



# Progress Report: Improving outcomes for students with disability 2019



# Minister's Foreword



The NSW Government launched the Disability Strategy in February 2019. It sets our vision for an inclusive education system, and commits the Department of Education to an ambitious agenda for achieving strong educational and wellbeing outcomes for students with disability in NSW Government schools.

The Strategy is informed by extensive consultation with educators, disability experts and families, and builds on the NSW Government's response to the Parliamentary Inquiry, *Education of students with a disability or special needs in NSW*.

In the eight months since the launch, we've made significant progress on a number of the key initiatives set out in the Disability Strategy.

We are focused on embedding these changes, continuing to deliver on the initiatives and achieving our goals of improving outcomes for children and young people.

One of the Parliamentary Inquiry's recommendations was that, each year, the Minister make a Ministerial Statement in Parliament which reports on the educational progress of students with disability in NSW.

This is the first report giving effect to that recommendation. We are committed to providing this report on our key areas of achievement and goals for the future each year, and to tabling it in Parliament. As Minister I recognise there's much more to be done and commit to driving positive change for students with disability.

I'm conscious our students with disability have many different experiences of learning. In all aspects of education I am determined to ensure our school system offers all students across the State a world class education, regardless of what a student's background may be or what school they attend.

In 2020 and beyond, I want to ensure we fulfil all the Disability Strategy's commitments and continue to improve the inclusivity of education in NSW by increasing schools' capacity to provide students with an equitable and participatory learning experience, and equip them for fulfilling lives after school. It is also important to improve our professional learning so teachers have the skills, capabilities and confidence to better support our students with disability.

I look forward to continuing to engage with our schools, students, their families and the broader community on this important work.

**The Hon. Sarah Mitchell, MLC**

Minister for Education and  
Early Childhood Learning



# Our vision


We are committed to building a more inclusive education system, one where all students feel welcomed and are learning to their fullest potential.


The Disability Strategy, released in February 2019, outlines our vision for building a better education system for students with disability in NSW Government schools.

We aspire to build an education system in which children with disability thrive academically, develop good physical, mental and emotional health, and gain the skills to live a fulfilling, independent life post-school.

The Disability Strategy recognises education has a vital role in shifting awareness and understanding of the lives of all people with disability. It is also about creating equal access to quality, individualised education for every student that enhances their ability to lead fulfilling lives after school.

We want to ensure that all children and young people attending NSW schools are known, valued and cared for and that they:

- are welcomed and included in their local school community
  - enjoy a wide range of experiences
  - learn to their fullest capability, achieving demonstrable learning, wellbeing and independence outcomes, in a safe, supportive and healthy environment
  - receive an excellent education, with expertise available to support access to the full curriculum in a way that is relevant to them
  - build friendships, interact with other students, and feel a sense of belonging.
- 



“We developed a new strategy for supporting students with disability in our schools. We want to make sure we are supporting our most vulnerable students and our most complex learners with an inclusive strategy that is committed to diversity and ensures great opportunities for all.”

**Mark Scott, Secretary  
NSW Department of Education**





# Our commitments

Within the first eight months of the Disability Strategy, we have achieved good progress against the focus areas and key actions, as well as ensuring we are implementing the recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry.

We have established a dedicated team to drive change and coordinate actions under the Disability Strategy. We are supporting a drive towards more inclusive education.

We know that a one size fits all approach won't deliver the ambitious change we need. Learning environments are also changing rapidly with amazing technological advances and cutting-edge research.

This progress report sets out what we have achieved under the four themes of the Disability Strategy and what our priorities are for 2020. It speaks to achievements and areas for further work that were set out in the Strategy, other areas of focus for the Department, and ways in which we are implementing the recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry.

We are concerned about the number of students with disability who are suspended from school.

We are committed to changing this, including by supporting schools to manage student behaviour. We are focused on supporting our students through key transition points, including into a fulfilling life after school. In the spirit of this changing landscape, we will continue to build on our Disability Strategy, and what success looks like for delivery of its vision.

The thread that runs through our priorities for 2020 is continuing to listen and respond to the diverse voices and experiences of our students, their parents or carers and school staff to bring about positive change. In this report we set out what we have achieved in 2019 and our key priorities in 2020. We are committed to expanding on this agenda, informed by our school communities and external partners.

Only by working together and tailoring support to our diverse students and school communities will we improve learning and wellbeing for every child. We want to make sure we understand young people and their parents and carers' experience at each stage of their educational journey. This will help us identify what we can do to make that experience better and easier to navigate.

## Our focus is on four key areas:

- **Strengthen support**  
Investing in teachers and other support staff.
- **Increase resources and flexibility**  
Enabling schools to operate with more flexibility.
- **Improve the family experience**  
Making experiences better and easier.
- **Track outcomes**  
Building an evidence base to measure progress.

# Inclusive education

## What we mean by inclusive education

We are committed to inclusion in NSW education.

Inclusion means all students, regardless of disability, can access and fully participate in learning at their local school, alongside their similar aged peers, supported by reasonable adjustments and teaching strategies tailored to meet their individual needs.

We are committed to building the capacity of our mainstream public schools to meet the needs of their local students unless there are compelling individual reasons why a different option would better support the student.

We acknowledge that this needs to be balanced against parental choice regarding the most appropriate setting for their child, and will continue to work with parents and education experts to individualise support so that every child can be engaged with learning and flourish at school.

The requirement to support enrolment in mainstream schools is supported by Part 4 of the *Disability Standards for Education* under the *Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, which requires that enrolment for students with disability is on the same basis as other students.

The overwhelming majority of students with disability, around 97 per cent, currently learn in mainstream schools, and the Department will continue to work to identify new approaches for allocating and using specialist support provisions to support students with disability in or close to their local school.

This supports the outcomes we are striving for: the learning growth, wellbeing and independence of children and young people.

We remain aware of the current Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability which will look into the use of restrictive practices and the exclusion of students with disability from

the education system. We have established a dedicated team to ensure we can respond to the Commission.

**In our NSW public schools:** More than 125,000 students across NSW are receiving supplementary, substantial or extensive adjustments to their learning because of disability – the majority of students in mainstream classes.



# 3,395

**specialist support classes** in mainstream and schools for specific purposes



# 970

**classes in schools** for specific purposes support more than **5,360 students**.



Around

# 97%

**of students** with disability learn in mainstream schools.



More than

# 1,870

**specialist teachers** support students whose learning is impacted by disability



More than

# 435

**specialist itinerant teachers and assistant principals** support students with hearing or vision impairment.





“I felt like a weight had been lifted off me and I felt fresh and happy... I feel included and understood by everyone I know”

**Monica, 11, on her lived experience of autism at a mainstream school with inclusive practices.**



# Delivering on key reform areas

## 1 Strengthening support

### We are investing in our teachers and other support staff


We are building the skills, confidence and capabilities of our teachers and leaders so they are better equipped to support students with disability. We want teachers to have access to the right strategies, tools and know-how to support every child to reach their full potential.

### Professional learning and training leaders, teachers and support staff in evidence based approaches

We are building on the current suite of **professional learning programs** for teaching and support staff with new professional development programs and expert support for teachers and leaders.

### Our commitments

- 1.1 Build on suite of core, advanced and specialist professional learning.
- 1.2 Provide funding support for qualified candidates to pursue additional specialist studies.
- 1.3 Train school and departmental leaders in evidence-based approaches to support students with disability.
- 1.4 Develop and launch a new approach to induction on supporting students with disability for all new teachers.
- 1.5 Establish a permanent team of expert designers, planners, researchers and leaders, to work on the creation of inclusive learning spaces.



“I now have the confidence to apply things in the classroom... That’s really helped [students] with their behaviour, which has then helped them with their learning.”

**Lauren Young, Classroom Teacher, Oran Park Public School, is studying a Masters of Education (Special & Inclusive)**






## Key achievements in 2019

- In November 2019, we will pilot a new professional development program in **trauma-informed practice** with over 1,000 participants as part of our Strategy commitment. Trauma-informed practice in an educational context focuses on how teachers, school-based staff and leaders can better relate to and support the wellbeing and learning of children and young people who have experienced trauma. Social and emotional learning is something that all educators can embed into their teaching and learning programs. We engaged with 500 schools who had done some trauma-informed practice. We received an overwhelming 442 survey responses and held 52 qualitative interviews about what is working, to inform the development of training. Schools told us that this approach has positively improved student outcomes and overall school culture, and there is an enthusiasm to implement it further. The pilot will inform a more widespread roll-out of trauma-informed practice support to NSW schools.
- We launched a new evidence-based course on **supporting student wellbeing and mental health** to enable teachers and schools to better meet the needs of students with disability. Over 300 participants have already completed the course across the state with more to follow in 2020.
- A new **professional learning course on personalising learning with technology has been launched**. It has had strong uptake – with 500 enrolments since it launched in August 2019. The course helps teachers make informed decisions about choosing and implementing assistive technology to support students with diverse needs in the classroom.
- We've updated training for **disability standards for education with the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA)**. This is available for schools and their staff, along with practical advice, case studies and guidance on the implementation of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD). Over 95,000 people have already completed this training. We will mandate the disability training for principals, which implements recommendation 29 from the Parliamentary Inquiry.

- We have established and implemented an **aspiring principal's leadership program**. We've identified aspiring principals, and they are being mentored by highly experienced current principals. Participants in the program can access support to enhance their leadership and better understand the need to lead an inclusive school.
- We are **co-designing a new resource for school learning and support teams** across the state. This will encourage a whole school approach to putting support in place for students with additional needs to improve the learning outcomes of every student.
- We've added information on **reasonable adjustments to our teacher induction website** and presented this information in recent new teacher conferences. We have also updated our training for school administration staff to include more information on supporting students with disability.

## Our priorities for 2020

- **Further strengthen our professional development offerings**, with more support to schools on the availability of evidence-based professional learning on inclusive practice, and classroom practice. New professional learning approaches and courses will be informed by collaboration with a wide range of our school, education and disability partners.
- **Effective promotion of the disability standards** training and implementing the Parliamentary Inquiry recommendations to mandate training (Recommendation 29), focus on practical application of the training (Recommendation 28) and investigating the feasibility of making training part of the accreditation process for all teachers and principals (Recommendation 30).
- **Testing and deploying our new trauma-informed practice professional learning** to all school leaders and more school staff to meet our commitments under the Strategy. We will evaluate different models for delivery and coaching support for impact on classroom practice.
- To make sure we can better support a range of student behaviours we're developing a **Behaviour Strategy**, which will incorporate a discipline policy review and suspension



procedure update. Professional learning for teachers and support resources for schools will also be developed. It is anticipated that the development of the Strategy will be finalised by the end of March 2020, and the Strategy will then be phased in over the following 6-18 months. The planning for implementation of the Strategy is vital to ensure we reach all schools and students, parents and carers. We want to ensure we support all students through a care continuum focusing on prevention, early intervention for 'at risk' students and individual intervention for students with complex and challenging needs.

- We've also dedicated \$1.5 million each year for four years to partnering with **leading youth mental health organisations and universities** to provide evidence-based wellbeing and mental health programs for staff and students.

## Funding support for staff to complete specialist studies

We are working to ensure a steady supply of high-quality teachers and support staff with expertise in supporting students with disability.

### Key achievements in 2019

In August 2019, we launched the **inclusive practice in education scholarship**, building on our current scholarship program. The scholarship is for teachers to undertake a master's degrees in inclusive/special education in universities across NSW. The first group of successful candidates will start their inclusive education studies in 2020. The scholarships are open to all permanent, temporary and casual teachers in mainstream schools and specialist settings so we can increase the number of teachers with expertise in all schools. Scholars will get up to \$23,000 towards their degree and access to professional development.

We are aiming for numbers above 100 Scholars in 2020 with increased numbers in future years. We will ask scholars to form a scholar network, and connect them in with teachers across our system who have already completed the degrees.

We are focused on meeting – or exceeding – the target set out in the Disability Strategy: to increase the number of people studying inclusive/special education by 50% by 2022.

We know there is a need for more qualified teachers, support staff and specialist positions across the system. In 2019, we also focused on responding to these resourcing issues for school psychologists and counsellors by:

- Investing **\$88.4 million over four years to provide every public high school with a full-time school counsellor support on site and a full-time student support officer**. This extra funding means an extra 100 school counselling positions and 350 student support officers, dedicated telepsychology and fly-in/fly-out services for rural and remote students. Student support officers work within the school community in partnership with the learning and support team and the school counselling service, to enhance student social and emotional wellbeing and learning outcomes. They also have a pivotal role in working collaboratively with external child and family support agencies and other government agencies to support students.
- We've increased the **scholarships offered to teachers to retrain as school counsellors** with nearly 100 staff already qualified. We've also started a new tailored Master's program for school psychologists.
- We've introduced **strategies to fill school counsellor vacancies** and gaps from staff leave through an ongoing centralised, state wide recruitment strategy where vacancies are advertised as both school counsellor and school psychologist positions.
- We've expanded rural and metropolitan **scholarships for psychology graduates** to be employed in the school counselling service. A new tailored training pathway through the Master of Professional Psychology program started in January 2019.
- We're **improving support in rural and remote areas** by employing recently retired or separated experienced staff to work in rural and remote areas and by trialling telepsychology service in 12 schools.
- We're also establishing a **prequalified scheme for contingent psychologists**, so that external staff can fill positions due to leave or unfilled recruitment processes.

The Department was pleased with the outcome of the Industrial Relations Commission process this year, which made a new three year award for NSW school administrative and support staff. The new award will directly benefit the Department's 18,000 school administrative and support staff with increased remuneration, a contemporary classification structure, recognition and career options which support the aims of the Disability Strategy. It includes requirements that school administration and support staff undertake health support procedures as part of usual duties.

The Department is running a procurement process to establish a prequalified panel of allied health providers that schools can access. A trial has commenced to provide schools with improved access to specialist allied health services state-wide, including in rural and remote locations. Evaluation of this trial is informing implementation of the procurement solution in line with the Parliamentary Inquiry's recommendation that the Department review how allied health services and support is provided in schools (Recommendation 26).

## Our priorities for 2020

- **Ongoing delivery on our new Inclusive Practice in Education Scholarship** by providing support and networking opportunities for our scholars and ensuring a strong pipeline of scholars with a next round of the scholarship.
- **Identifying, strengthening and implementing additional career progression strategies** for teachers and support staff to support the objective of a steady supply of staff with expertise in supporting students with disability.
- **Partnerships with the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) and universities** to ensure we are building teacher capability through all undergraduate teaching degrees and postgraduate degrees.
- We will continue to work closely with our school leaders to address immediate and medium term **staffing pressures** in specialist classrooms and schools through the **Staffing Methodology Review**.

- The establishment of a scheme to assist schools to **access specialist allied health services** more quickly and effectively (Recommendation 26). Schools will be able to access providers from a pre-qualified list, to assist with occupational therapy, speech pathology, physiotherapy, exercise physiology and behaviour support. The scheme is expected to be available from Term 1, 2020.

## Creating more inclusive learning spaces

We are developing more inclusive approaches to school infrastructure by improving physical environments for students with disability.

We are currently recruiting two dedicated positions to join a new school infrastructure team of expert designers, planners, researchers and leaders that will work with schools on inclusive learning environments.


We are also:

- creating an infrastructure reference group to collaborate with stakeholders and experts on inclusive design.
- leading research to understand the interaction between physical learning environments, and support and outcomes for students with disability.

Our key priorities in 2020 are to embed the new team and ensure that the early involvement in our designs, builds and refurbishments is focused on meeting the needs of the full range of students.

"All children benefit from an inclusive learning environment. Acknowledging our diversity and embracing the uniqueness of individuals is what makes a community."

**Sue Becker, CEO,  
Lifestart**



## 2 Increase resources and flexibility

### Enabling schools to operate with more flexibility

#### Key achievements in 2019

##### Innovation Program

We're launching our new **Disability Strategy Innovation Program** to provide schools with dedicated funding to improve the learning and wellbeing of students with disability.

We will partner with schools to test innovative ideas and build the evidence base for what works. Projects that will receive funding could include improving transitions between early childhood, primary and high school or post school, fostering inclusion in a school environment, or creating better learning outcomes.

We are interested in partnering with schools who have new ideas on how we resource schools (in mainstream or specialist settings) so as to better respond to students' needs quickly and effectively.

There is already great innovation happening in our schools and we want to evaluate these practices. We also want to support schools to test ideas they want to try but need support to deliver.

This opportunity is available to all NSW Government schools and government pre-schools. Schools are welcome to partner with non-government organisations on their idea or with other schools. The program will provide the funding, evaluation expertise and other support needed to co-design and implement an idea.

We will look at how we can scale-up approaches across the state that we've found out work well for our students.

Our key priorities in 2020 are to partner with schools who have applied through this Innovation Program.

### Our commitments

- 2.1** Launch an innovation fund for schools to trial and evaluate new resourcing models to give schools greater resourcing and flexibility to tailor education to students' needs.
- 2.2** Identify and showcase approaches that are getting great results for students.
- 2.3** Build online tools that make it easy for families, carers and teachers of students with similar needs across NSW to connect

### Showcase approaches that are achieving results for students

We are celebrating success and examples of **good practice in schools and communities to help raise awareness of inclusion** in the **Disability Strategy newsletter** and website.

#### Our priorities for 2020

- We will publish evidence-based case studies developed by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) on schools with good practice in inclusive education for students with disability. These case studies will be shared widely with schools across the state in 2020 to highlight how schools with different local contexts have implemented **effective practice in inclusive education**.
- We will publicise the schools we are partnering with for the Innovation Program and provide any updates on **successes and lessons learned**.
- We will continue to use the newsletter as a communication channel for sharing **evidence-based practice**.





### 3 Making the family experience better

We are committed to ensuring that the experience of families of children and young people with disability is supportive, transparent and straightforward.

We have been working hard to improve the experience of families. And we know that there is much more we can do, informed by student and parent and carer engagement throughout 2020.

#### Improving the learning and support journey

We are focused on improving the consistency of information and support received by families on accessing support for a child with disability. We are focused on ensuring schools know their students' strengths and needs.

This includes ensuring that families, students and their school are engaging regularly on the personalised learning and support needs of a student. Personalised learning and support involves the school, family and student. A personalised learning and support approach includes identifying the needs of a student through quality assessment and observation of the student's need, collaboration between the family, student and school on what kinds of adjustments should be made to meet those needs, and the ongoing review of those adjustments. Adjustments may include changes to teaching and learning, individual planning, learning materials being provided in alternative formats, and changes to the learning environment to address physical or sensory needs.

We are also improving the system for accessing additional support by looking at eligibility and processes. We have focused on **improving the family experience and reducing the administrative burden** of the access request process. Access requests are used to apply for additional student support such as integration funding support and access to specialist support classes and schools for specific purpose.

#### Our commitments

- 3.1 Create a one-stop online resource with information for families and carers.
- 3.2 Provide new resources for local use to educate school and local communities about disability.
- 3.3 Streamline and improve the processes by which families, children and young people access support at schools.
- 3.4 Improve our response rates to concerns and complaints.

This work is delivering on the Parliamentary Inquiry recommendations about the Department of Education prioritising its review of the access request process with a view to streamlining the process and facilitating the timely provision of funds to schools (Recommendations 22, 23 and 24).

Our aim is to ensure parents, students and schools all have access to information and resources that enable them to work in partnership together to make the best choices that meet the learning needs of students with disability.

"I had found exactly what we were hoping for, a school that saw the positives and not the negatives and more importantly saw Madi and not her disabilities."

**Nerida Bodycote shares her daughter Madi's journey into a mainstream school.**

## Key achievements in 2019

- **We have implemented a new timeframe for applying for support class placement for students moving from primary to high school.** The purpose is to facilitate better transition planning between students, their parents/carers and schools. In most cases, the access request process will now occur in Year 5 instead of Year 6. This means students will find out where they are attending secondary school earlier and have more time for transition planning.
- **We have introduced a more seamless way for students to receive funding support when transitioning from primary to high school.** Students who receive integration funding support (IFS) in Year 6 will have it rolled over to Year 7 without needing a new access request. This will benefit around 1400 students with disability who transition from primary to secondary school this year and reduce the administrative burden on families and schools.
- **We have been testing options to streamline the access request process for families and schools.** A pilot in Term 2, 2019 led to much faster timeframes for access requests. Two more pilots in 2019 will look at other ways for us to meet the commitment of improving the quality and timeliness of information to students and parents about additional supports in schools.
- We continue to support students, families and schools to understand and navigate the **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)**. We've delivered advice and professional learning to principals, other school staff and families on the NDIS, including how NDIS-funded services can support student learning in NSW public schools. We've provided over 900 information and professional learning sessions, and helped schools with individual student NDIS matters.

## Our priorities for 2020

We are focused on building on our 2019 changes to further streamline and improve the processes by which students and their families' access support at schools. We will deliver an updated approach, including:

- New **family information packs and web content** which provide clear guidance on the kinds of support available at all NSW schools, and assist with conversations with schools about support options.
- New guidance to schools on early and ongoing engagement with families and expectations for personalised learning and support discussions.
- **Changes to the access request process** including reducing paperwork required for a current application, improving the transparency to families and the effective management of the panel processes used to make decisions about accessing specialist support classes and schools for specific purposes.

We are committed to working with schools on the collection and use of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) as recommended by the Parliamentary Inquiry.

This includes:

- **Testing a more modern approach to the use of disability criteria** to capture student need based on functional assessment rather than just a diagnosis (Recommendation 7). This may include drawing on the NCCD data.
- Exploring the viability of using the **NCCD data to inform resource allocations** provided to schools through the equity loading, low level adjustment for disability (Recommendation 5).

The NCCD is an annual collection of data by all states and territories of the number of students receiving an adjustment for disability, the level of adjustment each student is receiving and the broad category of disability of each student.

The Parliamentary Inquiry recommended that we use Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) on School Students with Disability:

- **instead of NAPLAN in the Student Learning Needs Index, as the basis for calculating the low level adjustment for disability equity loading.**
- **as an alternative indicator of need in calculating additional funding provided to non-government.**



## Information for families and carers in one location

We want to make it as easy as possible for families and carers to find the information and advice they need online, to help them understand what to expect and the support they need. In 2020, we will work with families and carers to develop accessible online resources.

## Improve how we respond to concerns and complaints

We're improving the way we respond to concerns and complaints. Our complaint policy and procedures have been revised to make it easier for families to raise issues and to improve our response to complaints. We have developed new plain English resources including a video to assist parents and members of the public in making complaints and an easily accessible contact point on our websites.

## Other key achievements

- Updated guidelines for responding to child protection allegations against employees.
- We're updating guidelines for the management of conduct and performance.
- Updated NSW Education Standards Authority manuals for requirements and evidence to be maintained by schools.

**Parent Selena shares how her son Athan, 9, connects to his school from home through a telepresence robot.**

"It's life changing. It's increased his quality of life. It's more joy, more social connection, more education opportunity."

**Nerida Bodycote, parent/carers, is:**

"really excited to be given the opportunity to talk about how the education system can be improved so that all children can benefit from attending school in an inclusive environment and I'm pleased to hear that families like ours who participated in the process are being listened to."





## 4 Track outcomes

This report is the first regular update on progress for students with disability in NSW.

The Disability Strategy set out a vision for what success would look like that was informed by families, carers, educators and disability experts. A more inclusive education system is one where:

- Students with disability are learning to their fullest capability.
- Parents and carers are treated like partners in their child's education.
- Teachers possess the necessary skills to effectively educate children with disability, and feel confident doing so.
- School leaders wholeheartedly support and enable inclusive education practices.
- Specialists work alongside teachers, providing support and guidance.

One of the biggest challenges we face is building an adequate evidence base so we can reform the education system to enable children and young people with disability to achieve consistently good outcomes. There is currently little consensus on how to measure learning outcomes for students with disability. This makes it difficult to confidently identify and scale the approaches that work best for our students.

We are committed to improving the way we use data to monitor and improve the learning, wellbeing and independence of students with disability. We have made good progress in 2019 and will build on this throughout 2020.

### Key achievements in 2019

In 2019, we are focused on identifying ways we measure progress and outcomes for students with disability.

We continue to work with schools and the Commonwealth to improve the reliability and validity of **Nationally Consistent Collection of Data** on students with disability.

This year, we asked all parents about whether their child's school supports inclusivity and access, and if the built environment supports

### Our commitments

- 4.1** Initiate a ground-breaking approach, developed in NSW schools, to track and report the learning progress of students with complex needs.
- 4.2** Invest in new research to identify the practices that support the best learning outcomes.
- 4.3** Invest in research to better understand the prevalence of autism and mental health in our schools.

learning. This is now part of the **Department's annual Tell Them From Me (TTFM) survey**. For the first time, the TTFM survey will also ask parents if their child is enrolled at their first choice of public school, in line with Recommendation 11 of the Parliamentary Inquiry.

The surveys capture student, parent and teacher voices and can be used to measure student engagement and wellbeing. Responses will give us greater insight into the family experience and inform areas for improvement.

We initiated a trial of **assessment tools for complex learners**. We are preparing to undertake the trial in a sample of schools so we can determine the most effective way to measure learning progress for students with complex needs. We will trial two tools: the first based on the communication passport developed by two NSW schools for specific purposes and the second 'students with additional needs' (SWANs), developed by the University of Melbourne and the Victorian Department of Education and Training.

We have commissioned research to better understand the **prevalence of students with autism and mental health concerns** in our schools. This will deepen our understanding of the increasing demand and identify what practices support the best outcomes.

## Our priorities for 2020

We know that the prevalence of disability in our schools continues to change, and there have been shifts in the number of students with different disability types – whether these are diagnosed or not.

We recognise that suspension rates for students with disability are too high. We will hold ourselves to account by working to change this. We will continue to examine both attendance and suspension data to understand what it means for students with disability.

Over subsequent reports, we're going to update our data, report back on indicators to measure outcomes for students with disability, and more importantly on how we want to affect outcomes for students with disability. We will hold ourselves to account in this annual progress report.

We will report on our findings and next steps on the trial of the **assessment for complex learners**.

We will continue to report on our research findings through the progress report, our monthly newsletters and ongoing engagement with all our education and disability partners.








We acknowledge the homelands of all Aboriginal people and pay our respect to Country.

## For more Information

If you have any questions about this progress report, or to request a text-only version, please email:  
**[disability.strategy@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:disability.strategy@det.nsw.edu.au)**

## Say hello

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