
- inclusion in a Year 7 Literacy Intervention Class to help with reading comprehension.

The college has developed a whole-school approach to supporting all students with learning difficulties. This has involved a focus on building the capacity of staff to develop inclusive classroom practices including professional learning for teaching staff such as Inclusion Online; regular whole staff meetings to share advice on learning difficulties such as dyslexia; and providing tools such as assistive technology and high-interest low-ability texts for the school library. Jennifer's progress and learning outcomes are regularly reviewed through Student Support Group meetings attended by Jennifer, her family and her teachers.

**Case study 2:** 'Bryson'\* , who is on the autism spectrum, was going to an Autism Specific Specialist School, where he worked with teachers to understand the routines of school and develop his skills across communication and social engagement. His parents and teachers saw that Bryson was growing in confidence and skills, and that he was ready to transition to Year 4 at his local primary school.

His parents met with his new teacher to discuss his abilities, interests and support needs. Together, they developed a learning plan specifically tailored to Bryson. His new teacher came to the Autism School to observe him in class. And Bryson came to the local school often to get comfortable. His specialist school teacher went along on the early visits to help him settle in. She also provided advice to his new teacher on the resources available – including online professional development – to help the teacher help Bryson be his best. His new teacher talks with his mother about strategies that she uses with Bryson at home. Bryson's parents meet with the school regularly so they can monitor his learning outcomes and address any needs that arise. Bryson is having a great time at his school – especially his lunchtime Lego Club where he build robots and spaceships with his friends.

\*names changed for privacy reasons

**Recommendation 12**

Develop and implement a stronger system of accountability for outcomes for all students with disabilities that includes improved data quality and data collection, analysis of data, and reporting and transparency. For students this would include measures for achievement, engagement and wellbeing, and for schools this would include greater accountability and transparency for the use of funds.

A lack of data currently makes it difficult to assess whether funding for students with disabilities is improving student outcomes. Parents need information about their child's learning, wellbeing and school participation to help them work with the school and their child to ensure the best possible education outcomes.

Improved data collection, linkage and analysis is needed to support planning, accountability and transparency, and to build excellence in teaching and learning. We will work with stakeholders to develop a plan to improve data quality and analysis, using existing data collections (such as NAPLAN, the School Enrolment Census, and the Attitudes to School Survey). This will include examining how schools can best report on the use of targeted funding as part of their existing reporting processes.

Identifying how to improve data collection, analysis and reporting will require consideration at both a school and system level, to inform planning and support across Victoria, as part of building collaborative and achievement-focused partnerships with families, within regions and across the school system as a whole. This is in line with our Education State Framework for Improving Student Outcomes, with an emphasis on strengthening the use of student data in two of the six high-impact initiatives that schools have been asked to focus on.

## Improving the transition to secondary school (Recommendation 13)

### **Recommendation 13**

Consider providing interim funding for students transitioning from Year 6 who are no longer eligible for targeted PSD funding, to provide additional support as part of a coordinated multi-disciplinary approach.

Moving from primary to secondary school can be challenging for many students. For students with disabilities, this is also the time when their eligibility for the PSD is reassessed, and we know this remains an area of concern for many families. However, with the Year 6-7 reassessment still required to determine eligibility under the existing funding model, the Review found there was no real benefit in moving the timing of the reassessment earlier or later. In the short term, better support is required for students transitioning to secondary school who are no longer eligible for the PSD after their reassessment in Year 6.

As part of the 2016-17 Budget, we will provide a \$3 million funding boost over two years to provide better transitional support for students and their families. This funding for students transitioning from Year 6 who are no longer eligible for the PSD will give secondary schools increased capacity to plan and support students as they move to Year 7. They will also be able to put in place strategies to build students' independence and skills, consistent with the *Transitioning from Primary to Secondary* resource and the *Autism Spectrum Disorders: Planning a successful transition to secondary school* program. This interim funding will provide support for families and schools while the Government carefully considers the recommendations for a new funding model.

## Better outcomes for students with autism and with dyslexia (Recommendations 15-20)

### Recommendation 15

Make available ongoing autism-specific disability training and access to specialist support and expertise, particularly in relation to evidence-based approaches to respond to the specific learning needs of students on the autism spectrum, for example through:

- Expanding the role of autism-specific schools to include greater outreach and support (see Recommendation 7)
- Including allied health professionals or specialist teachers with expertise in autism in the new area multidisciplinary teams to support schools and individual students
- Developing specific resources and teacher support material for supporting students with autism and high-level communication, social and behavioural challenges
- Establishing partnerships with non-government organisations that provide support for students with autism.

The use of evidence-based intervention approaches to respond to students on the autism spectrum is varied across Victorian schools. Schools need improved access to support and expertise to meet the learning and support needs of students on the autism spectrum.

We will work with experts to implement a range of strategies to maximise opportunities for schools to access support for students with autism.

Autism specific schools across Victoria provide valuable expertise that could be better shared to support mainstream schools to be more inclusive in their teaching. In identifying options for all specialist schools to become 'centres of expertise', the Government will prioritise options for autism specific schools.

To build on our significant regional reforms, we will consider the importance of Student Support Services Officers having expertise in autism.

Partnering with non-government organisations supports our Education State agenda, where schools are deeply integrated with their communities and form strong partnerships with service providers and organisations to improve student outcomes. We will explore how to both build on the success of existing partnerships with non-government organisations such as AMAZE, and develop new partnerships relevant to the engagement, wellbeing and achievement of students on the autism spectrum and their families.

We will work with experts and teachers to develop further resources and materials to help schools better support students with autism and high-level communication, social and behavioural challenges.

**Recommendation 16**

Consider providing additional resourcing to schools to better meet the educational needs of students with autism, dyslexia and learning disabilities who are not eligible for the PSD, for example through the expansion of the Language Support Program.

We know that effort and investment spent on educating kids with disabilities will be repaid many times over. It equips them for better jobs and a more independent life. However, there are widespread concerns that students on the autism spectrum and with dyslexia who are not eligible under the PSD are not consistently well supported in their specific needs by all schools.

As part of the 2016-17 Budget, we will provide an extra \$17 million over two years to better support the needs of students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia and autism. A new *Language and Learning Disabilities Support Program* will be established, to incorporate and expand the existing \$35 million *Language Support Program*.

This new program will provide schools with additional funding to strengthen their capacity to support students with learning disabilities, including dyslexia, some students with an ASD, reading disorders and difficulties and speech and language delays. This extra funding will enable schools to implement reading intervention and language screener programs, employ speech pathologists or provide training for education support staff and teachers about the latest knowledge in how best to maximise the learning and wellbeing of children on the autism spectrum, or in using specific assessment and intervention programs.

We will consult with schools, students and their families and use those insights to provide guidance on the best use of these extra funds.

**Recommendation 17**

Continue the rollout and implementation of the Special Needs Plan commitments to require all new schools to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities and the delivery of the \$10 million Inclusive Schools Fund to improve existing schools.

We know that the built environment plays an important role in supporting inclusive education for students with disabilities. As part of our Special Needs Plan we have committed that all newly built government schools and schools undertaking significant building projects will meet the needs of all students.

The 15 new schools being built as part of the Public Private Partnership Project will be outstanding inclusive learning spaces. Informed by these school designs, new *School Provision Planning Guidelines for Students with Disabilities* have also been released, as has an updated *Building Quality Standards Handbook* to ensure Victorian schools of the future are inclusive.

We launched the \$10 million Inclusive Schools Fund in September 2015 to help existing government schools better support the social and educational needs of students with disabilities. The Fund is available until 2019 and is in addition to the annual Accessible Buildings Program. In February 2016, we announced the first 33 schools to share in \$2.4 million to fund innovative projects promoting best practice inclusive school environments. Round 2 applications will open later this year.

#### **Recommendation 18**

Complete the investigation into an early years screening program for learning disorders.

Best practice support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities including dyslexia requires early identification and differentiated teaching approaches.

Each year, teachers in government primary schools are required to assess every child's literacy abilities using the English Online Interview assessment tool. As part of our Special Needs Plan, we commissioned a review of this tool which identified areas for improvement to give teachers more information about each child's unique abilities, and to improve student outcomes. The English Online Interview and supporting resources are now being enhanced to reflect the latest research on child development, including how children's oral language development can indicate future learning difficulties. The improved tool will better inform the screening process for learning difficulties and disorders.

The English Online Interview sits within a suite of assessment tools and resources that empower teachers to assess and monitor children's learning in the early years of schooling. The enhanced tool and supporting resources will be available for Insight pilot schools to review through the Insight Online Assessment Platform in the second half of 2016. It will be used across all government schools from Term 4, 2016 ahead of the 2017 assessment period. It will also be available to Catholic and independent schools

**Recommendation 19**

Raise awareness and encourage schools and teachers to participate in the available online training on supporting students with dyslexia.

Students with dyslexia are not consistently supported in schools, and some teachers require more professional development to be able to adapt their teaching practices to support students with dyslexia.

Schools can already access a range of online resources, tools and applications to support students with reading difficulties and dyslexia, such as the *Understanding Dyslexia and Significant Difficulties in Reading* course which has had around 3000 registrations since mid-2012. But we believe more can be done to increase use of online resources available, and how to adapt their teaching.

Through the development of the Inclusive Education Workforce Capability Strategy and better promotion of the existing professional learning opportunities available, we will assess how to improve access and participation by teachers. This will include strengthening our partnership with SPELD Victoria to increase access for schools to high-level expertise and advice around students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties.

**Recommendation 20**

Develop and implement a dyslexia and learning difficulties strategy, including providing ongoing disability-specific training to lift workforce capability to understand and teach students with learning difficulties and dyslexia.

Despite the availability of some resources to support students with dyslexia, including information and training opportunities, more could be done to put in place appropriate intervention and teaching strategies.

Over the next two years, in consultation with schools, students and their families we will roll out a dyslexia and learning difficulties strategy, to provide schools with advice and expertise to enhance student outcomes. This strategy will be supported through \$2 million of funding and deliver face-to-face, accessible professional learning opportunities for all schools, the improved rollout of the existing online training courses, and providing better advice and resources for teachers and families, including practical examples. The strategy will also align with the Inclusive Education Workforce Capability Strategy.

## A new approach to funding and support (Recommendations 14, 21, 22 and 23)

### **Recommendation 14**

Design and implement a new funding model, based on functional needs, that removes the requirement for the Year 6–7 review process.

### **Recommendation 21**

Develop a new tiered funding model based on a strength-based functional needs approach to meet the needs of all students with disabilities, which includes:

- Base funding—allocated to all schools for all students
- Teaching and learning loading—allocated to schools to support students with disabilities who require reasonable adjustments
- Targeted funding—allocated to schools to support students with disabilities and high education adjustment needs.

### **Recommendation 22**

Develop a formal relationship with the National Disability Insurance Agency to ensure maximum alignment with the NDIS as it evolves, including consistency and sharing of information and professional insight where possible.

### **Recommendation 23**

Develop and implement a strengths-based, functional needs approach to assessing student need, to support the achievement and participation of students with disabilities.

The Review made four recommendations proposing a new needs-based funding model and maximum alignment with the NDIS' strengths-based, functional needs approach.

These recommendations propose a comprehensive reform of funding for students with disabilities.

Over the coming months, we will carefully consider these recommendations alongside other national and state-based reforms which will also impact support systems for students with disabilities. These include:

- the rollout of the NDIS
- ongoing negotiations with the Turnbull Government to ensure it honours its commitment to the final two years of the Gonski funding agreement to ensure our most vulnerable students are treated fairly
- the Government response to the Victorian Schools Funding Review ('Bracks Review')
- the continued implementation of the Special Needs Plan for Victorian Schools
- the ongoing development of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCDSSD)
- the broader reforms to the Victorian education system proposed through the Victorian Government's Education State agenda.

We also need to consider any changes to PSD funding in the context of future State Budgets, to ensure consistency with other significant commitments made as part of Education State.



Any new funding model for all students with disabilities – as recommended by the Review – would explore an approach based on the learning and support needs of students rather than a category of disability. A strength-based approach would focus on how best to maximise the independence and achievement of students with disabilities.

We are already working cooperatively with the NDIA in the trial and full scheme rollout of the NDIS in Victoria. Should a new funding model be developed, alignment with the NDIS would be one of the key objectives. A formal relationship with the NDIA would help information sharing and identify opportunities to align design features and consider administrative efficiencies. This would help students with disabilities and their families better navigate the services available.

Several interim funding measures have been announced as part of our response to the Review, which will provide transitional support while the Government carefully considers the proposal for a new funding model.

This is on top of the \$4 billion in extra funding announced in the 2015/16 State Budget: the single biggest injection of education funding in Victoria's history. It included \$747 million in funding directed to breaking the cycle of disadvantage, meeting in full our obligations under the Gonski agreement through to 2017, and getting critical extra support to the schools and students who need it most.

## Towards a better model: policy into practice (Recommendations 24-25)

### **Recommendation 24**

The Department to provide sufficient resources to develop and implement the recommendations in the Review, including oversight The Government accepts this recommendation.

### **Recommendation 25**

Undertake regular consultations with the education sector and the community to inform the development and implementation of the reforms and prepare all stakeholders for the changes.

We will provide the resources to develop and implement the recommendations we've accepted, and ensure they're implemented in a timely, coordinated way.

Ongoing stakeholder engagement and participation will be vital to the successful development and implementation of the reforms.

Over the coming months, we'll continue to listen to students, families, school communities and other experts as we roll out our response.

# NEXT STEPS

Over the coming months, we will develop an implementation strategy setting out clear, integrated stages of work, timelines and accountability arrangements to ensure our response is effectively rolled out. There are some immediate actions which we have already put in place and we will continue to work with stakeholders on the medium and long-term actions.

Below is a high-level summary of our next steps in implementing our response to the PSD Review.

2016	2017	2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop detailed implementation plan</li> <li>• Develop new policies, strategies, guidelines and tools</li> <li>• Expand access to and awareness of current training on working with students with disabilities</li> <li>• Develop accountability and transparency measures</li> <li>• Consider recommendations for new funding model alongside recommendations from Bracks Review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement transitional funding arrangements</li> <li>• Implement policies and strategies, including actions under the Inclusive Education Workforce Capability Strategy</li> <li>• Implement personalised learning and profiling tools</li> <li>• Finalise response to recommendations for new funding model alongside recommendations from Bracks Review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to implement transitional funding arrangements</li> <li>• Continue to implement policies, strategies, guidelines and tools</li> <li>• Monitor outcomes of students with disabilities</li> </ul>