



Review of the impact of COVID-19 on school students with disability

Discussion Paper

Introduction

The purpose of this discussion paper is to support the Australian Government's public consultations for the Review of the impact of COVID-19 on school students with disability (the Review). In this paper we discuss:

- the purpose of the Review
- potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on school students with disability
- how you can get involved in the Review.

The paper also includes discussion questions to help us learn about your views and experiences.

Purpose of the review

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented disruptions to schooling in Australia. It has required rapid and ongoing adjustments from students, families, educators, schools and education authorities.

The Review will consider:

- the educational experiences of school students with disability throughout the pandemic
- the impact of those educational experiences on the wellbeing and education-related outcomes of school students with disability
- how support for school students with disability has been managed by governments, education authorities and schools.

In formulating recommendations, the Review will focus on opportunities for national collaborative actions to strengthen the capability of schools to support students with disability in future emergency events, and support the recovery of school students with disability from the impacts of the pandemic.

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on school students with disability

The way in which the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted school students with disability is likely to vary according to individual circumstances, and which state or territory a student lives and is educated in. This Review wants to understand the depth and breadth of those experiences.

Together with public consultation activities, the Review will draw on existing evidence and research from sources such as the Disability Royal Commission, federal, state and territory governments, peak bodies, education authorities and schools.

The Disability Royal Commission identified that some of the key challenges during the pandemic have included:¹

- obtaining reasonable adjustments and supports online
- ensuring students with disability have the same curriculum as their peers without disability
- maintaining positive student-teacher-parent relationships and communication
- maintaining social connections with peers.

These findings are consistent with the 2020 Review of the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*, which found that, in general, the pandemic amplified existing challenges for students with disability, and impacted their support and connection to school.

The Review is also aware of research by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare that indicates, overall, the pandemic has had a negative impact on the wellbeing of young Australians.² This finding aligns with work by the Australian Human Rights Commission that found children have struggled with remote learning, loss of routine, and the lack of social engagement and contact caused by the pandemic.³

Who should get involved in the Review

The Review consultations will seek to hear from a diverse range of school students with disability including those:

- who are First Nations
- from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- living in regional, rural and remote locations
- who identify as LGBTIQ+.

The review consultations will also seek to hear from parents, carers and educators of school students with disability.

¹ The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (2022) *Issues paper- The impact of and responses to the Omicron wave of the COVID-19 pandemic for people with disability*, accessed 13 September 2022.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021) *Australia's youth web report*, accessed 13 September 2022.

³ Hand K, Kealy N, Newell S, Nicolson S and Taylor A (2022) *'Mental health shapes my life: COVID-19 & kids wellbeing'* Australian Human Rights Commission website, accessed 13 September 2022.

How to get involved in the Review

We welcome all contributions to the Review. This includes from school students with disability, their parents and carers, educators, school leaders, administrators, academics and advocates. We want to hear from as many people as possible.

Our public consultations will run from 31 January to 28 March 2023. During that time there will be a range of ways to get involved. As dates for consultations are confirmed they will be put on the Engagement Hub website.

At the website you can make your own written, video and audio submissions, complete a questionnaire, or register for an event. To find out more, visit the Engagement Hub website or sign-up to get updates about the Review as more information becomes available.

Share your experience

We want to hear about your experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following questions are things for you to think about to help you provide input to the Review. You don't need to respond to all (or any) of the questions – they are simply there as a guide.

If you want to contribute to the Review, you can:

- **make a submission**, considering the questions below. You can upload your own submission or story in a written document, or as an audio or video file. If you can't provide your submission electronically you can send it in the mail to:

COVID Review Team
Student Learning and Disability Strategy Branch
GPO Box 9880
Canberra City ACT 2601

- **complete the online questionnaire**
- **get involved in an event**, such as a webinar, online discussion board or focus group.

What we want to know

Questions for school students with disability, parents and carers

- **What has been your/your child's experience of school education during the COVID-19 pandemic?**
 - This could be about things like communication with teachers, access to technology and learning materials, or how suitable learning activities were during remote learning and/or face-to-face learning.
- **If you/your child has returned to face-to-face learning after periods of remote learning due to COVID-19, what has this experience been like?**
 - Have you/your child needed additional support? Has the support you need changed since COVID-19?
- **Are you/your child experiencing any issues or barriers that stop you from returning to face-to-face learning? If so, please tell us what they are.**
- **How well did schools and governments support you/your child to continue learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?**
 - This could be about things like your/your child's access to supports, such as specialist resources, curriculum changes, updates to individual education/learning plans, mental health support, and teaching staff.
- **Can you tell us about the information you received from your/your child's school about accessing and receiving support during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

You might like to focus on:

 - Whether there was enough information about the supports available if/when you moved to remote learning, and during remote learning?
 - Whether information was available to help move back and forth between remote and face-to-face learning.
- **How has your/your child's academic achievement been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?**
 - You might also like to think about any other supports that could have helped you/your child's academic achievement.
- **Are there any other ways you/your child's education has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?**
 - For example, has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your/your child's ability to successfully move between schools, schooling year levels, or from school into further education, training, or employment?
- **Thinking about your/your child's educational experience during the pandemic, what impact did these experiences have on your/your child's wellbeing?**
 - You might like to think about your/your child's mental health, independence, resilience, place in community, relationships, and experiences at school.

- **Have you/your child been able to stay connected with peers and the school community during any periods of remote learning?**
- **What settings, supports, and technologies provided a positive experience for students with disability during the COVID-19 pandemic?**
- **In future, what do you think could be improved for students with disability during a major emergency event like the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Questions for educators, providers of education and support workers

- **What has been your experience of students with disability accessing and participating in school education during the COVID-19 pandemic?**
 - You might like to focus part of your response on your ability to contact and communicate with students with disability, your access to technology, your ability to provide modified learning materials during any periods of remote learning, and/or, where relevant, the ability to prepare students with disability to return to face-to-face learning.
- **Have you successfully supported students with disability to return to face-to-face learning after any periods of remote learning?**
 - If yes, how? Were additional supports required to help students with disability return?
 - If not, what issues or barriers exist that are preventing a successful return to face-to-face learning?
- **Have you had the information and advice you need to support students with disability to access and participate in school education during the COVID-19 pandemic?**
 - You might like to consider your access to, and the quality of, preparation time, information and advice about school closure plans, specialist resources, curriculum modifications, updates to individual education/learning plans, psychosocial support, and staffing.
- **Did the supports available to assist you or assist your students with disability in accessing and participating in school education change during the COVID-19 pandemic?**
 - You might like to reflect on whether support/assistance for learning increased or decreased, if there were shifts in who provided support, if the quality of support improved or worsened or if the time to access and receive support increased or decreased.
- **What settings, supports, and technologies provided a positive experience for students with disability during the COVID-19 pandemic?**
- **In your view, is there more that could be done to minimise the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on school students with disability? Why?**
- **Have the academic outcomes and/or wellbeing of students with disability been impacted (positively or negatively) by their educational experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic? Why?**

- **Has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your ability to support students with disability to successfully transition between schools, schooling year levels, or from school into further education, training, or employment?**
- **What improvements could be made for students with disability during another major emergency event like the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Accessibility

People can choose how they want to engage, including answering questions in their own time online, or joining a discussion. We will do our best to ensure all consultations accommodate specific needs and requests.

We will ensure consultation events are accessible. This includes having Easy Read documents, Auslan interpreters and live captioning.

Easy Read information sheets will be made available before events to help you think about the information we will cover, and the questions being asked.

Public consultations will inform our advice to governments

Your input to the Review will provide insights into how educational experiences throughout the pandemic have impacted on the wellbeing and education-related outcomes of school students with disability. It will ensure we deliver on the Commonwealth government's commitment to help children and young people bounce back from the impacts of the pandemic.

We will work closely with state and territory governments, and representatives of non-government schooling in the development of the final report and recommendations. Our intention is to focus on opportunities for national collaborative action between the Australian Government, states and territories, and government and non-government education providers.

The Review report will be provided to the Federal Minister for Education during 2023.

Contacts

If you have questions or want to know more about the Review, please contact the Department of Education, at DisabilityStrategy@education.gov.au.

For more information about how to get involved in the Review, including support to register, please contact The Social Deck at engage@thesocialdeck.com or on 0491 617 118.