

Strategies to support decision-making

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Introduction

The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) represents a new approach to understanding students with disability across all Australian schools. The model for the NCCD relies on the professional judgements of teachers about their students. It requires teachers and schools to make evidence-based decisions about:

- students with disability who are receiving reasonable adjustments to access education because of disability, consistent with definitions and obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) and Disability Standards for Education 2005 (the Standards)
- the level of adjustment being provided for each student with disability, in both classroom and whole-of-school contexts
- the broad category of disability the student best falls within.

Individual teacher judgement in making these decisions will reflect the school context. Robust school systems and practices will provide principals and teachers with a vehicle to develop and support common understandings in their school about the NCCD and the important role of teachers within it. Robust school processes also support and promote shared and consistent decision-making around each of the steps in the NCCD.

This document provides guidance about strategies that will support principals and teachers in planning and implementation of the NCCD and in making effective and consistent decisions. It does not replace other information available to schools to support the NCCD and should be used in conjunction with information provided on the [NCCD Portal](#).

Preparation and effective school processes

Many principals and teachers across Australia took part in the phased national implementation of the NCCD (2013–15). Data and feedback from these principals and teachers highlighted a range of planned and practical actions that have been demonstrated to support effective and consistent decision-making in implementing the NCCD process in their schools.

These actions include the following.

- Strong, strategic and effective **school leadership** and involvement from the principal and the executive team.
- **A whole school or school team approach** connecting all teachers and support staff to the NCCD and its processes. This key strategy was used by many schools to accommodate variables in the decision-making process such as teacher experience, knowledge, and understanding of the provision of support for students with disability.
- **Analysis** of all available information to inform evidence-based decisions about the inclusion of students in the NCCD, including the level of adjustment and category of disability for each student. Maintaining an evidence base is a requirement of the NCCD.
- Targeted professional learning promoting **knowledge and understanding of the DDA and the Standards**. It is strongly recommended that teachers, support staff and principals complete professional learning in this area as a vital adjunct to the NCCD. A whole-school approach to professional learning about the DDA and the Standards, as well as regular refreshers, will help to ensure that all staff in the school remain knowledgeable about their shared responsibilities and accountabilities to students with disability.

- The **planned development of shared understanding among school staff** about [the NCCD model](#), levels of adjustment and categories of disability supported through the use of resources on the NCCD Portal.
- Planned, rigorous and ongoing **professional conversations** about highly effective teaching and learning. This includes the provision of quality differentiated teaching that meets the needs of all students, including those with disability, as well as the provision of personalised adjustments where needed for students with disability to meet their identified educational needs in consultation with the student and/or their parents, guardians or carers.

Aligning professional dialogue and decision-making with the model for the NCCD will support school teams to achieve consistency in decisions about students included in the NCCD.

Mechanisms to support teacher decision-making

The professional judgements that teachers make about their students' learning needs and the evidence that they draw on to support these judgements will reflect a wide range of school contexts and practices.

Individual teacher judgement about which students are receiving an adjustment, which of these students has a disability under the DDA, their level of adjustment and disability category may vary within a school and across key learning areas and over time. Teacher judgement is influenced by a range of variables including teacher experience, knowledge, and understanding of the provision of support for students with disability.

A team-based approach can assist in building teacher capability and supporting teachers in their decisions. Establishing a school culture where the development of effective teaching and learning practices and student engagement is a shared responsibility promotes school-led consultative decision-making practices and the development of common understanding.

Collaborative, team-based approaches that continuously refer back to the definitions and descriptors provided in the NCCD model will also assist school staff to moderate variances that may arise among teachers when determining each student's level of adjustment and disability category. This will contribute to greater consistency within the school and with the quality of data collected for the NCCD.

Ongoing professional dialogue between colleagues is a powerful tool in developing and maintaining consistency of teacher judgement now and over time. The allocation of time for these discussions will support continuous improvement in teacher capacity in this area.

The characteristics that make each school unique will shape and inform the systems and processes they put in place. These will identify and support the educational needs of their students with disability, and the professional learning and support needs of their teachers. Principals have an important leadership role in establishing and maintaining effective learning and support processes that respond to their specific school context. This might include: whole-school data managements systems, standardised report templates and other school or systems-based tools.

Strategies to support decision-making: Step 1

Which students are included in the NCCD?

The NCCD highlights the importance of teachers and support staff knowing and understanding the learning and support needs of individual students and groups of students, including where adjustments may be required. Schools that build into their practice an ongoing analysis of a range of data about student engagement, learning growth and outcomes can plan more effectively for students' learning.

The students included in each year's NCCD will provide an increasingly useful starting point for professional discussions and school planning. This data will assist schools to monitor and support planning for individual students.

Evidences of personalised learning and support

Decision-making for the NCCD relies on evidences of personalised adjustments and reflects the wide range of practices in schools for meeting the educational needs of students with disability. Schools will draw on evidence from across four key areas when making their decisions:

- assessed individual needs of the student
- adjustments being provided to the student to address the disability – this includes support provided with quality differentiated teaching practice
- ongoing monitoring and review of the adjustments
- consultation and collaboration with the student and/or parents, guardians and carers or associates and other professionals.

Effective management of the process of personalised learning and support for students with disability forms part of each school's accountability.

The development of protocols within the school about how evidence of personalised learning and support is recorded and stored is an important practice that supports the smooth implementation of the NCCD. More importantly, it is an essential resource in personalising the learning for students with disability.

The definition of disability in the NCCD

The model for the nationally consistent collection of data is based on the existing obligations of all Australian schools under the DDA and the Standards, and draws on the definition of disability in the DDA.

The DDA uses a broad definition of disability in order to provide protection against discrimination for a wide range of people. In addition to an individual with disability, the DDA covers other people, including associates of a person with disability, people who do not have disability but who may face disability discrimination in the future, people who are not in fact impaired in functioning but treated as impaired, and people with conditions that may result in impairment such as obesity, mild allergies or physical sensitivities, and those who wear glasses. See the Australian Human Rights Commission's [DDA guide: Who does the DDA protect?](#)

The Standards clarify the obligation of schools under the DDA to provide reasonable adjustments for students with disability where required so that they can access and participate in education on an equitable basis to their peers.

Which students should be included?

Students should be included in the NCCD where:

1. the student's impairment meets the DDA's broad definition of disability **and**
2. the functional impact of the student's disability results in the school actively addressing or supporting the student's specific individual education needs within quality differentiated teaching practice and monitoring the student or providing a 'supplementary' or higher level of adjustment or support **and**
3. students are provided with adjustment(s) to address their disability related needs for 10 weeks or more (consecutive or cumulative) over the 12 month period prior to the NCCD.

To determine whether a student is eligible to be counted, consider whether:

1. there is evidence at the school that the student is being provided with an educational adjustment to meet ongoing, long-term specific needs associated with disability
2. decisions have been made in consultation with the student and/or their parents, guardians or carers.

It is not the intention of the NCCD to count every student who is protected from discrimination under the DDA, including every student who has a health or other condition where their condition does not impact on the student's ability to participate in schooling on the same basis as their peers. Where the student's condition does not have a functional impact on their schooling or require additional monitoring, the student should not be included in the NCCD.

For example, a student who wears glasses to correct mild vision impairment and needs no further educational assessment, monitoring or support in relation to their eyesight, should not be included in the NCCD. The definition of disability under the DDA and obligations under the Standards includes those students who are receiving individually targeted specialist education services and supports as well as students with disability who are supported by general resources available within the school.

Students with disability as defined under the DDA and the Standards are in mainstream or regular schools as well as special schools and specialist support classes.

The definition includes:

- students who have formally diagnosed disability by a health or allied health practitioner
- students who may not have a formal disability diagnosis but have impairment that requires an adjustment
- students with intellectual, physical, sensory and social/emotional disability as well as students with difficulties in learning or behaviour due to disability
- students who are gifted and talented and whose learning is impacted by disability.

Students with a disability confirmation or verification who are receiving targeted, specialist supports are only a subset of those students who meet the definition of disability under the DDA and obligations under the Standards and may be included in the NCCD. For this reason, it is important for schools to have processes in place to identify whether the student who is receiving an adjustment meets the DDA definition of disability and the school's obligations under the Standards. Professional learning about the DDA and Standards and ongoing discussion in the school will support teachers in identifying and responding to students with disability.

Are adjustments provided to address disability?

Schools and teachers make adjustments and provide support for a range of students. Not all adjustments and supports are provided to address disability. These examples show a student who would not be included in the NCCD, and one who would be included:

- A student is experiencing difficulty with learning as a result of external factors such as limited school attendance or acquisition of English as a second language while learning in English. This student would not be included in the NCCD.
- A student is experiencing difficulty with learning as a result of a disorder or malfunction that results in them learning differently from other students without the disorder or malfunction. This student would be included in the NCCD.

Strategies to support decision-making: Step 2

Level of adjustment

Determining the level of adjustment

Once it is determined that a student with disability is having their individual disability needs actively addressed or supported through quality differentiated teaching practice or at a higher level of adjustment, teachers and school teams use their professional judgement to determine the level of adjustment that each student is being provided to address the educational impact of disability.

The Standards require that where a student with disability needs reasonable adjustments to ensure their equitable access and participation, the school must consult the student, or their parent, guardian or carer, when determining the type of reasonable adjustments needed.

Decision-making about the level of adjustment should be continually aligned with [the model](#) and based on evidence. Schools analyse available evidence to make professional judgements about the level of adjustment provided to students.

It is important that all school staff refer to the definitions and descriptors of the [levels of adjustment](#) for national consistency.

Students with disability for whom support is provided within quality differentiated teaching practice

Students may be counted in this category of the NCCD where they meet the DDA's broad definition of disability **and** the functional impact of their disability is addressed by the school actively responding to their specific individual education needs within quality differentiated teaching practice. The functional impact of disability for these students would generally require active monitoring by the teacher and school staff.

Some students with disability will have been provided with an adjustment in the past, or will require an adjustment in the future, but for the period they are being considered for the NCCD, they are receiving support that actively addresses their specific individual education needs through quality differentiated teaching practice. These students should be counted under the 'Support provided within quality differentiated teaching practice' level of adjustment.

The decision to actively support the student through quality differentiated teaching practice should also be made in consultation with the student, their parent, guardian or carer.

Differentiating between supplementary, substantial and extensive adjustments

Some students need targeted or more focused and personalised learning and support in order for them to participate and achieve successful outcomes on the same basis as their peers.

For most of these students, this will include adjustments to teaching and learning programs as well as a wide range of supports for both the student and their teacher. These adjustments and supports are facilitated through a collaborative process involving the student; their parents, guardians or carers; teachers; education staff; and other professionals as needed.

Consistency in determining levels of adjustment is strengthened when teachers are able to make judgements based on a shared understanding of how the levels correlate to quality teacher practice within the school.

In the first instance, school teams should refer to the information provided about the levels of adjustment including typical adjustments and student characteristics in [the model](#) and carefully consider the evidence that underpins the adjustments that students are being provided with.

Where schools are having difficulty deciding between the levels of adjustment, it may also be helpful to consider the frequency, intensity and range of adjustments or support being provided. For example:

- Is the adjustment or support provided at specific times during the week, at most times on most days, or at all times?
- Is the adjustment or support provided for particular activities in some or many learning areas, for most courses and curriculum areas, or across all courses and curricula and activities?
- Is personalised support provided in one or more areas of communication or is there intensive support in multiple areas of communication?
- Is the adjustment or support provided to supervise or actively monitor personal care, or for planned, highly specialised personal care and safety support?
- Do adjustments to enable access to learning include specialised technology or equipment; some modifications to school facilities, or highly modified school environments; support or close supervision, support from specialist staff, or extensive support from specialist staff?

When differentiating between the levels of adjustment, case studies and other resources available on the NCCD Portal will provide teachers and school teams with examples of each of the levels. The national resources assist schools to moderate their decision-making while retaining the integrity of the NCCD model. The [moderation guidelines](#) are a useful tool in deciding on the levels of adjustment.

Strategies to support decision-making: Step 3

Determining the broad category of disability

When considering the broad category of disability for each student included in the NCCD, schools should refer to definitions in [the model](#).

Schools may draw on a range of evidence to support their decision about which disability category to select, including medical and other specialist reports available to the school. However, the selection of a disability category in the NCCD does not rely on a formal medical diagnosis but on the professional judgement of the teacher about the aspect of the student's learning need that has the greatest impact on their education.

The disability category selected will be the area of disability that is the main driver or focus of the adjustments being provided for the student to support their learning.

If a student has multiple disabilities or does not readily fit within one category, schools should select the disability category that requires the greatest extent of reasonable adjustment to enable the student to access and participate in education.

Additional support and resources

Teachers with queries about implementation of the NCCD in their school should contact their principal or school executive in the first instance.

Each state and territory and education sector has a nominated contact point for further queries about implementation of the NCCD in their jurisdiction or sector. These details can be found on the [Key contacts](#) page of the [NCCD Portal](#)

A range of resources is available to assist schools to understand the NCCD and support planning for implementation in their school. The NCCD Portal contains important information for schools and their communities about the NCCD.