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12 June 2026

Attention: House Standing Committee on Education

Please accept this letter as Children and Young People with Disability Australia's (CYDA) submission to the Inquiry into the Factors Driving Educational Attainment. We appreciate the opportunity to provide comment on this important work.

About CYDA

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) is the national representative organisation for children and young people with disability, aged 0–25 years. Our vision is that children and young people with disability fully exercise their rights, realise their aspirations, and thrive in inclusive communities. Our work centres on rights-based advocacy, lived experience, and evidence-informed policy.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Lands on which this submission has been written, and pay our respects to their Elders past and present. This is, was, and always will be Aboriginal Land.

General comment

CYDA welcomes the Inquiry into the Factors Driving Educational Attainment, to shed light on the intersectional factors that impact educational experiences and outcomes. We view this as a positive development towards further recognition of the unique experiences and challenges that students with disability face.

We propose that the Inquiry expand its focus beyond the girl/boy binary to examine how this intersects with other factors that impact educational outcomes such as disability, gender diversity, cultural and linguistic diversity including First Nations communities, socioeconomic status, and location especially regional and remote.

Context: Educational barriers for children and young people with disability

Children and young people with disability are one of the most disadvantaged cohorts in the educational system.¹ One in ten students has a disability, and 89 per cent of students with disability attend mainstream schools. Yet one of the major impediments to progression through school for students with disability is exclusion, with 72 per cent having been excluded from school activities or events and only one in four feeling supported to learn. Children and young people with disability are more likely to leave school early. One in seven have been suspended or expelled, with an even higher rate for First Nations students. Many students with disability have lower than average attendance rates leading to poorer academic outcomes, a lesser sense of belonging, and more social exclusion. Almost three quarters (74.3 per cent) of young people with disability aged 20-24 years have completed year 12, compared with nearly nine in ten young people without disability (87.4 per cent). Only 23 per cent of 20–24 year olds with disability are enrolled in university or other higher education, and 9.6 per cent in TAFE.²

These barriers are structural, with evidence demonstrating that educational systems are not inclusive, and inhibit rather than facilitate equitable participation, opportunities, and outcomes. This means that additional rights-based measures and safeguards are needed to ensure equitable educational participation, progression, retention, and attainment rates for children and young people with disability.

CYDA's Summary of Recommendations

1.1 Extend the collection and reporting of the development domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) beyond the first year of school and into additional years of the primary schooling journey, and add disability as a priority cohort.

1.2 Create integrated and coordinated systems for delivering inclusive education, that require States and Territories to be accountable for the education of students with disability.

1.3 Invest in the learning and development of teacher aides, Universal Design for Learning in Initial Teacher Education across the country, and training for current teaching staff to differentiate curriculum.

2.1 Further develop the Multi-Tiered System of Support Model³ proposed by the Australian Education Research Organisation to support attendance for students with disability.

2.2 Develop and implement “early warning measures” that students with disability are not having their needs met at school, including attendance and participation data that accounts for the context of the whole child, increased disciplinary measures, and falling grades.

¹ Statistics from this section are drawn from CYDA (2026) [Snapshot of Children and Young People with Disability in Australia – a Key Statistics Report](#)

² ABS (2022) [Children and young people with disability](#)

³ Melvin, G et al. (2025) [Interventions to promote school attendance and address student absence: Rapid literature review. Australian Education Research Organisation](#)

2.3 Develop targets and supporting programs for reducing the number of suspensions and expulsions of students with disability in line with DRC recommendation 7.2 “Prevent the inappropriate use of exclusionary discipline against students with disability.”

3.1 Adjust the NCCD to link data collection and reporting to improved learning, social, and wellbeing outcomes for students with disability and other equity cohorts.

3.2 Standardise definitions and reporting requirements across jurisdictions to capture national data on formal and informal suspensions and expulsions that can be cross referenced with data from all equity cohorts.

3.3 Expand the NCCD to include more rigorous accountability processes, and enable student and family contributions to data collection.

4.1 Disaggregate outcome data in universities, entailing reporting student outcomes by disability status and impairment type, including access rates, participation rates, and post-graduation outcomes.

4.2 Ensure that universities have accountability mechanisms for inclusion, including measures for accessibility and reasonable adjustments, and audit university programs and courses to remove unfair bias in entry requirements.

4.3 Create a positive duty for the Australian Tertiary Education Commission to refer disability discrimination and non-compliance with the Disability Standards for Education to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency and/or the Australian Human Rights Commission.

5.1 Provide disability and neuro-affirming training for the education workforce to recognise the impacts of gender on diagnoses, misdiagnosis, and masking behaviours.

5.2 Promote educational cohesion through a National Roadmap for Inclusive Education to combat exclusion and bullying towards students with disability through.

5.3 Continue to account for the increased barriers faced by students with disability through disability loading to schools.

CYDA’s Recommendations corresponding to Terms of Reference

CYDA make the following recommendations corresponding to the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry, based on our previous advocacy around educational settings for children and young people with disability.⁴

1. Term of reference: School readiness and progression through school education

Students with disability face additional barriers to school readiness and progression including access and accommodation needs, as well as bullying and exclusion once attending school. They require extra support at key transition times including between

⁴ CYDA (2025) [Submission on strengthening the Disability Discrimination Act for children and young people with disability](#); [CYDA submissions: Education](#)

early childhood, primary, and secondary settings, and at the start of each new school year. Although early childhood data generally demonstrates that boys are more “developmentally vulnerable” across key domains,⁵ emerging research points to the higher prevalence of girls masking their disability and needs at school,⁶ suggesting that data collection approaches might be missing signs of developmental vulnerability in girls. Providing equitable supports requires better data and accountability structures, as well as workforce capacity.

Recommendations:

1.1 Extend the collection and reporting of the development domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) beyond the first year of school and into additional years of the primary schooling journey, and add disability as a priority cohort.

1.2 Create integrated and coordinated systems for delivering inclusive education, that require States and Territories to be accountable for the education of students with disability.

1.3 Invest in the learning and development of teacher aides, Universal Design for Learning in Initial Teacher Education across the country, and training for current teaching staff to differentiate curriculum.

2. Term of reference: School attendance rates, school retention rates, and senior secondary school attainment rates

Poor grades, low attendance levels, poor retention, and disciplinary absences are all signs that students with disability are not having their needs met at school. Early warning measures could prevent students from being marginalised and funneled into segregated settings, which the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (DRC) recommendations are trying to prevent. Students with disability are disproportionately suspended from Australian schools, infringing on their right to access an inclusive education and making it more likely they will experience poorer outcomes in the future across a range of measures.⁷ Prior to the Covid lockdowns in 2020, researchers were finding that parents predominantly cited “additional learning needs not being met at school” as the key reason for home schooling.⁸ The number of homeschoolers has increased since Covid-19, linked with children’s anxiety and “school can’t”.⁹ Although the exact gender make up of “school can’t” and homeschooling is not known, there is evidence that female caregivers are more likely to shoulder the resulting

⁵ Australian Early Development Census (2025) [2024 AEDC National Report](#)

⁶ Halsall, J. et al. (2021) [“Camouflaging” by adolescent autistic girls who attend both mainstream and specialist resource classes: Perspectives of girls, their mothers and their educators. Autism Journal](#)

⁷ Tait, K., and Hyde, M. (2025) [Suspension and exclusion rates from schools in most Australian states are skyrocketing. Are we now inclusive or exclusive?](#)

⁸ Slater, E.V., Burton, K., and McKillop, D. (2020) [Reasons for home educating in Australia: who and why? Educational Review Journal](#)

⁹ Gregory, K. (2025) [‘Accidental’ homeschooling on the rise. ABC News](#)

workload, taking them out of the workforce.¹⁰ It has also been reported that due to the growing lack of safety and support at school, neurodivergent, LGBTIQ+ and First Nations students are more likely to struggle with school attendance.¹¹

Recommendations:

2.1 Further develop the Multi-Tiered System of Support Model¹² proposed by the Australian Education Research Organisation to support attendance for students with disability.

2.2 Develop and implement “early warning measures” that students with disability are not having their needs met at school, including attendance and participation data that accounts for the context of the whole child, increased disciplinary measures, and falling grades.

2.3 Develop targets and supporting programs for reducing the number of suspensions and expulsions of students with disability in line with DRC recommendation 7.2 “Prevent the inappropriate use of exclusionary discipline against students with disability.”

3. Term of reference: Representation in the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on school students with disability

The experiences of students with disability are still not fully captured through the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD), and inconsistent approaches to data collection across jurisdictions make comparisons difficult. This means that funding for students with disability (disability loading), which is based on this data, can be applied inequitably. According to the Australian Education Union’s 2023 Survey, fewer than one-in-five principals said they receive enough funding to meet the needs of students with disability, with almost 90 per cent drawing from other areas of the school budget to compensate.¹³ Student voice is also not present in the NCCD dataset, relying solely on subjective judgements and data provided by the school to act as a conduit for student and family concerns. Moreover, the inconsistency of NCCD data due to variations in how school staff make decisions about disability-related capacity and need means that many students are not receiving adequate support. The following recommendations are made with the stipulation that each be adequately resourced to ensure additional administrative burden does not undermine the potential outcomes.

Recommendations:

3.1 Adjust the NCCD to link data collection and reporting to improved learning, social, and wellbeing outcomes for students with disability and other equity cohorts.

¹⁰ Gerrard, J., et al. (2025) [Parental rights and state concerns: the policy problematisation of home education. Journal of Education Policy](#)

¹¹ Leslie, R., et al. (2025) [School can't: a conceptual framework for reframing school refusal and recognising school related stress/distress. British Journal of Sociology of Education](#)

¹² Melvin, G. et al. (2025) [Interventions to promote school attendance and address student absence](#)

¹³ Australian Education Union (2024) [Full funding will boost opportunities for students with disability](#)

3.2 Standardise definitions and reporting requirements across jurisdictions to capture national data on formal and informal suspensions and expulsions that can be cross referenced with data from all equity cohorts.

3.3 Expand the NCCD to include more rigorous accountability processes, and enable student and family contributions to data collection.

4. Term of reference: Participation, completion, and attainment rates in tertiary education, including VET, apprenticeships, and higher education

Participation, completion, attainment, and satisfaction rates in tertiary education, including VET, apprenticeships, and higher education, continue to be significantly lower for students with disability. Research shows that fragmented supports, inflexible learning environments, and a reliance on individual complaints-based enforcement of Disability Standards undermines participation, completion, and attainment rates for students with disability^{14, 15}.

A stronger, proactive whole-of-system approach is essential to embedding accessibility, equity and quality in the tertiary education sector.

Recommendations:

4.1 Disaggregate outcome data in universities, entailing reporting student outcomes by disability status and impairment type, including access rates, participation rates, and post-graduation outcomes.

4.2 Ensure that universities have accountability mechanisms for inclusion, including measures for accessibility and reasonable adjustments, and audit university programs and courses to remove unfair bias in entry requirements.

4.3 Create a positive duty for the Australian Tertiary Education Commission to refer disability discrimination and non-compliance with the Disability Standards for Education to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency and/or the Australian Human Rights Commission.

5. Term of reference: Drivers of any differences in outcomes based on gender, cultural and linguistic diversity, socio-economic status

Barriers to educational attainment cannot be measured in a silo. Structural and systemic barriers in the context of power relationships shape how children and young people with multiple social identities experience education.¹⁶ Intersectional factors such as age, disability, culture, socio-economic status, location, and gender can compound experiences of disadvantage. For example, a young girl who identifies as Autistic, lives in a regional

¹⁴ Australian Government (2024) [Review of the Disability Discrimination Act](#)

¹⁵ Australian Government (2025) [Review of the Disability Standards for Education](#)

¹⁶ The University of Queensland (2020) [Investigating the effects of cumulative factors of disadvantage](#)

area, and attends a mainstream school faces distinct barriers that are more than just the sum of each of these factors.¹⁷ When analysing drivers of educational outcomes, it is imperative that intersecting factors such as disability are considered in context. For example, the presentation of Autism in girls and boys can manifest differently: while boys are more likely to be in mainstream settings and more than three times as likely to be expelled than girls, masking is more prevalent in girls.¹⁸ This does not reduce support needs, but changes the way needs are perceived, assumed and responded to. These factors impact disability loading and support in schools, when accommodations and adjustments are based on perceived rather than actual support needs.¹⁹ The strengthened compliance sought by the Federal Government's recent budget cuts to disability loading must not come at the expense of students with disability getting the supports they need.

Recommendations:

- 5.1 Provide disability and neuro-affirming training for the education workforce to recognise the impacts of gender on diagnoses, misdiagnosis, and masking behaviours.
- 5.2 Promote educational cohesion through a National Roadmap for Inclusive Education to combat exclusion and bullying towards students with disability through.
- 5.3 Continue to account for the increased barriers faced by students with disability through disability loading to schools.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make a submission. If you have any questions about CYDA's submission, please contact CYDA's Policy and Research Manager at lizhudson@cyda.org.au.

Yours sincerely



Skye Kakoschke-Moore

CEO, Children and Young People with Disability Australia

¹⁷ CYDA (2026) [Snapshot of children and young people with disability in Australia – Key statistics report](#)

¹⁸ Milner, V. et al. (2019) [A qualitative exploration of the female experience of Autism Spectrum Disorder. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders](#)

¹⁹ Sciffer, M.G. (2025) [The systemic inefficiency of Australian schools: A policy and measurement review. Australian Journal of Social Issues](#)