Inclusive School Practices Toolkit

Response to Intervention: A Model for Change to Build Teacher Capacity

This tool has been developed as part of the *Inclusive School Communities Project*, funded by the National Disability Insurance Agency. The project is led by JFA Purple Orange.

## Introduction

This tool was written by Karen Kurczak, Head of Inclusive Learning at Pulteney Grammar School drawing on her 17 years’ experience as a school leader, educator and advocate for inclusive education. This tool is informed by the change management process undertaken by Pulteney Grammar School, an independent ELC-12 school in Adelaide, to shift from a withdrawal model to Response to Intervention (RTI).

Every student succeeding requires commitment to all students having access to curriculum that is meaningful, engaging and relevant to age and stage of development. Enabling all students to access the curriculum on ‘The Same Basis’[[1]](#footnote-2) requires schools to make adjustments to tasks and assessments through quality differentiated teaching practice on a daily basis in the classroom. There will be other times where students require a more targeted intervention to enable them to access the curriculum with confidence and success.

This tool introduces RTI including core features and examples of practice that schools can implement. This tool provides guidance based on Pulteney Grammar School’s experience and is useful for schools wanting to shift to RTI through a well-planned process engaging with school staff (leaders, teachers, teacher aides), students, and families.

## Ideas

The research refers to different types of curriculum including hidden or covert curriculum[[2]](#footnote-3), however this tool focuses on the Australian Curriculum[[3]](#footnote-4) in a general education setting (also referred to as ‘mainstream’) and how the RTI model can support success for all students.

Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behaviour needs. The RTI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom.[[4]](#footnote-5)

RTI is a process “that emphasizes how well students respond to changes in instruction”[[5]](#footnote-6). The approach is intended to shift educational resources toward the delivery and evaluation of instruction, and away from the provision of supports based on diagnosis or classification of disabilities. The essential elements of an RTI approach are:

* the provision of scientific, research-based instruction and interventions in general education
* monitoring and measurement of student progress in response to the instruction and interventions
* use of these measures of student progress to shape instruction and make educational decisions[[6]](#footnote-7)

The RTI process is generally defined as a three-tier model of school supports that uses research-based academic and/or behavioural interventions:

**Tier 1:** Universal High-Quality Classroom Instruction, Screening, and Group Interventions delivered and available to every student in the class. In terms of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) this matches the level of adjustment of Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice[[7]](#footnote-8).

**Tier 2:** Targeted Interventions that are delivered to small groups, for a specific purpose, over a defined period of time. This corresponds to the NCCD level of adjustment of Supplementary Adjustments[[8]](#footnote-9).

**Tier 3:** Intensive Interventions and Comprehensive Evaluation[[9]](#footnote-10) often delivered 1:1 or 1:2, over an extended period, possibly for the entire length of schooling, and is individualised to the changing needs of the student. This corresponds to the NCCD level of adjustment of Substantial[[10]](#footnote-11) or Extensive Adjustments[[11]](#footnote-12).

It is helpful for schools wanting to shift the way they identify and support students with learning and behavior needs to develop an understanding of the RTI approach. The tool contains two resources, informed by practice at Pulteney Grammar School, that may be used with school staff (leaders, teachers, teacher aides) to discuss and develop knowledge about RTI:

Handout 1 on page 4 of this tool lists the core features of an RTI process.

Handout 2 on page 5 of this tool offers examples of practice according to each RTI tier 1, 2, and 3.

Handout 1: Core Features of a Response to Intervention (RTI) Process

To be carried out effectively and to deliver successful and sustainable outcomes, RTI should include the following qualities/activities:

* High quality, research-based instruction and Positive Behaviour Support (PBS).
* Norm referenced screening of literacy, numeracy and wellbeing in order to identify students who need closer monitoring or interventions.
* Scientific research-based interventions that are matched to identified student needs and preferences.
* Time and money are invested in the investigation, consultation and research of interventions/programs. You need ‘buy in’ from all stakeholders and upskilling those who will be delivering the intervention before implementation.
* Clear communication with all stakeholders about the identification process, commitment to and requirements of participation, and beginning and end dates of interventions.
* Ensuring quality, well-trained staff deliver interventions to ensure implementation is as intended and consistent.
* Collaborative approach by school staff, students, families and multi-disciplinary team for development, implementation, and monitoring of the intervention process. Most tier 2 interventions are short term (one semester) with the aim of providing students with skills and strategies they can apply to learning in a general classroom environment. Tier 3 interventions and support may be one year to the entire length of schooling, depending on student learning and developmental needs, however, the primary aim is for students to engage in general education classes, excursions and other activities of the school community with their peers for the maximum school time possible.
* Continuous monitoring of student progress during the interventions, using quantitative and qualitative data, to determine if students are meeting measurable, successful outcomes.
* Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the efficacy of the intervention (by gathering and assessing data). If it’s not working, find out why. If it’s still not working, stop using it.
* Continuous documentation and feedback about the intervention and progress to students, teachers, and parents.

Handout 2: Examples of Practice According to RTI Tiers

This is a list of examples of practice according to tier 1, 2 and 3 used by Pulteney Grammar School. You will notice that tier 1 includes a range of examples of professional development (PD) and capacity building for staff. It is helpful for schools to prepare an inventory of their practices and catalogue them according to the three-tier model.

## Tier 1 Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice (Universal)

* Autism training through Autism SA https://www.autismsa.org.au/ and Positive Partnerships https://www.positivepartnerships.com.au/
* Berry Street Education Model https://learning.berrystreet.org.au/
* Dyslexia trained teachers (Pulteney Grammar School has 12 teachers in total who have completed dyslexia training and two of them are trained to Level 3-tutors)
* Employment of TESOL (EAL) and Mandarin teachers
* Explicit Direct Instruction e.g., InitiaLit and PreLit https://multilit.com/programs/initialit/
* Graduate Certificate in Special Education, Graduate Certificate in Gifted Education
* Inclusive School Communities Project
* Individual Learning Plans
* Consultancy with Kylie Bice, Growing Up Greatness about differentiation https://www.growingupgreatness.com/
* Education Changemakers https://educationchangemakers.com/
* Practical Teaching Strategies for the Differentiated Classroom PD by Glen Pearsall
* Creative Kids, Creative Futures PD by Erica McWilliam http://www.ericamcwilliam.com.au/
* Positive Behaviour Support https://pbl.schools.nsw.gov.au/
* Problem Based Learning (PBL) https://www.pblworks.org/what-is-pbl
* SACE Assessment practices/Special Provisions https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/web/special-provisions
* Universal Design for Learning (UDL) http://www.cast.org/our-work/about-udl.html#.XfbeVHduKUk
* Whole school training on Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and the Disability Standards for Education (DSE) - delivered in-house by Pulteney Grammar School’s Inclusive Learning team

## Tier 2 Small Group Interventions (Targeted)

* Animal Therapies e.g., Lab’s N Life https://www.labsnlife.com/
* Language and Literacy Groups e.g., MacqLit, MiniLit https://multilit.com/programs/macqlit/
* Numeracy groups
* Reading Doctor http://www.readingdoctor.com.au/
* Social skills groups e.g., What’s the Buzz <https://www.whatsthebuzz.net.au/>, Choice Theory <https://wglasser.com/what-is-choice-theory/>, Bounce Back https://www.bounceback-program.com/
* Teaching Students with Dyslexia e.g., Playberry Multisensory Literacy Program https://www.hansberryec.com.au/playberry

## Tier 3 One-to-One Support (Intensive)

* Linking Literacy e.g., Reading Recovery https://www.saeps.vic.edu.au/page/75/Reading-Recovery, InitiaLit https://multilit.com/programs/initialit/, Reading Doctor http://www.readingdoctor.com.au/
* Occupational Therapy
* Other Therapies
* Speech Pathology
* Teaching Students with Dyslexia (TSD) qualified teachers

## Actions

Moving to a model that supports full inclusion can be a huge cultural shift for many schools and their school communities. Pulteney Grammar School shifted their approach from the medical model and a total withdrawal system to a three-tier RTI model over a period of three years. This was an essential step towards their vision of being an inclusive school. The following is a summary of the change management process undertaken by Pulteney Grammar School including learnings and tips from the author of this tool (Karen Kurczak, Head of Inclusive Learning at Pulteney Grammar School) for schools contemplating moving to an RTI model.

Pulteney Grammar School established a working party to lead and manage the change process. The group included the Inclusive Education Team, students, parents, teachers, an Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) Mentor, and members of the school Executive as various stages. Pulteney Grammar School’s strategic plan had clear goals and actions with specific timelines assigning responsibility to a specific person and goals and actions were reviewed and reported against. School policies, procedures and other school documents need to be evolving and reflective of change and updated on a regular cycle to mirror the progress of inclusion on the school’s journey

Challenges in the Change Process

Early in the change management process undertaken at Pulteney Grammar School various worries were raised by educators and parents/caregivers of students living with disability as well as parents of students without disability. Concerns raised by school staff were related to their capacity to engage and teach students who have different learning, behavioural, and/or personal care needs. Concerns raised by parents/caregivers were about the environment and educators’ capacity to meet their child’s needs, and whether their child will be accepted by their peers.

Pulteney Grammar School encountered two main challenges:

**Beliefs and attitudes**

Some families and staff believed that it was up to learning support staff to ‘fix’ the student living with disability and to remove them from the mainstream setting and educate them separately. Changing from the medical model to a social model of disability demanded changing attitudes and beliefs and increasing knowledge and capacity around the benefits to all when students living with disability are fully included in the mainstream classroom.

**Collaborative partnerships**

Some school staff thought external professionals would “fix the problem” and had an attitude of “it’s not my problem, the Speechie can do that”. The new model demanded working as a team with several key stakeholders such as school staff, allied health professionals, and parents/caregivers all communicating and collaborating to support the child.

Addressing these Challenges

Pulteney Grammar School addressed the main challenges in the following ways:

* Conducted whole school surveys around beliefs and values of inclusive practices

(included all current teachers, past and present families, and Old Scholars). These surveys were designed and conducted by MMG Education (**http://www.mmgeducation.com.au/)**, leaders in **tailored school stakeholder research** and **performance benchmarking.**

* Delivered whole school PD around quality evidenced based practice focusing on differentiation.
* Delivered whole school PD around the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and the Disability Standards for Education (DSE).
* Provided consultation and support for key stakeholders - specifically the students and families (e.g., those students who were in withdrawal programs) and staff who would be directly affected by the change to an RTI model.

School leaders wanting to shift their school to RTI are encouraged to identify concerns that are likely to be raised by their staff, students and families and plan early for how they will respond.

Communication is Essential

Pulteney Grammar School found that the change to an RTI model can progress more quickly if there is initial and ongoing communication with students and families directly affected by the change and the rest of the school community. The change will be more readily accepted if information is transparent, timely and backed by research. Communication to all school community members should include:

* research around best practice
* evidence supporting inclusion over integration or segregation
* examples of the interventions that will be offered and why
* how students will be identified for interventions, timelines for interventions, how interventions will be monitored, and measurement of outcomes.

A Shared Understanding of Inclusion

It is imperative that the whole school community have a shared understanding of, and language around, inclusion for whole school change to be successful. Actions to develop a whole school community understanding of inclusion may include:

* student forums and working party
* community surveys
* staff PD sessions and working party
* parent information sessions and working party
* quality guest speakers, including past students with lived experience of disability and families and old Scholars to discuss challenges and successes faced in schooling
* online learning on topics such as DDA, DSE, UDL, neurodiversity

Learnings from Pulteney Grammar School’s Change Process

It is likely that other schools will face similar challenges to those experienced by Pulteney Grammar School in shifting to a new model. School leaders are encouraged to think creatively and plan early to overcome challenges, ensuring all school community members (students, families, school staff, and key external stakeholders) feel heard and have input into the change management process. If your school is aiming for full inclusion (and this could take several years depending on infrastructure, physical spaces, leadership and vision, and other factors), begin by undertaking consultation and education around inclusion and a strategic plan with clear goals and actions with specific timelines assigning responsibility to a specific person.

## More Information

**ACARA Student Diversity -** ACARA is committed to the development of a high-quality curriculum for all Australian students, which promotes excellence and equity in education. <https://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/student-diversity>

**Australian Curriculum Leaders Resource -** A resource for SA schools to support working with the Australian Curriculum, to design engaging and intellectually stretching learning experiences for all students. <https://acleadersresource.sa.edu.au/?page=strategic_intent>

**Making A Difference -** Meeting Diverse Learning Needs with Differentiated Instruction (Chapter 8 Students with Disabilities, p. 115) <https://education.alberta.ca/media/384968/makingadifference_2010.pdf>

**Teaching for Effective Learning -** The framework and resources are designed to support leaders and teachers in continually developing our ‘craft’ and professional effectiveness as leaders and teachers. <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/teaching/teaching-effective-learning/teaching-effective-learning-tfel-resources>

## Acknowledgement

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3. Australian Curriculum (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. RTI Action Network (n.d.). What is RTI? Retrieved from http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/what/whatisrti [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. LDA (n.d.). Response to intervention. Retrieved from https://www.ldaustralia.org/response-to-intervention.html [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
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