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Autism Victoria Professional Advisory Panel

Position statement on:

Integration of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Integration traditionally refers to the inclusion of students with special needs into regular/mainstream schools, but it is generally accepted that Special schools, Special Developmental schools and Early Childhood Educational settings, also need to modify their programs to the specific learning needs of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Integration should be responsive to the individual strengths and difficulties of each individual student and supported with the appropriate guidance, resources and staff training in the specific learning requirements of students with ASD.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) "... is committed to delivering an inclusive education system that ensures all students have access to a quality education to meet their diverse needs".¹ Victorian Schools are required to comply with the Disability Standards for Education 2005² which seek to clarify The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1992.³ The DDA sets out to prevent discrimination against a person on the grounds of disability and specifies that schools must comply, unless the enrolment of a child with a disability or reasonable adjustments required to allow participation on the same basis as students without disabilities, will impose unjustifiable hardship on a school.

Although the core characteristics of ASD are consistent, no one child with autism will have exactly the same pattern of strengths and needs as another. An understanding of the unique learning style, cognitive profile, communication, social and self-regulation abilities of the individual child is required if an educational program for a student with ASD is to utilise their strengths, meet their needs and facilitate development.

The empirical evidence available on the efficacy or effectiveness of inclusive settings for student with autism is limited and inconclusive but positive outcomes have been found for many students with ASD if the required supports, resources and staff training are in place.⁴

Recommendations

Autism Victoria, the peak body representing individuals with ASD, recommends that the educational program should consider the placement, teaching methods and curriculum content within the context of the individual needs and strengths of each student with ASD.⁵ Staff should be trained in the unique learning needs of students with ASD with access to appropriate support and resources. Sensitive management of transition and the establishment of a positive and collaborative problem solving relationship between home, school and specialised service are critical to the successful placement of students with ASD. Reduced class sizes, adequate planning time for staff, the development of communication and social skills for the student with ASD, the use of support staff to work with 'all' students on a needs basis, and ongoing evaluation of inclusion are recommended.

References

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3. Australian Commonwealth Government. (1992). Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act. Canberra.
4. Danne, C.J., Beirne-Smith, M., & Latham, D. (2000). Administrators' and teachers' perceptions of the collaborative efforts of inclusion in the elementary grades. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*, 121(2), 331-338.
5. Roberts J M and Prior M (2006) A review of the research to identify the most effective models of practice in early intervention for children with autism spectrum disorders.
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