Inclusive School Practices Toolkit

Inclusive Curriculum Provision: Ensuring Equitable Access and Progress in Age-equivalent Curriculum

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 Loren Swancutt, Head of Inclusive Schooling at a public high school in Queensland. Loren is highly regarded for her innovative work in relation to differentiated teaching practice and inclusive curriculum provisions, a topic she is researching as a doctoral candidate at the Queensland University of Technology.

One of the challenges in the implementation age-equivalent curriculum within inclusive classrooms centers on teacher self-efficacy, or their reported confidence and capability around having the necessary knowledge and skills to enact the practice[[1]](#footnote-2). This tool introduces concepts and features of inclusive curriculum provision that teachers can access in order to improve their professional knowledge and understanding of how this important component of inclusive education can be achieved. The tool contains two handouts that are aimed at discussing and developing understanding of how the Australian Curriculum is designed to be universally responsive, and how the design can be applied in context to enact curriculum adjustments. The two handouts within this tool can form the basis of professional learning.

Ensuring all students have access to and are making progress within their age-equivalent curriculum is an important aspect of the realisation of inclusive education. Having the opportunity to engage in regular curriculum opportunities and content provides students with the necessary conditions and prerequisites to be valued and contributing members of the class. Academic instruction from age-equivalent contexts and curriculum within inclusive classrooms has also been found to lead to greater advancement in learning progress for students, including those who require substantial or extensive adjustments[[2]](#footnote-3). In addition, the Disability Standards for Education (DSE) supports the notion of inclusive curriculum provision by stating that all educational experiences, including curriculum development, accreditation and delivery, should be enacted equitably and free from discrimination[[3]](#footnote-4).

Ideas

When exploring the concept of inclusive curriculum provision, this tool explicitly refers to the Australian Curriculum. It is acknowledged that Victoria and New South Wales utilise their own state-based curriculums, however, the standards-based design of all three curriculums results in the concepts and features explored in this tool being applicable across contexts.

**Standards-based Curriculum**

The Australian Curriculum[[4]](#footnote-5) is a standards-based curriculum. This means that it sets out consistent national standards around what students should learn (content) and be able to do (cognitive behaviours or skills) across each year level of schooling from Foundation to Year 10. The simple idea behind standards-based curriculum is ensuring transparency of clearly articulated learning goals, or achievement standards. This results in greater clarity of what to teach and what satisfactory achievement looks like.

Standards-based curriculum allows greater flexibility[[5]](#footnote-6) around ways that students can interact with content and skills, and the ways in which they exhibit their learning. The curriculum articulates expectations around content and complexity or rigour, but allows for the context and conditions to be universally designed and variable so as to be responsive to student diversity.

**Planning for Personalised Learning and Support**

Under the DSE, schools have the obligation to maximise the academic outcomes of students with disability by providing reasonable adjustments that result in access to high-quality teaching and learning that is free from discrimination. This requires acknowledgement that all students are unique, with their own aspirations, strengths, interests and challenges. Schools must respond to these diverse characteristics with the principles of personalised learning and support that aim to ensure high-expectations of achievement are afforded to all.

The principles underlying personalised learning and support have been articulated in the Planning for Personalised Learning and Support: A National Resource[[6]](#footnote-7) that is based on the DSE. These principles are as follows:

1. *Quality teaching and learning*

* All students can learn.
* Every child has a right to a high-quality education.
* Effective teachers provide engaging and rigorous learning experiences for all students.
* A safe and stimulating environment is integral to enabling students to explore and build on their talents and achieve relevant learning outcomes.
* For students with disability and additional learning needs, reasonable adjustments should be made where required.

1. *Consultation*

* Effective consultation requires meaningful participation by all contributors and should recognise the input of all participants; the student, their family or carer, school personnel, other professionals and other relevant people.
* The DSE state that, before the school makes an adjustment for a student, the student or the family/carer of the student must be consulted about the type of adjustments required.
* Consultation should be tailored to the needs of the student and their family or carer. It should involve consideration of learning needs and strengths, aspirations, cultural, social and religious diversity.
* Decision-making processes can include the student and people who support the student on a regular basis. This can include parents, carers, other family members, other professionals and relevant school staff. Decisions should be clearly explained to and understood by all people involved in this process.
* Families are able to make decisions about the nature of their involvement in the consultation process.

1. *Collaborative practice and planning*

* Meeting the learning and support needs for all students is the responsibility of the school principal, teachers and the school community working together.
* Collaborative planning is enhanced by focusing on goals, strategies, learning needs and strengths, and achievement.
* Planning should be clear, timely and transparent for everyone involved.
* Decision-making processes should be inclusive and understood by the student and their family or carer, school staff and other relevant people.

**Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice**

Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice (QDTP) is a term that has been established by the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD)[[7]](#footnote-8). It conceptualises the provision of quality first teaching that is responsive and differential to student diversity from the outset. QDTP aims to identify and illuminate unnecessary barriers, and to build on student’s strengths through the provision of responses and supports that are infrequent or occasional, or frequent with low-level action.

**Curriculum Adjustments**

Curriculum adjustments refer to actions that are aimed at increasing a student’s access to and participation in teaching, learning and assessment. Adjustments are designed to provide students living with disability equitable opportunity to benefit from the educational process, and to be able to engage in instruction and tasks on the ‘same basis’ as their peers[[8]](#footnote-9).

The NCCD has established three tiers or levels of adjustment that vary in levels of frequency and intensity. These are supplementary, substantial and extensive, and they are defined as:

*Supplementary adjustments:*

Students living with disability are provided with adjustments that are supplementary to the strategies and resources already available for all students within the school. Adjustments occur for particular activities at specific times throughout the week[[9]](#footnote-10).

E.g. A student who accesses a speech-to-text application on a regular basis across learning areas to assist them with composing written text.

*Substantial adjustments:*

Students living with disability who have more substantial support needs are provided with essential adjustments and considerable adult assistance. Adjustments to the usual educational program occur at most times on most days[[10]](#footnote-11).

E.g. A student who accesses curriculum content at a reduced complexity across a range of learning areas, therefore requiring adjusted instructional tasks and summative assessment.

*Extensive adjustments:*

Students living with disability and very high support needs are provided with extensive targeted measures and sustained levels of intensive support. These adjustments are highly individualised, comprehensive and ongoing. Adjustments to the regular educational program occur at all times[[11]](#footnote-12).

E.g. A student who has complex communication needs and is learning to utilise Augmentative and Alternate Communication (AAC) that requires frequent multidisciplinary collaboration with a speech pathologist, and highly individualised adjustments to all curriculum tasks to ensure access and participation.

Actions

In order for teachers to implement appropriate adjustments that enable students to access, participate and make progress in their age-equivalent curriculum, they need to understand how the Australian Curriculum is designed to be universally responsive, and how the design can be applied in context to enact curriculum adjustments. The tool contains two resources that are aimed at discussing and developing this understanding:

Handout 1: Core Features of the Australian Curriculum for Inclusive Curriculum Provision

Handout 2: Making Supplementary, Substantial and Extensive Curriculum Adjustments

Start by utilising Handout 1 to engage educators in reflection and discussion about their knowledge and understanding of the three-dimensional design of the Australian Curriculum. Draw attention to the components of the curriculum and identify their purpose and application to the teaching and learning process.

Explore the Australian Curriculum website to familiarise educators with the design, and the location of where the components can be viewed and accessed.

From here, Handout 2 can be utilised to develop capability around the application of the components of the Australian Curriculum when planning inclusive curriculum provisions. Invite educators to explore the ways in which each of the components provide opportunity for all students to engage in high-quality, equitable curriculum access and participation.

Explore ways that these aspects might be applied in the context of their own classrooms, before watching the recorded webinars to gain further clarity and direction. See ‘More Information’ at the end of this tool for Vimeo links to the webinar recordings.

Handout 1: Core Features of the Australian Curriculum for Inclusive Curriculum Provision

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is committed to the development of a world class, high-quality and equitable curriculum that promotes excellence for all Australian students[[12]](#footnote-13). It recognises that all students are entitled to rigorous, relevant and engaging learning programs that are drawn from a challenging curriculum that also responds to their individual learning requirements.

To support the realisation of the Australian Curriculum’s responsiveness to diverse student populations, specific advice, discussion and exemplars are explored via the Student Diversity tab of the website[[13]](#footnote-14). Amongst this information is reference to the three-dimensional design (learning areas, general capabilities and learning progressions, and cross-curriculum priorities) of the curriculum, and how recognition of its entirety contributes to the overall inclusive capacity and potential.

The following components of the three-dimensional design are utilised when planning for and providing inclusive curriculum provision:

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| **Curriculum Design** | **Design Component** |
| **Learning Areas**  Knowledge, skills and understanding across eight disciplines (English, Mathematics, Science, Health and Physical Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, The Arts, Technologies, and Languages). | **Achievement Standards**  Describe the depth of understanding and sophistication of skill expected at the end of a particular year level or band of years.  Arranged into a sequence, or continuum of achievement across Foundation to Year 10.  **Content Descriptions**  Provide further explanation and context of the subset of knowledge and skills that are identified in the Achievement Standards. |
| **General Capabilities and Learning Progressions**  Knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions important in equipping students to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century.  Addressed through the content of the learning areas, and can add depth and richness to student learning.  The capabilities and progressions include – Literacy, Numeracy, Information and Communication Technology, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social, Ethical Understanding, Intercultural Understanding. | **Learning Continua**  Describe the relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours at particular points of schooling within each of the general capability areas.  Arranged into a sequence, or continuum across levels.  **Progression Maps**  Support students to engage successfully with the literacy and numeracy demands of the curriculum from Foundation to Year 10. The progressions describe observable indicators of how literacy and numeracy skills develop overtime. |
| **Cross-curricular Priorities**  The priorities provide national, regional and global dimensions that enrich curriculum. They are addressed through learning areas and add depth and richness that will encourage broader perspectives and conversations.  The priorities include – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, Asia and Australia’s Engagement with Asia, Sustainability. | **Organising Ideas**  Organising ideas reflect the essential knowledge, understanding and skills of the priority area. They capture key concepts in conceptual statements that can be drawn on when delivering learning experiences. |

Handout 2: Making Supplementary, Substantial and Extensive Curriculum Adjustments

The design of the Australian Curriculum provides opportunities for all students to access, participate in and make progress through age-equivalent curriculum content and experiences. This is achieved by enacting a range of quality differentiated teaching practices and levels of adjustments that build on students’ strengths, interests, goals and potential.

The ways in which the design of the Australian Curriculum can be enacted to provide inclusive curriculum provision are explored below:

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| **Design Component** | **Inclusive Provision** |
| Learning Areas - Achievement Standards | * Provide clarity of exactly what students need to know and be able to do across a year of schooling. * Articulate the standard of satisfactory achievement. * Allow for instructional and assessment contexts and conditions to be universally designed - removing any unnecessary barriers that exist external to the content and complexity demanded by the curriculum intent. * Provide a sequence of achievement across years to show where students have come from and where they are heading in their learning. * Provide opportunity to enact substantial curriculum adjustments by altering complexity through access to alternate entry points from higher or lower year level achievement standards. |
| General Capabilities and Learning Progressions – Learning Continua and Progression Maps | * Can be utilised to provide supplementary curriculum adjustments by: * Provide opportunities to personalise knowledge, skills and behaviours that sit alongside learning area content. * Provide opportunity to supplement and enrich access and participation in tasks. * Identify target skills that can be addressed alongside learning area content in regular curriculum instruction and tasks. * Provide opportunity to enact extensive curriculum adjustments through access to individual learning goals that are derived from Level 1 of the Literacy, Numeracy, and Personal and Social capabilities. |
| Cross-Curricular Priorities – Organising Ideas | * Provide opportunity to extend the tools and language that students need in order to better engage with and understand their world. * Broaden perspectives about the value and contributions of diverse cultures and regions. |

More Information

### Zoom Webinar Recording – Making Supplementary, Substantial, and Extensive Curriculum Adjustments <https://vimeo.com/436283947>

### Zoom Webinar Recording - Curriculum Adjustments Practical 3 June 2020 <https://vimeo.com/436287573>

Swancutt, L., Medhurst, M., Poed, S., & Walker, P. (2020). Making adjustments to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. In L.J. Graham (Ed.), Inclusive Education for the 21st Century: Theory, Policy and Practice (pp. 55-78). Allen & Unwin.

School Inclusion – From Theory to Practice <https://school-inclusion.com/>

Acknowledgement

This tool was written by Loren Swancutt, Head of Inclusive Schooling at a State High School in Queensland. In writing this tool, Loren draws on her 11 years teaching experience across both primary and secondary school settings, her experience as a school leader and Regional coach, and her role as the National Convenor of the School Inclusion Network for Educators. Loren is highly regarded for her innovative work in relation to differentiated teaching practice and inclusive curriculum provisions, a topic she is researching as a doctoral candidate at the Queensland University of Technology. <https://school-inclusion.com/>



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2. de Bruin, K. (2020). Does inclusion work? In L.J. Graham (Ed.), *Inclusive Education for the 21st Century: Theory, Policy and Practice* (pp. 55-78). Allen & Unwin. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Australian Government. (2020). *Fact Sheet: Disability Standards for Education 2005*. https://docs.education.gov.au/node/35943 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (n.d). *Student diversity.* Australian Curriculum. https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/student-diversity [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
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6. Australian Government. (2015). *Planning for Personalised Learning and Support: A National Resource.* https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/planningforpersonalisedlearningandsupportnatplanningforpe.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Education Services Australia (2019). *Selecting the Level of Adjustment.* https://www.nccd.edu.au/sites/default/files/h5p/content/167/docs/endorsed\_levels\_of\_adjustmena.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Australian Government. (2020). *Fact Sheet: Disability Standards for Education 2005*. https://docs.education.gov.au/node/35943 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Education Services Australia (2019). *Selecting the Level of Adjustment.* https://www.nccd.edu.au/sites/default/files/h5p/content/167/docs/endorsed\_levels\_of\_adjustmena.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority. (n.d). Australian Curriculum. <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority. (n.d). *Student diversity.* Australian Curriculum. <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/student-diversity/> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)