Providing inclusive education for children and young people with disability in a 'time of crisis'

1 What is inclusive education and what is a 'time of crisis'?

Inclusive education recognises the right of every child and young person – without exception – to be welcomed as a valued learner and genuinely included in general education. It involves ensuring that learning environments and teaching approaches support full participation of all children and young people on an equal basis regardless of individual attributes or characteristics.[1] Crises (natural disasters, pandemics, technological disasters or man-made disasters), demand fast and effective whole of government responses – it is important to establish political will and authority early to drive this response. Clear understanding of the role and responsibility of all of those involved in the response is also critical.[2]

2 What was the status of inclusive education in Australia before this time of crisis?

A transformation in education is needed to ensure that Australia complies with the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (**CPRD**). All Australian children and young people with disability must be welcomed and supported at their local school and provided with a high-quality inclusive education. Sadly, for too many children and young people with disability, this is not the case.

3 What are the challenges and risks during a time of crisis?

Students with disability are among the most at-risk for educational neglect and exclusion, especially in a time of crisis. Risks can take a variety of forms; economic, physical and environmental, and most crucially, social disconnection. Changes as a result of a crisis may introduce multiple new physical, social and curriculum barriers and heighten existing ones. As systems move to e-learning, the digital divide in connectivity, access to devices and skill levels can create further disadvantages for many.

4 What are the opportunities?

All responses must be designed to avoid creating further educational and social disconnection and inequality. They should aim to create new opportunities for students, teachers and families to form stronger connections, develop creative initiatives, collaborate more, trial new tools, and learn in new ways that may rethink how we collectively implement a fully inclusive school system for ALL.
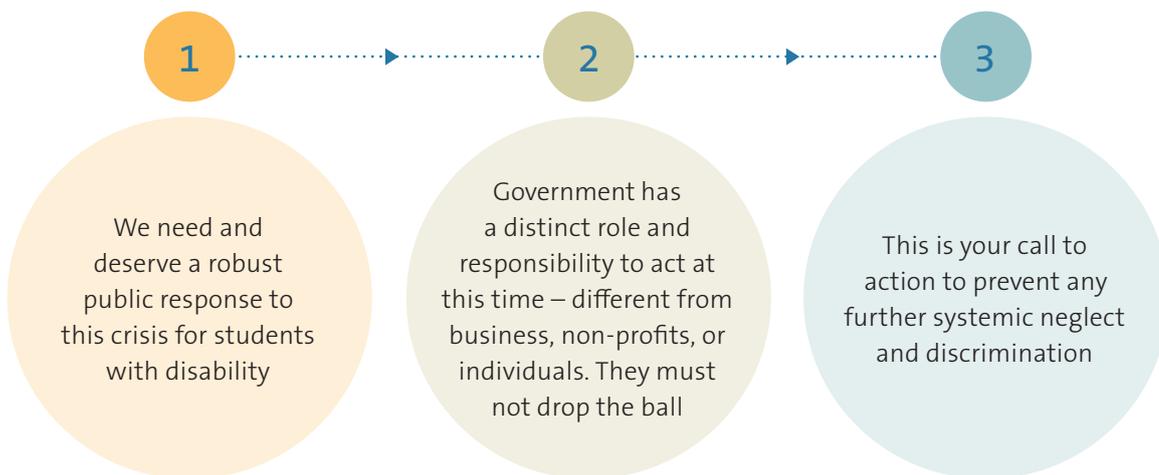
1 Children and Young People with Disability Australia (2019) Fact Sheet 1, 'What is inclusive education?'

2 Australian Public Service Commission – https://www. apsc.gov.au/7-managing-crises-and-their-consequences

acie
australian coalition for inclusive education

What are the risks during a time of crisis for students with disability?

1. Existing disconnection and inequality are exacerbated and previously achieved reasonable adjustments are lost

2. Students are unable to focus on learning and have high levels of anxiety or disengagement

3. Families feel unprepared and are struggling as they try to balance work and learning delivery including individualised supports

4. Students are disconnected from classmates and peers even though digital tools are offering ways to connect

5. Families are planning daily activities but are not able to implement innovative educational practices at home

6. The COVID-19 crisis provides multiple opportunities for learning about pandemics. However, families and teachers may lack resources and skills to effectively deliver on this

7. Families are overwhelmed with the plethora of resources being shared without steps on how to use them

8. Reasonable adjustments were not agreed or not working well prior to COVID-19 and will be exacerbated with the provision of "special" materials that are not aligned with the curriculum

9. Difficulties maintaining a positive student-teacher-parent relationship

10. Teachers are scrambling to go digital without much support & training

What is the role of Government during 'a time of crisis'?

"Education Council endorsed a set of national principles for the consideration of the National Cabinet to support continued delivery of high-quality school education for all students during COVID-19. Noting that decisions about education continue to be the responsibility of states and territories, these principles will inform decision-making to ensure that every student has access to education in a sustainable and effective manner."[3]

1 → **2** → **3**

We need and deserve a robust public response to this crisis for students with disability

Government has a distinct role and responsibility to act at this time – different from business, non-profits, or individuals. They must not drop the ball

This is your call to action to prevent any further systemic neglect and discrimination

"If we ever wanted a situation that was going to show up the educational equity divide in Australia, this is it. This is our moment."

Professor Vaille Dawson, University of Western Australia, 6 April 2020

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3   Education Council, 7 April 2020 Communiqué – http://www. educationcouncil.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/EC%20 Communiques%20and%20media%20releases/2020/Education%20 Council%20Communique%20%20-%207%20April%202020%20.pdf

What are the key elements of inclusive education for students with disability in a time of crisis?

Physical inclusion

present and fully participating in the same learning environments that is accessible to all, for the same amount of time. This can be online environments

Curriculum inclusion

curriculum is delivered accessibly, so all students are included in the same lesson material, with appropriate support and adjustments

Social inclusion

socially all students are welcomed, supported to belong and not separated from their peers on the basis of disability or difference

System inclusion

close existing gaps, minimise impact of existing educational disadvantage and optimise limited resources for community-wide outcomes

What does ensuring inclusive education on an equal basis mean?

The Disability Standards for Education (the **Education Standards**) were formulated under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (**DDA**). The purpose of the Education Standards is to provide a framework to ensure that students with disability can access and participate in education without discrimination. The Education Standards seek to 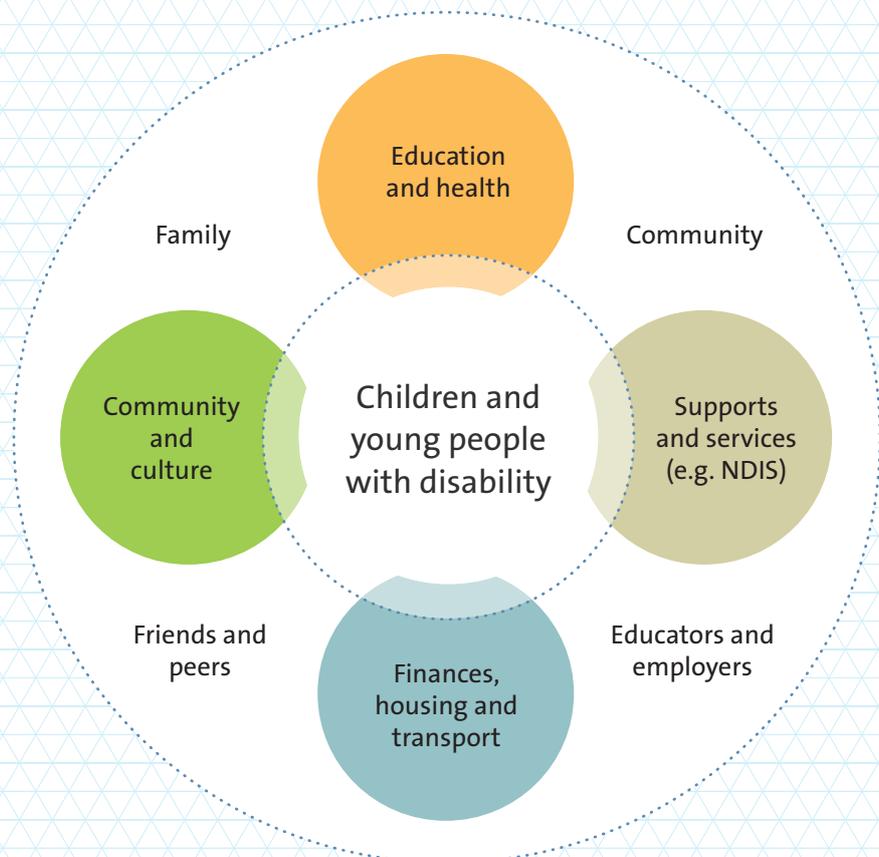do this by providing guidance to education and training providers and to students with disability about their respective rights and obligations under the DDA. The Education Standards set out a process to be followed, to ensure that students with disability are provided with reasonable adjustments to participate in education and training on an equal basis with non-disabled students.

Supporting the whole child and young person with disability

All students, children or young people, are more than their education and more than their health. Consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Australian children and young people with disability should feel:

• Healthy

• Safe

• Connected

• Supported

• Challenged

• Engaged

Family, friends and peers, educators, employers, and the wider community are integral in supporting children and young people with disability. All levels of government, across policy and practice, have a role to play in ensuring the support of our children and young people.

Family

Community

Education and health

Community and culture

Children and young people with disability

Supports and services (e.g. NDIS)

Friends and peers

Finances, housing and transport

Educators and employers

What do children and young people with disability need?

A spirit of collaboration that recognises that not all students will have been fully included prior and that not all students feel safe and supported at home

Clear communication with students and families about what is happening including what to do about keeping children and young people with disability safe and socially connected

A strategy to ensure social connectedness. Students who have been previously disengaged, not supported with whole of school communication approaches, experienced bullying or significantly impacted by COVID-19 changes, need targeted solutions and supports

"Inclusive, equitable education in emergencies can enhance learning opportunities for all, improve outcomes, generate innovation, assist governments to 'build back better', and normalise or embed inclusion in systems emerging from crises."
IASC Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, July 2019, Inter-Agency Standing Committee, IASC Task Team on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, Endorsed by IASC October 2019

Flexible arrangements for accessing learning material, classmate and peer interactions and assessment including need for accessible material and smaller group work online

Clear learning plans for students with disability including making reasonable adjustments to curriculum materials and class lessons

No penalty for needing flexible arrangements, targeted support for classmate and peer connections or greater support because of educational or social inequality

What proactive and positive steps can Government take?

Checklist for an education response to the COVID-19 Pandemic[4] adapted by ACIE for students with disability

System level	1.	Establish a steering committee that will develop and implement the education response for students with disability. Ensure those in the task force represent different stakeholders in the education system and bring important and diverse perspectives to inform their work. This should include disability representative organisations, students and families.
	2.	Develop a schedule and means of frequent and regular communication among task force members and an evaluation framework with agreed KPIs and means of gathering relevant and disaggregated data. Map key constituencies, and key messages to support the execution of the education strategy for students with disability and ensure those are effectively communicated through various accessible channels.
	3.	Align this strategy to the UN CPRD and General Comment No.4, the DDA and the Disability Standards for Education. For example: protecting the health of students with disability and staff, ensuring academic learning and providing social connection and emotional support for students with disability and staff. This alignment will provide focus for the initiatives to be undertaken and will help prioritise time and resources.
	4.	Establish mechanisms of coordination with public health authorities so that education actions are in sync and help advance public health goals and strategies, for example, educating students with disability, families, teachers and staff on the necessity for physical distancing, social connection and supporting emotional and mental health.
	5.	Encourage collaboration across all school networks or systems and create forms of regular communications with them to share information about needs and approaches to solve them, and to share experiences to foster rapid improvement in delivering education in the new modalities.
	6.	Ensure that school leaders get the financial, logistical and moral support they need to provide for successful outcomes for ALL students.

Checklist for an education response to the COVID-19 Pandemic[4] adapted by ACIE for students with disability

Delivery, support and communication	7.	Social connections between classmates and peers needs to be prioritised and promoted as a mental health issue of all students who will be missing the social contact. This connection needs to be prioritised into learning design: content, method and data recording for long term use. Targeted supports may be required for some students. Enhance the communication and collaboration among ALL students to foster mutual learning and wellbeing.
	8.	Identify means of education delivery. When feasible, those should include online learning, as it provides the greatest versatility and opportunity for interaction. If not all students with disability have devices and connectivity, look for ways to provide them to those students. Explore partnerships with the private sector and the community in securing the resources to provide those devices and connectivity. Ensure that both an online education strategy and alternative means of delivery address the participation of students differing in background, experience, attainment or disability.
	9.	Ensure any forms of communication including websites are accessible for communication with teachers, students with disability and families about curriculum goals, strategies and suggested activities and additional resources.
	10.	Ensure adequate support for students with disability and families during the implementation of the alternative education plan – reasonable adjustments, regular check-ins, connections with peers, accessible materials etc.

Teachers	11.	Clearly define roles and expectations for teachers to effectively steer and support students with disability learning in the new situation, through direct instruction where possible or guidance for self-directed learning.
	12.	Create a mechanism of just in time professional development for teachers to be able to support learners in the new modality of instruction. Create modalities that foster teacher collaboration and professional communities and that increase teacher autonomy.

Checklist for an education response to the COVID-19 Pandemic[4] adapted by ACIE for students with disability

Achievement	13.	Define appropriate mechanisms of student assessment. Equity in assessment must be maintained while also providing schools with flexibility to accommodate their unique circumstances, including the specific needs of individual students.
	14.	Identify the feasibility of pursing options to recover learning time once the physical distancing period is over, for example, an intensive review period during the break prior to the start of the new term.

School level	15.	Each school should develop a plan for continuity of operations that includes supporting students with disability on the same basis. To support them, education authorities can provide curated examples of plans in other schools.
	16.	When the school provides social and support services, such as Allied Health, nursing support or mental health supports, develop alternative forms of provision.
	17.	Schools should develop a system of communication with each and ALL students, and a form of checking-in daily with each student that supports student's self-assessment and reflection.
	18.	Schools should provide resources and accessible information to students with disability and families about the safe use of screen time and online tools to preserve student well-being and mental health as well as provide protection from online threats to minors.

Who are we?

ACIE is a national coalition of organisations working together to advance Inclusive Education in Australia and across State and Territory education systems. We pledge our support to the goal and principles of inclusive education as a fundamental human right of every person, and the elimination of barriers and discrimination against children and young people with disability in education and in society as a whole. This pledge is just as important during a time of crisis such as this.

ACIE is guided by a human rights and evidence-based approach to inclusive education. We look to the principles embodied in United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the most authoritative expression of the human rights of people with disability, including the right to inclusive education under Article 24 and General Comment No. 4 (Right to Inclusive Education).

Our Pledge for Inclusive Education

"We pledge our support for the Goal and Principles of inclusive education as a fundamental human right of every person and will work towards an inclusive education system and the elimination of barriers and discrimination against children and young people with disability in education and in society as a whole"

Contact us

All Means All – The Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education – National
www.allmeansall.org.au

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) – National
www.cyda.org.au

Community Resource Unit Ltd (CRU) – QLD
www.cru.org.au

Family Advocacy – NSW
www.family-advocacy.com

Imagine More – ACT
www.imaginemore.org.au

JFA Purple Orange – SA
www.purpleorange.org.au

Julia Farr Youth – SA
www.purpleorange.org.au/what-we-do/library-our-work/julia-farr-youth-jfy

Queensland Advocacy Incorporated (QAI) – QLD
www.qai.org.au

Queensland Collective for Inclusive Education (QCIE)
www.qcie.org

Youth Disability Advocacy Service
www.yacvic.org.au/ydas/

Youth Disability Advocacy Network
www.ydan.com.au

This resource was developed by the Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE)

cyda — Children and Young People with Disability Australia

allmeansall

Purple Orange

JuliaFarr YOUTH

family ADVOCACY

Queensland Advocacy Inc.

YDAN .com.au

ydas — Youth Disability Advocacy Service

Community Resource Unit Ltd. — Expanding Ideas: Creating Change

ImagineMORE

QUEENSLAND COLLECTIVE FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Other resources by ACIE

Learning at home during a time of crisis: COVID-19 https://bit.ly/2VnGyQG