



**Children and Young People  
with Disability Australia**

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Committee Secretary  
Senate Education and Employment Committees  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

24<sup>th</sup> October 2024

Attention: Committee Secretariat, Senate Education and Employment Committees

### **Inquiry into the Better and Fairer Schools (Funding and Reform) Bill 2024 [Provisions].**

Please accept this letter as CYDA's formal submission to the Senate Inquiry into Better and Fairer Schools (Funding and Reform) Bill 2024.

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) is the national representative organisation for children and young people with disability aged 0 to 25 years. Our vision is that children and young people with disability are valued and living empowered lives with equality of opportunity; and our purpose is to ensure governments, communities, and families, are empowering children and young people with disability to fully exercise their rights and aspirations.

In [surveys conducted](#) by CYDA in 2022 and 2023, students with disability told us:

- Only half (54%) reported feeling welcome and included
- 70% of students reported being excluded from events or activities at school
- 65% of students reported experiencing bullying and 13% preferred not to answer
- Only 27% reported feeling supported to learn at school
- Only 35% of families felt teachers and support staff have adequate training and knowledge to support the student

CYDA is deeply concerned about the inadequacy of both the proposed [Better and Fairer Schools \(funding reform\) Bill 2024](#) (Bill) and the [Better and Fairer Schools Heads of Agreement 2025-2034](#) (Agreement) which overlook the needs of students with disability. As the key legislative driver of the Agreement, the Bill—without a significant increase in Commonwealth funding—risks excluding an entire cohort of children and young people with disability from accessing quality education.

We therefore urge the Federal Government to implement the following recommendations:

#### **1. Increase commonwealth funding contribution to a minimum of 25% of the School Resource Standard (SRS).**

- For over two decades, the highest level of educational attainment remains stubbornly lower for children and young people compared to those without

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disability. Students with disability are segregated, suspended and expelled at higher rates<sup>1</sup>. These inequities can have lifelong implications. Research shows that people with disability are more likely to experience poverty, are less likely to be in work and more likely to be socially isolated.<sup>2</sup> Better funding is required to address this inequity.

- As an organisation that advocates for children and young people with disability, many of whom disengage from education before completing secondary school, we have witnessed the challenges created by the underfunding of public schools for students with disability.
- A long-term agreement where the Commonwealth does not fund 25% of the SRS, locks in a decade of inequality for the next generation of children and young people with disability.
- Given that the Australian Government has significant responsibility for funding schools and setting the national education policy agenda, including the national goals for schooling, education is no longer solely a state or territory responsibility. Emerging economic and social demands—such as the Commonwealth's intersecting role in implementing key policy education-related priorities like the NDIS, the Australian Disability Strategy and responding to the recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission—necessitate a greater federal role in funding Australia's major education system.

**2. Remove the provision allowing States and Territories to count up to 4% of certain non-student-related operational costs as part of their SRS contribution.**

- This practice enables states and territories to inflate their reported spending on public education without necessarily improving student outcomes.

**3. Review the Better and Fairer Schools Heads of Agreement 2025-2034 to better address the needs of students with disability**

- Despite one in ten primary and secondary school students in Australia having disability<sup>3</sup>, students with disability are the only priority equity cohort conspicuously excluded from Improvement Measurements outlined in the Agreement. Notably, they are referenced only four times throughout the 38-page, 106-clause document.
- The Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia currently fails to capture national data on access, participation and outcomes for students with disability. It should be extended to critical areas such as Year 12 attainment and school attendance targets. True educational equity cannot be achieved without disability-specific and measurable goals.

**4. Implement CYDA's recommendations from our [August 2023 submission](#) to the Federal Department of Education's Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System.**

CYDA is deeply disappointed that students with disability are not prioritised in the Better and Fairer Education Heads of Agreement. We strongly reiterate our recommendations from the August 2023 submission, emphasising that a reformed education system must:

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- Ensure the education reforms as outlined in the Agreement and the Commonwealth funding model supports and incentivises inclusive education, by holding states and territories accountable to deliver the full inclusion of all students in mainstream school settings.
- Invest in national and state and territory level mechanisms that collect, prioritise and action the voices and views of children and young people with disability.
- Drive and fund transformational change to ensure inclusive education across all life stages.
- Invest in training and support for educators, teachers, and related professional and specialist staff working with and supporting inclusive education.

We urge the Federal Government to prioritise the needs of students with disability in building a truly inclusive and equitable education system. Failure to take decisive action will deepen the barriers children and young people with disability face and perpetuate inequality for generations to come.

The time for meaningful change is now.

In support of this submission, we detail CYDA's previous work in Education as outlined in the Appendix.

If you would like to know more about this submission, CYDA's work or the recommendations in this letter, please contact Dr Liz Hudson, Policy and Research Manager on 03 9417 1025 or [lizhudson@cyda.org.au](mailto:lizhudson@cyda.org.au).

Kind regards,



Skye Kakoschke-Moore  
Chief Executive Officer

## Appendix: Further details of evidence and CYDA's previous work

CYDA's work is rights-based and led by the direct experiences and diverse voices and visions of children and young people with disability across Australia. CYDA grounds its work in evidence and a human rights approach. Below is a list of resources and reports that provide further detail related to this submission.

### CYDA supports the following positions in conjunction with this submission

- All Means All Submission to the Better and Fairer Schools (Funding and Reform) Bill 2024 [Provisions] Submission 26. CYDA has endorsed this submission along with eight other sector organisations.
- [Starting together, staying together](#): CYDA's position statement on ensuring inclusive education and phasing out segregated education, December 2023.
- Disability sector's [Position Paper](#) on Segregation In 2020, CYDA and other disability rights and advocacy organisations endorsed a position paper<sup>1</sup> titled '*Segregation of people with disability is discrimination and must end*', calling for action toward the goal of ending the segregation of people with disability in schools, housing, and workplaces.
- The Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education's '[Driving change: A roadmap for achieving inclusive education in Australia](#)'.

### CYDA's work on school education

- [Submission](#) to the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System
- [Submission](#) to the Disability Royal Commission, Education of children and young people with disability
- [Submission](#) to the Disability Royal Commission - Restrictive Practices issues paper
- [Submission](#) to the Senate Inquiry into the national trend of school refusal
- [Submission](#) to the Senate Inquiry into school disruption
- [Submission](#) to the 2020 Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005
- [Submission](#) to the Inquiry into the education of students in remote and complex environments
- [Report](#): Disappointment and discrimination: CYDA's surveys of the learning experiences of children and young people with disability in 2022 and 2023
- [Report](#): How deep does it go? Australian students with disability and their experience of entrenched inequity in education

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- [Report](#): “I think the teachers need more help” – Voices of experience from students with disability in Australia
- [Report](#): Not even remotely fair: Experiences of students with disability during COVID-19
- [Report](#): Time for change: The state of play for inclusion of students with disability

## References

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Australia's Children. Canberra: AIHW; 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Kavanagh A, Kmjacki L, Beer A, LaMontagen AD, Bentley R. Time trends in socio-economic inequalities for women and men with disabilities in Australia: evidence of persisting inequalities. *International Journal of Equity in Health*. 2013;12:73.

Milner A, LaMontagne AD, Aitken Z, Bentley R, Kavanagh A. Employment status and mental health among persons with and without a disability: Evidence from an Australian cohort study. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. 2014;68(11):1064–971.

Kmjacki L, Emerson E, Llewellyn G, Kavanagh A. Prevalence and risk of violence against people with and without disabilities: findings from an Australian population-based study. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*. 2016;40:16–21.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. People with disability in Australia, AIHW; 2024.

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