

# DISABILITY STANDARDS FOR EDUCATION 2005: PRACTICE EXEMPLARS



Australian Government  
Department of Education and Training

This document contains exemplars of good practice in developing reasonable adjustments for students with disability in line with the Disability Standards for Education 2005.

The Disability Standards for Education clarify the obligations of education and training providers and seek to ensure that students with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as other students. The Standards cover:

- enrolment in education
- participation in education
- curriculum development, accreditation and delivery
- student support services
- harassment and victimisation.

Each of the exemplars is a real story of an education provider working with students and their families to ensure a fair and inclusive experience in education. While the exemplars cover a range of education settings and student needs, the lessons learned are transferrable to educators, students and parents across the country.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- students and their parents for sharing their stories
- education providers
- referrers of stories



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## EARLY YEARS

## PRIMARY

## SECONDARY

## VOCATIONAL

## HIGHER

### STORY



Five-year-old Liam will be starting in a mainstream school next year after two years in Brisbane kindergarten programmes. He is the second of three children, and is described as sociable and enthusiastic, with a caring nature. He has many interests that include swimming, soccer, and playing with his siblings and cousins. Liam has down syndrome, which results in delays in his development, including his speech.

When looking for an early education programme for Liam, his parents wanted a local community to maximise the chance for him to make friends with future school classmates. Their main priority was that he would be able to experience full inclusion — that is, being seen as a valued and contributing member of the group and being able to participate in every aspect of the kindergarten experience. Liam would need extra support to follow instructions and complete tasks, so the challenge was to balance this with promoting his independence and social inclusion. Self-reliance was highly valued by Liam's mother, so it was important for the model of support not to impede his developing sense of self.

When Liam's mother visited the kindergarten she was happy to find a teacher who focused on Liam as a person first, with many characteristics, including his disability. For Liam's mother the language is very important, and what she heard was a focus on 'four-year-old Liam' rather than 'a special needs child'.

To assist Liam starting at the kindergarten he and his mother spent transition time there on a couple of occasions. This provided the teacher with an insight into how communicative Liam was with his mother — his face lit up as he conversed with her — and provided an insight into what the teacher and Liam's relationship could be, once established.

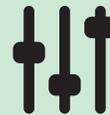
It was important to Liam's mother that his independence be promoted, including through simple things like the teacher's assistant not being 'Liam's aide', but rather an extra resource to the group. How an aide is referred to affects how they are seen both by the child being supported, and by others. Ultimately it affects how the child sees himself.

Engaging with Liam presented a learning curve for the educators who hadn't worked with a child with down syndrome — a learning curve they describe as being a very positive one. Underpinning their learning was a philosophy that all children are unique and adjustments are made for each in different ways.

Initially an individual plan was documented, with goals for toileting, engaging with other children, and reduced reliance on the aide. The goals were formally reviewed through interviews between the teacher and parents twice a year, and adjusted on a needs basis through informal conversations.

Mainstream school has always been the plan for Liam. In preparation for prep in the coming year, the major focus has been on developing his communication skills, and toilet training; and having Liam be able to follow verbal instruction and conform to classroom expectations. To help plan his support needs for mainstream school the aide has increasingly been spending time on other tasks as Liam engages more independently with the programme.

### REASONABLE ADJUSTMENT



The adjustments made to the kindergarten programme and the environment included:

- the availability of an extra aide to help the teacher guide Liam's participation and activities
- the use of key word signs as much as possible, in conjunction with spoken language, which gave Liam a practical form of communication while also encouraging his speech development
- assistance with toilet training
- a readiness to reflect and adapt as Liam's confidence and ability to engage developed
- increased communication between educators to ensure that Liam was always in line of sight
- reinforcing standard safety practices for all children, such as communicating to all parents that no child is to be let through the external gate without their parents.

Other adjustments were trialled but not kept if the benefit wasn't realised. For example, the educators initially used visual tools suggested by Liam's occupational therapist, but found that Liam became distracted from his routine. Additionally, a communication book was used where the aide would capture the detail of his day and Liam's mother would add to it before the next session. Strong communication patterns between parent and educators have become established over time, and Liam has become familiar with the routine, so the book is no longer used.



***For Liam's mother the language [at the kindergarten] is very important, and what she heard was a focus on 'four-year-old Liam' rather than 'a special needs child'.***

- KINDERGARTEN TEACHER



## OUTCOMES



Liam has been able to enjoy all the benefits of an inclusive kindergarten programme, and the effects on Liam's life are described by his mother as 'invaluable'. Over the year she has seen him grow emotionally; form friendships; and be invited to, and successfully attend birthday parties and play dates.

From the team's perspective, as trust and familiarity have been established, less one-on-one guidance and dedicated support time has been needed. His increasing confidence and independence means he's able to follow instructions and knows how to behave in the various activities. While Liam continues to need re-direction to stay on task, he has an increased capacity to be part of the group for the duration of a story or other group activity.

Additionally, Liam's growing confidence and awareness of expectations is helping his engagement in transition to school activities — he has participated in a transition school visit with enthusiasm, and without his mother or the kindergarten aide present.

The benefits also extend to his family: his older sister is seeing Liam take the same education pathway that she did, and having the same expectations of engaging in everything a child his age should experience.

Liam's parents are confident that their partnership with the kindergarten staff has given him an enriching preschool experience, and they have the same goal of inclusion for primary school. Academically, Liam will have an individual learning plan to suit the pace at which he learns, reflecting his mother's view: '...despite the difference in pace, his potential has no limit'.

“ *It's been very positive for [Liam's sister] to witness him being included and never pulled away or segregated.*

- KINDERGARTEN TEACHER

## COSTS



Funding for Liam, based on his diagnosis, covers an aide for just over five hours of the 15-hour programme. Liam's family incurs no additional expense.

## SKILLS AND BEHAVIOURS



The first point of contact and how a family is welcomed into a service speaks clearly to parents about inclusion — parents are looking for signs that their child is seen first, and that their disability is just one of many characteristics their educators will engage with.

Liam's mother says, “Being part of a kindergarten community is a beautifully rewarding experience. An inclusive classroom brings enormous benefits not only to the child with a disability, but to all students. By giving others the opportunity to see Liam's amazing qualities and what they bring to the class, community and society, moves the conversation away from deficits to the adjustments that allow any child be an active contributor and valued member of the group”.

“

*I just want it to be known how important it is ... and how grateful we are, that he hasn't felt excluded – it means so much for the child and the parent; and we can see how beneficial it's been for Liam*

- LIAM'S MOTHER

”

## EARLY YEARS

## PRIMARY

## SECONDARY

## VOCATIONAL

## HIGHER

## STORY



Five-year-old Peter is enjoying his second year of kindergarten, which is in a metropolitan area. He loves music, being read to and has many favourite stories. His autism and speech apraxia<sup>1</sup> affect his engagement with people and the activity around him, his attention span and his ability to communicate with spoken language, as well as his energy levels. At times he is anxious, and at other times he is engaged and relaxed. Peter's presentation, which can include vocal stimming<sup>2</sup>, can lead to him being underestimated intellectually and therefore academically.

Peter's parents sought a kindergarten environment where educators would see his strengths, and would work with them to support his age-appropriate development and learning. Their aim was for Peter to be included in the learning and social life of the kindergarten to help him achieve his potential.

Peter's kindergarten is a double unit kindergarten with two educators: a teacher and a teacher/director. When the director contacted Peter's mother about an upcoming place, she learned about Peter and his mother's plans for his inclusion in a mainstream kindergarten programme. Peter's mother values the kindergarten experience her daughter enjoyed and was determined that Peter had access to the same quality of education prior to school.

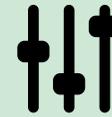
As Peter's mother and the director talked, Peter's mother heard a confident and positive educator confirm that Peter would be supported to participate, contribute to, and benefit from their programme. Peter's mother visited the kindergarten to meet the director and assistant, and was confident with their focus on Peter. After a few transition mornings spent at the kindergarten with his mother, Peter was ready to attend the 15-hour programme.

There is no documented plan or communication book for Peter and this reflects the trusting relationship and the adaptability of the programme to accommodate Peter's needs. For example, Peter's mother can provide updated details about Peter's physical therapies, and these are woven into the programme, to focus on gross or fine motor skills, or speech/language development. The director and Peter's mother maintain regular catch-ups, mostly at pick-up time and through more formal parent-teacher sessions each term.

The kindergarten's approach to including Peter is reflected in a creative method of communicating his capabilities to other children. At the suggestion of his mother, the teacher filmed him reading and then showed this to other children, allowing them to see that he has similar skills and abilities which they may not have seen in the kindergarten environment.

1. Apraxia is a speech disorder where the messages are not effectively directed to the mouth, tongue and jaw muscles to form the child's thoughts into words.

2. Vocal stimming can include mimicking, growling and humming, which can be used as a form of self-regulation, to block out stressful sound, or as a form of self-expression.

REASONABLE  
ADJUSTMENT

The adjustments made to the kindergarten programme have included:

- one-on-one support to promote Peter's engagement in the routine and overall programme
- weaving aspects of Peter's occupational therapy, speech therapy and physiotherapy programmes into the kindergarten programme
- visual schedules to assist Peter to follow the programme through the day
- sensory aids to help him to stay with, and be part of the group at 'group time', including a sensory wedge cushion to provide sensory input when sitting; a weighted turtle to give deep pressure input when sitting or sleeping; and oral sensory necklaces for chewing, instead of chewing non-food related items
- a calming space with sensory toys for when Peter feels overwhelmed
- watchfulness by the educators in the play area because he doesn't always anticipate risk, e.g. around the swings
- simple adaptations at meal times to accommodate his restricted diet.

These adjustments were facilitated by funding for a full-time additional needs assistant, who worked alongside skilled educators that had an adaptive approach to their work.

“

*I know he'll be cared for and looked after and appreciated.*

PETER'S MOTHER

”

## OUTCOMES



The outcomes for Peter have been significant — Peter no longer wanders from group activities; he has become familiar with the structure of the programme, and understands what is expected of him; his peers look out for him, which suggests they accept him as part of their group; and he has come to recognise some of the children when he sees them in other settings. Additionally,

Peter experiences a seamless transition between home and kindergarten because his physical therapies are blended into his day.

For his parents, the outcome has been a high-level of trust and respect for Peter's educators; because of the contribution this makes to his kindergarten environment, Peter looks forward to going to kindergarten and is thriving.

## COSTS



Funding from the Queensland Department of Education and Training covers 30 per cent of the cost for the additional needs assistant and the kindergarten funds the balance. No extra costs are passed onto Peter's parents.

## SKILLS AND BEHAVIOURS



Peter's mother sees education as a journey for any child with extra needs, as well as for their parents. Through advice from other parents and service providers, Peter's parents sought opportunities early, and when talking to professionals always listened out for their attitude toward children with extra needs, and what they could offer Peter. Engagement in early intervention support helped in many ways, including priming Peter for the next stage of his journey. A repeat year of kindergarten has also benefited Peter by consolidating his achievements in his first year.

Peter is an active participant of the kindergarten group and like all the children within the group he is challenged and supported by the educators to develop and extend his learning.

Educators who are positive about supporting a child's learning and inclusion promote parents' confidence in leaving their child in the care of those educators. The educator's ability to acknowledge and value the input of parents about their child is also vital to building the partnership between home and school.



*Parents are looking for educators who want to be part of their child's education journey.*

PETER'S MOTHER



## EARLY YEARS

## PRIMARY

## SECONDARY

## VOCATIONAL

## HIGHER

## STORY



Ten-year-old Henry is in year four at primary school in a large regional city. Six years ago while at kindergarten he was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), with anxiety being his biggest challenge. Henry's mother was initially anxious about sending him to school because as the oldest of four,

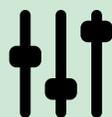
he was the first of his mother's children to attend school, and she had the additional worry of his developmental delays.

Henry's mother started to look for a primary school that would support her son's needs, and be a 'partner' to Henry and his family during his school years. Henry's mother wanted the school to take a proactive and holistic approach to supporting Henry, rather than reacting to issues when they appeared. Henry's mother has found a school that is able to be a proactive partner and Henry has been going to this school since prep.

The priority for Henry's time at primary school has been to develop his self-management skills, and to help him identify and articulate his emotions. This is because when he's anxious Henry can struggle to maintain focus and concentration on task for long periods. From a pragmatic perspective Henry can struggle to interpret social situations with his peers and become easily frustrated and overwhelmed especially in competitive situations.

Working with the school will also help Henry develop his engagement and organisation skills; and developing his handwriting, executive processing and group participation skills will help Henry to engage with his peers. Guides and redirection aids will also support Henry to organise and follow a task, including, knowing what to use for a task, or what to get out of his backpack that day.

## REASONABLE ADJUSTMENT



Many of the adjustments made to support Henry's participation have been focused on reducing his anxiety to support his learning. The adjustments have included:

- additional transition visits into prep, and a social story to help Henry become familiar with the school environment
- routine access to the school sensory area, including sensory toys and activities, which he can access throughout the day, especially in the morning when he is most anxious
- sensory yoga moves, or the use of headphones to avoid over-stimulation caused by classroom noise
- social stories<sup>3</sup>, especially when the usual pattern of the day has changed because, for example, there's a school excursion
- communication tools, such as pictures, to help him understand and communicate what his feelings are
- visual charts and schedules to guide him through the day, with activities broken down into individual tasks and steps, including visual charts of how to participate in games
- steps for starting the school day attached to his school bag that include routine tasks for Henry to focus on before classes begin, such as helping with the set-up of the sensory area
- contact between the classroom teacher and Henry's mother to exchange messages about Henry's pre-school morning, and his progress throughout the day.

Access to the school's sensory area is important to Henry. His classroom teacher is also aware of his sensory needs and provides a weighted toy to help Henry with his anxiety strategies. In conversation, she may assist his focus by placing her hand on his shoulder.

Communication between Henry's mother and the school is vital. At least once a term the school holds case conferences between parents, the classroom teacher and the assistant principal, with input from Henry's relevant allied health professionals and the aide in his classroom. The documented individual support plan, which addresses pragmatics, social, behavioural and learning goals is reviewed and amended if needed.

Outside this formal process, the assistant principal, Henry's classroom teacher and his mother are in regular contact through playground conversations, texts and emails. Text messaging has proven to be a crucial tool in providing Henry with a smooth entry into his school day, and allows his teacher to send an update to his mother during the day.

Although Henry is not able to access a dedicated aide, placing him in a class with an aide who was with another child provided a positive environment for Henry and was an important way of engaging him in his learning. Now in year four, Henry operates without such support.

Henry's mother is a member of the school's fortnightly Parents' Inclusion Support Group, which grew out of the informal support that parents were giving to each other. Parents can discuss ideas and strategies to support their children's learning and social engagement; and the group gives them a chance to share stories and have a laugh. The Assistant Principal attends for a part of each session and contributes when appropriate. Henry's mother finds the group reduces her sense of isolation, and provides a feeling of comfort and normality.

<sup>3</sup> Social Stories™ is an intervention for children with autism that uses a story, with pictures and an appropriate level of language, and sometimes music or rhyme to both explain a social situation or area of concern, and to help them learn socially appropriate behaviour and responses ([http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/social\\_stories\\_th.html](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/social_stories_th.html)).

## OUTCOMES



Learning the skills to moderate his moods has also increased Henry's confidence because he can see that he 'got through that'. These skills now mean he can identify the signs of his anxiety, and what has distressed him, and talk about his feelings rather than lose control. If a 'melt down' does occur, he is better able to reflect on what happened, and learn from it.

This year, Henry has been more independent and will speak up to clarify a task. And, although he still likes to know what's happening, he isn't always anxious about following a timetable. The assistant principal noted that this resilience has helped him to develop socially. For example, he now joins in soccer games, and next year he will be a buddy to a prep student.

Henry's mother also feels less anxiety than when Henry first started school because she feels listened to and respected. This in turn has a positive impact on Henry.

“ At first, as a parent, every time that phone rings you have a heart attack. That relationship [with the school] is so important. Trust builds over time. – HENRY'S MOTHER ”

## COSTS



Henry and his family receive a funded package under the NDIS, which includes funding his visits to the psychologist and occupational therapist, and access to a social participation program, but excludes supports in school.

The school as a whole however, receives funding under the Victorian Department of Education and Training's Program for Students with Disability, which allows the assistant principal to support students with disability. Additionally, the school funds educational aides and employs a speech therapist one day per week. It also has a budget line for assistive resources, from which Henry gains access to sensory and learning resources.

Henry's mother has invested considerable time and some financial resources to develop her own knowledge and skills in relation to her son's ASD.

## SKILLS AND BEHAVIOURS



The school's non-judgemental and supportive approach to families, including respecting the knowledge parents bring to the school, the parent group and the commitment to case management meetings provide a network of support between the home, the school and allied services. This network approach is essential to responding flexibly to the needs of children at the school and is supported by effective communication between all parties, including a consistency of language, and a culture of inclusion within the school, with a positive emphasis on the achievements of Henry. The children model friendly and inclusive behaviour to one another, which is supported by the school's policies about fair participation. Henry's mother believes that the children respect one another and the school celebrates achievement, regardless of level.

The assistant principal, who is responsible for students with disability, has a high level of knowledge about strategies to support students, including linking into professional health services; and is backed by a supportive principal.

Additionally, the school takes a whole-of-family approach to support by working with the dynamics within a family, such as working with Henry's brother, who doesn't have ASD, but who saw his brother having access to supports he didn't. They provide emotional support to him that helps him understand his brother's needs.

“ These kids aren't helpless — you've got to empower them. Know them and their learning styles, and help them to make their own strong choices. – HENRY'S MOTHER ”

## EARLY YEARS

## PRIMARY

## SECONDARY

## VOCATIONAL

## HIGHER

### STORY



Mac attends a mainstream primary school in rural NSW. Through successful inclusion in his school, Mac engages in the standard school curriculum and enjoys participation in school activities with an extensive friendship group. His positive experience of school life is a result of his parent's advocacy, the school's philosophy of inclusion, and the use of communication technology.

Mac's cerebral palsy means he has no independent movement, has significant vision impairment, and needs assistance with every aspect of his day. Mac uses a device with his feet, pressing through and selecting options to undertake tasks and demonstrate his learning. A communication partner holds the device against his feet.

The school where Mac goes had not previously supported a child with Mac's extensive support needs, and although they were apprehensive about their ability to accommodate Mac, the school welcomed him and his family, acknowledging it was the beginning of a steep learning curve.

Through detailed discussions, an independent learning plan was developed for Mac and is reviewed each year and as appropriate. The initial plan included the basic, but essential goals: get to know Mac and understand his learning capability. His parents had been told that Mac must have a massive cognitive deficit. In a 'light blowing moment' however, it became clear he was learning at the same rate as his peers.

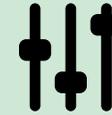
Ultimately it was the NAPLAN testing that allowed Mac to reveal his cognitive capability. In the year five NAPLAN test, Mac's communication partner used earphones and sat, turned away to prevent hearing or seeing the question, which was read to Mac by another adult. In this way there was confidence that no unconscious assistance was provided by the communication partner, and all options were selected by Mac himself. The outcomes determined he was learning at his year level and this means his outcome goals have now been set in line with the other children.

A key message from Mac's experience is to move beyond the planning of physical and care needs, to a deeper understanding of what access to the curriculum and inclusion in social life actually means.

This has developed from the need to find the balance between the school's perspective about how to perform their duty of care around the supervision of Mac, and his parent's vision for Mac to enjoy an 'ordinary life: tonnes of friends and fun, tonnes of natural support, employment — same as any child'. It is this vision that has set the framework for many decisions over time: whether an activity, a type of support, a teaching approach, or interaction, aligned with the vision. If not, then re-thinking may be required to align with the vision for Mac.

An example of re-thinking the school's care of Mac in line with the vision framework, occurred when it became apparent the aide took Mac with her if she left the classroom, but this took him away from his peers and the class activity underway. Mac also let his mother know he was lonely at lunchtime, because he was with the teacher on duty, again away from his peers. The school worked to change this by implementing a variety of creative solutions including helping the students to identify games that Mac could participate in, for example time trials of an obstacle course that Mac could complete with his friends.

### REASONABLE ADJUSTMENT



The adjustments made have included:

- changes to tasks and their associated outputs — such as the time given to complete a task, the amount of work required and how Mac demonstrates his learning — which are all based on the Disability Standards for Education 2005 and the NSW Primary School Syllabus guidance for students with special needs

- ensuring the teacher is working with Mac, like they would with any other child, rather than having the aide pass on the teacher's instructions.
- the school supporting teachers to get past their nervousness that they will do the 'wrong thing'.

In addition to specific adaptations, creative means are used to promote participation, for example:

- when studying and creating shelters in class, Mac acted as a council inspector to assess the physical accessibility of his peers' shelters
- in science, children designed and developed a simple device for Mac's chair for handball games
- in a peer-led initiative, Mac's classmates developed a presentation about Mac's capabilities for the school assembly, providing insight about his classroom work, humour and contribution
- acknowledging the school's concern for Mac's safety by developing a 'wheelchair attendant licence' for children before they could push Mac's chair
- developing a competency within the curriculum that allows Mac's peers to develop their skills against this to take on the role of communication partner.

## OUTCOMES



Mac's mother identifies the biggest success as the level of autonomy Mac has with his peer group, who have become confident and skilled in supporting his physical engagement. Examples of this autonomy include sleeping in a room with five mates at camp, and the development in science class of a device for Mac's chair for handball games.

The benefits to the other children and the broader school community have also been overwhelmingly positive. Creative solutions — like the wheelchair attendant licence — also addressed the perception that only people in paid roles could touch Mac or his chair. It also promoted peer responsibility for their classmate, and their friend.

Parents and the school measure success in the normalised way Mac receives consequences for occasional misbehaviour, and his routine of going home to a friend's house every Tuesday. The principal hears back from other parents about the respectful way their own children talk about Mac at home, providing another indicator that the school's investment in inclusion is rippling out to benefit the wider school community.

Mac's mother notes that inclusion isn't innate: people take time to learn, and don't always get it right. Not always knowing the answer is also part of the learning.

“ **We had an expectation he'd go to school with kids from his neighbourhood to learn at his level and to start out and remain an engaged and valued member of his community.** – *MAC'S MOTHER* ”

## COSTS



Mac's parents have opted to provide Mac's communication technology, and the school has provided a laptop for the aide to load up teaching material for Mac's reader.

The aide is funded by the NSW Department of Education's Disability Support Program, which covers all but a half-hour of the school day. The assistance the aide provides gives Mac's teacher support to prepare his learning materials, attend to care needs, and to support Mac's participation in games and playground activities.

## SKILLS AND BEHAVIOURS



Everyone knowing what they are working towards for Mac has kept the effort on track and by committing to keep working alongside each other, not pulling back when it gets hard, and keeping the focus on Mac, inclusion has been a reality for him.

Mac's parents sometimes take time to consider an idea, and they have found going to the formal planning meetings together is an effective way to make the smaller decisions on the run. Additionally, plans are documented and commitments are followed-up and checked off, which all contributes to building and cementing the trust in the parent-school partnership.

Mac's mother has also invested time in parent advocacy courses and found this helpful in articulating and pursuing their vision for Mac: 'a good, ordinary, inclusive life'.

The principal describes their experience of Mac being in the school in this way: "It's broken down my barriers around disability. Made me think very differently about how kids should be accessing school. He's taken it to the next level. I didn't know how to be natural around him — [I] had to learn. When our teachers move on they will be able to contribute more deeply in their next school".

“ **We had tonnes of meetings in the first couple of years — we were just so slow to move past our own limited understanding. Mac's Mum supported us in so many things and has given so much guidance, and waited for us to catch up. [The] only limitation we had, was ourselves.** ”

– *PRINCIPAL*

## EARLY YEARS

## PRIMARY

## SECONDARY

## VOCATIONAL

## HIGHER

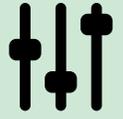
### STORY



McAyla recently completed primary school in Melbourne's outer suburbs. When she was in year three her teacher suggested McAyla undergo testing for a learning difficulty because there was a discrepancy between her achievement levels and her literacy and oral comprehension. Testing led to a diagnosis of dyslexia and, as a result of her diagnosis, McAyla now receives support with her literacy and short-term memory skills.

Before her diagnosis McAyla was frequently in tears before school because McAyla knew her peers' learning was ahead of her own, and she felt inadequate. Noting the importance of self-esteem in a child's ability to learn, her teachers focused on framing dyslexia as a different learning style, rather than a personal failing; and in this way McAyla was supported to build her resilience, which has been central to her staying engaged in the learning challenges that arise.

### REASONABLE ADJUSTMENT



The adjustments included:

- additional time to complete assessments, to account for reduced reading speed
- modified homework tasks, including less homework, and permission to submit it in an alternative format, e.g. PowerPoint or storyboards rather than prose
- she undertook additional English literacy classes rather than being required to study an additional language
- verbal assessments focused on what McAyla 'knew' not just what she could write about
- the provision of shorter, more targeted instructions
- the provision of all the materials for a task to reduce the risk of an item being forgotten by McAyla.

The dyslexia program coordinator, a leading teacher with experience as a numeracy coach ran two programs, which McAyla was involved in during her time in primary school. The first of these was a successful pilot program to boost the resilience of children with dyslexia, which has now become part of the school's dyslexia support program. The program recognises that dyslexia is often more than a literacy difficulty, given the feelings of inadequacy it can lead to and the low self-esteem that can result.

The second program that McAyla was involved in was aimed at improving her literacy skills. Each week a group of students met for an hour to take part in multisensory spelling and reading activities. Using hands-on materials they built up their knowledge of phonics, phonemes, spelling rules, etymology and tenses. They also played memory games to boost their short-term memory. The program coordinator believes the multisensory approach is a positive one, and is common in other aspects of teaching, such as primary numeracy. While all students may benefit from a multisensory approach to developing literacy skills, it has proved essential for students like McAyla.

The school has an overall commitment to the ongoing professional development of teachers in the area of dyslexia and McAyla was placed with a classroom teacher who had undertaken extra professional development related to teaching children with dyslexia, enabling the best match between student and teacher. McAyla's mother has noticed a positive difference in the overall awareness of teachers, which was comparatively low at the time of McAyla's diagnosis.

## OUTCOMES



McAyla's persistence and growing self-confidence have allowed her to become an effective self-advocate, which her mother reports is a useful skill now she has transitioned to secondary school. McAyla is aware of what dyslexia is, and has given a presentation to other students and teachers on what dyslexia means to her, and the affect it has on her learning, and life more broadly.

This confidence has also boosted McAyla's social development: in her earlier years of primary school she had few friends, but was able to go to a secondary school with only a few familiar peers from year six with confidence. Now in her second year of secondary school she has a number of friends.

In the class room McAyla is engaged, and confident to ask questions without embarrassment. Improvements in her literacy and short-term memory mean she has also made gains in other subjects, particularly maths.

“ **These improvements for McAyla haven't come easy for her. It did take a continued and regular approach from the school.**

– *DYSLEXIA PROGRAM COORDINATOR*



## COSTS



The school allocated release time for the leading teacher who became the dyslexia program coordinator from within its global budget. This teacher has since retired and is now employed one day each week to provide dyslexia support activities. The school also funds dyslexia support resources and multisensory activities from its own budget.

McAyla's mother has invested a lot of her own time and resources into up-skilling herself to learn about dyslexia, especially in relation to McAyla's transition to secondary school. This has required the support and cooperation of her employer to ensure she can flexibly arrange her hours when she needs to work with McAyla's school.

## SKILLS AND BEHAVIOURS



Communication has been key to McAyla's successful engagement in school. Communication with the dyslexia program coordinator at the school ensured consistency between the strategies being used at home and school. McAyla's mother believes that the dedicated role of coordinator has led to improvements in the way that the school and classroom teachers deal with students with dyslexia.

For example, differences between parents and classroom teachers about approaches and expectations can lead to tensions, and the coordinator can effectively act as a 'broker' to develop plans for the common goal of a supportive classroom environment. In this way a partnership between parent and teacher can grow, rather than be derailed over a disagreement. For McAyla's mother, engaging with teachers and advocating for McAyla is something that needs to happen with the start of each school year and with each new teacher. This advocacy for supports that have proven effective in the previous year is demanding both in terms of time and energy. And despite detail on McAyla's profile the school holds about her needs, personal engagement remains the only effective way to ensure McAyla's learning can commence from the positive point achieved in the previous year.

While individual teachers are learning about dyslexia, the school is proactive in setting a safe environment for discussing learning needs in general, and dyslexia in particular. The school is alert to the stigma surrounding learning difficulties. The dyslexia program coordinator places information about dyslexia in the school newsletter once a fortnight. For McAyla, this reduced the stigma for her as an individual, by focusing on educating the whole school community about dyslexia, and emphasising that learning difficulties are distinct from intelligence.

“ **If you're working with the teacher to get the best outcomes for your child, you're working in a partnership...not working against each other.**

– *MCAYLA'S MOTHER*



## EARLY YEARS

## PRIMARY

## SECONDARY

## VOCATIONAL

## HIGHER

### STORY



Zara is in year six at a primary school in Perth, which she has attended since the pre-kindergarten program at age three. Zara enjoys horse riding and gymnastics. During year five, Zara was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). She benefits from some redirection to stay on task; assistance to manage her anxiety; and support to practice her social skills, particularly when joining in on group settings.

After her diagnosis in year five, Zara's mother approached the school to get more support for Zara to transition into year six, and met with the school's Assistant Principal, who has responsibility for students with disability. The goal of support in year six was to support Zara to develop the more independent study approach expected of students in year six, and to work on the communication skills that would get her ready for transitioning to secondary school at the end of the year. As a part of this support, Zara receives a classroom aide one day a week.

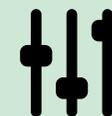
At the school's suggestion, Zara is enrolled in a support program from the School of Special Educational Needs: Disability. As a part of this, a teacher comes to the school and works with Zara's classroom teacher. The support teacher observes Zara in her classes and provides advice and strategies for her classroom teacher to address Zara's areas of need, such as participation in group work. Enrolment in the program also allows Zara and her mother, as well as the classroom teacher to access a range of assistive online resources.

The assistant principal leads case conferences at least once a term between Zara's mother, the classroom teacher and sometimes the educational aide and support teacher working with Zara. Together they help to formulate Zara's individual education plan, which will support Zara in her transition to secondary school. During transition activities, Zara's educational aide has been available to accompany Zara on her transition visits to her chosen secondary school, which helps to alleviate some of her anxiety.

This year Zara went on school camp, which worried her mother because this had the potential to be a very stressful time for Zara, who would be in an unfamiliar environment, where the dynamics among some classmates may be an issue away from home.

Zara was accompanied by the classroom teacher and her educational aide, to provide some familiarity in a different environment. Ahead of the camp, the school worked with all students and parents to minimise anxiety, providing information about the camp such as schedules, and information about what the camp would look like. Particular focus was given to Zara and other children in the class with additional needs to help make sure camp was an enjoyable experience for all students.

### REASONABLE ADJUSTMENT



The adjustments made have included:

- providing an educational aide for one day each week
- developing a school schedule to help Zara stay organised in the morning
- using a communication book between home and school to support good communication
- providing additional support from the school psychologist, including resources sent home to support Zara around her anxiety
- organising the autism support teacher, who provides additional support to the classroom teacher
- undertaking early planning to choose a high school classroom teacher who would be well-suited to work with Zara
- using an educational aide to support Zara in her transition activities.

Zara receives an educational aide one day a week, with a specific focus on her social skills, rather than to support her academically. This has required some adaptation by the classroom teacher, who was not used to having an educational aide in the classroom whose focus was not academic support.

## OUTCOMES



Zara's mother believes that the work the school has done this year has prepared Zara well for secondary school. She enjoys going to school and has a positive friendship group. This year, she has become more confident and her social skills have grown. For example, her mother commented that she was now able to ask for assistance in shops when accompanied, which she would not have done the year before.

Zara's increased confidence has given her the independence to do her own work and she has become more organised as a result of using the tools that support her organisation throughout the school day. For example, Zara uses her school schedule, which she ticks off to avoid confusion at the start of each school day.

“ **To get the best results for your child, you need to learn the skills about how and what to ask for in the case conference.** – ZARA'S MOTHER ”

## COSTS



There have been no costs to the school or Zara's family, except for the additional time needed to plan ahead.

The WA Department of Education Disability Services funds Zara's educational aide for one day a week. The school has planned to strategically maximise the support available to Zara by placing her in a class with another child with ASD, who also receives support from an aide. The children's allocation of aide time is used on different days, meaning Zara has access to an aide throughout the week.

The autism support program is funded by the School of Special Educational Needs: Disability.

## SKILLS AND BEHAVIOURS



The importance of planning ahead was emphasised by both Zara's mother and the school as being vital to achieving

outcomes. Investing time early ensured that Zara was able to be allocated to a classroom teacher who understands her needs and has the skills to support her. This includes setting clear expectations for Zara, and providing positive input and praise when she achieves her social development goals, as well as her academic goals.

Planning is supported by well-established processes in the school, such as case conferences, referrals, and plans that are documented, shared, and monitored.

Open communication is facilitated by regular meetings with the classroom teacher, and day-to-day communication is managed via a communication book. The school follows up after meetings, or after changes in Zara's plan, which keeps everyone in the loop on changes at home or school that might affect how Zara is feeling or behaving.

Zara's older sibling also has ASD and because of the partnerships Zara's mother had built up earlier, she has equipped herself with information about how she and the school can support her children, and how she can best advocate for Zara during meetings with the school. Additionally, the school values having a skilled parent in what are truly collaborative discussions.

“ **Student services' processes are the foundation of support for any student with diverse needs, at the student-level, teacher-level and school-level.**

– ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL ”

## EARLY YEARS

## PRIMARY

## SECONDARY

## VOCATIONAL

## HIGHER

### STORY



Richard is a very motivated student who recently completed secondary school in Victoria. He had a strong interest in legal studies and now studies arts and law at Monash University. Richard was diagnosed with asperger's syndrome when he was in primary school and his mother was disappointed that the school, where her other children had gone, was unable to accommodate Richard's needs. As a result, during the year six transition period to secondary school, Richard's mother

met with the new school's inclusion support teacher. Richard and his mother felt more comfortable at this school given the leadership's commitment to meeting their obligations under the Standards.

During his transition to secondary school Richard was anxious and found school stressful. When he joined the school he was below his year level in literacy and numeracy, often felt like he was struggling to keep up with his peers, and felt down as a result.

On one occasion in year seven, Richard's behaviour led to him being suspended. The school and his family worked together to understand what had driven him to have a 'meltdown' at school; and it was discovered that there had been bullying behaviour in that year group. The school worked with the other children to explain Richard's behaviour and how he processed what was going on around him. By doing this, as well as setting expectations, the school continued to build a culture of inclusion.

At least twice a year, over the course of Richard's time at the school, the school held case conferences that included the inclusion support teacher, the principal, his classroom teacher, the aide if appropriate, Richard's mother, and Richard as he grew older. These meetings provided an opportunity to identify Richard's needs and goals and formulate an individual learning plan. Following these meetings, the inclusion support teacher would communicate Richard's needs to his other teachers. This collaborative approach ensured everyone was working as a team.

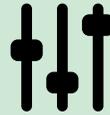


*We're about inclusion as much as possible. Whether you're in class, doing work experience, or on an excursion, you're not stopped from doing anything if you want to do it.*

- INCLUSION SUPPORT TEACHER



### REASONABLE ADJUSTMENT



The adjustments made included:

- curriculum modifications, e.g. in English he was allowed to write shorter responses, or answer modified questions in relation to the class novels

- extra time to complete assessments
- providing a scribe during assessments to ensure legibility of assessments, and to reduce Richard's stress
- Richard being able to complete assessments in a separate room to reduce the pressure of comparing himself to the perceived progress of other students during assessments
- placing his locker in the inclusion room, which allowed him to organise his day in a quiet space and provided him with access to the room as a calm space if needed
- extra English lessons with the inclusion support teacher instead of learning an additional language
- a funded aide one day per week, and being in classes with aides most of the time
- using funding flexibly to support increased aide time during particular periods.

Much of Richard's stress came from pressure that Richard placed on himself to succeed; and the inclusion support teacher noticed that some of his behavioural indicators increased during highly stressful periods, such as year 12 exams. Modifications made to the program aimed to reduce his stress; and teachers spent time breaking down activities and reassuring him that he could do them. The school also actively encouraged Richard and recognised his efforts

through school prizes to help grow his confidence. His additional lessons with the inclusion support teacher allowed Richard to keep on top of his work in other subjects, and addressed his anxiety about falling behind.

Richard grew to understand his disability and his own triggers: he knew that certain activities would cause him stress and he was able to then identify that stress as an area to work on.

The importance of forming habits early on was emphasised. For example, Richard was supported by the inclusion support teacher to learn to use his school diary to make notes of what he had done in his classes and what his homework was. Placing his locker in the inclusion room also gave the inclusion support teacher an opportunity to check in with him at the start of each day. Forming these habits early on assisted Richard when he was working in the more stressful environment of year 12.

Prior to year 10, Richard and his family had not decided if he would study VCE or VCAL subjects — partly because he had been undertaking a modified curriculum up until that point. However, in year 10 he undertook the regular curriculum, which allowed him the opportunity to see how he went before making a decision about his education pathway. Ultimately, Richard undertook VCE and the school worked closely with him to select study options at VCE that he would enjoy and be able to achieve in.

## OUTCOMES



Throughout his time at school, Richard became more relaxed and less anxious. His organisation improved and he felt more confident in his ability to achieve. His ambitions grew as his school achievements opened more possibilities. He originally wanted to enter the police force, but turned his mind to university as his academic achievements progressed.

Richard achieved a good result at the end of year 12, which enabled him to undertake criminology at Monash University. He has since transferred to law, which has been his passion since studying legal studies in secondary school. His success in VCE demonstrated to the school's staff the importance of making reasonable adjustments for students, and how those adjustments provided the environment for Richard to achieve his potential.

## SKILLS AND BEHAVIOURS



Communication between parents and staff is valuable for building a partnership that is aimed at achieving a positive outcome, although this can take time. The school recognised “the knowledge that parents and educators brought to the partnership and because the school exercises an open door policy, Richard’s mother knew she could update the inclusion support teacher if something had happened at home. The collaboration between home and school, combined with Richard’s own persistence in his studies, the coaching around setting routines, and additional assistance in key areas all enabled Richard to achieve this great outcome”.

## COSTS



The school received funding for an aide one day a week, and worked to place Richard in classes with other students who received funding for an aide, to maximise the time that Richard had access to support in the classroom. Richard’s funding was used strategically to focus on the subjects where he would most benefit from an aide, especially those needing language skills, such as English, history or legal studies.

At critical points in Richard’s time at the school — particularly transition and year 12 — additional aide time was funded from both the budgets of the school’s general and students with disabilities programs. The school emphasised the importance of using funding flexibly to achieve the best outcome for the student.

The school also funds a speech therapist, and Richard was able to access this service occasionally.

“

*In year 7, a school didn’t want him because all they were looking at was his academic results; to go on and do VCE and now study at university is a positive outcome.*

RICHARD’S MOTHER

”

## EARLY YEARS

## PRIMARY

## SECONDARY

## VOCATIONAL

## HIGHER

## STORY



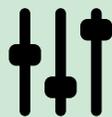
Tom attended high school in Melbourne, graduating two years ago before completing a fitness training course at TAFE. He is passionate about sports and fitness, and last year walked the Kokoda Trail. When he was in year seven,

aged 12, Tom had a stroke, leaving him with limited use of his right side and an acquired brain injury that has impaired his speech and processing skills. Tom is now able to walk unassisted, but following the stroke, Tom's paralysis meant he relied on a wheelchair and walking frame.

Tom has high expectations of himself, which at times has led to frustration because the usual stresses of high school were amplified by the need to adapt physically. Tom, his family, and the school were committed to finding a pathway through school that would support him into further education and employment.

The school focused most of its support through the Student Wellbeing and Special Needs Program, with the program manager being his key liaison point for school activities. The program also provided integration aides and resources. The school also gave him priority access to electives that would specifically support his needs.

A focus of his time at school was on building his resilience. This included work around his expectations and resilience when presented with challenges.

REASONABLE  
ADJUSTMENT

The adjustments made included:

- providing an integration aide in his classes to scribe and help clarify tasks
- sending an integration aide on excursions, including a school trip interstate
- modifying the classroom program, including breaking work down into 'blocks' to assist with processing tasks
- modifying writing expectations and encouraging the use of a keyboard
- allowing extra time for assessments and tasks in class
- providing an information sheet for teachers on Tom's needs, and preferences in the learning process
- Additionally, the school held parent support group meetings with Tom's parents and the Student Wellbeing and Special Needs program manager, which sometimes included his integration aide and teachers. As he got older, Tom was able to participate in these meetings to provide his perspective and this increased his autonomy.

Tom was also surrounded by effective role models, including his father, the program manager and a mentor through the Melbourne AFL team. This helped to reassure him that the people around him wanted him to succeed. The boost in confidence helped him to develop his social skills – by years 11 and 12 he was hanging out with friends at lunchtime.

Tom loves sports and was keen to participate in as much of the physical education curriculum as he could; and because he had a strong relationship with the PE teachers, they involved him in any way possible, including umpiring or refereeing games. Tom also coached a number of sports teams, such as the junior football team at an interschool tournament.

Initially, some teachers were resentful of the changes resulting from the adjustments — such as differentiation of the curriculum, because it required extra effort in an already high-pressured job. These teachers needed extra support to realise the need for these adjustments to their practice, and strategies for implementing change. So the program manager provided teachers with an information sheet on every student in their class with additional needs, which included strategies to work with them, and notes about things they like and don't like. This helped reduce the level of resistance.

The program manager noted that another challenge for Tom was the physical environment of the school buildings, which are split over multiple levels. The school has a lift, which Tom was able to access, and without that means of access, it is doubtful Tom could have continued at the school.

## OUTCOMES



Tom's learning outcomes benefited from the work of the integration aides and teachers who tailored his work. Tom knew he never wanted to do a desk job, and wanted to continue a career in sport. As a result of curriculum differentiation, Tom was able to leave school eligible to attend a TAFE fitness coaching course, and now runs his own personal training business.

## SKILLS AND BEHAVIOURS



His parents collaborated closely with the school, placing a high value on education and were committed to ensuring Tom could achieve his potential.

Additionally, the school makes inclusion a priority and integration aides are supported to undertake professional development on a number of processing issues, for example, language skills; and the program manager was sponsored by the Victorian Department of Education and Training to undertake a diploma on special educational needs.

The program manager role is resourced as a leading teacher role, which means it has the same status as a teacher running any other department in the school. This helps to set expectations of other teachers around their negotiations with the program manager, and reflects the expectation of the school leadership that inclusion is non-negotiable.

The relationship between the staff from the Student Wellbeing and Special Needs Program and Tom has been significant in achieving a positive outcome. Tom believes an integration aide can be your friend, and that there doesn't need to be a division between student and support staff.

Tom's confidence and resilience improved during his time at school and his own attitude helped him to progress, despite his occasional frustrations. He was accepting of his own capabilities, but understood that he had to set and follow through on targets, no matter how small and incremental. He has adapted his expectations in line with a better understanding of his capabilities. For example, he wanted to be a professional tennis coach, but shifted this goal to become a professional fitness coach.



**Just being there made the difference. Sometimes in Year 10, I'd get angry and [the Student Wellbeing and Special needs Program Manager] would come and spend time with me. – TOM**



## COSTS



Tom's supports were largely funded through the Victorian Department of Education and Training's program for Students with Disability. The program paid for the integration aides' and speech therapist's time, as well as resources for the Student Wellbeing and Special Needs Program. Tom received funding from the Royal Children's Hospital for his additional supports and therapies.



**Our whole attitude is inclusion, inclusion, inclusion. I'd say his secondary education has not been very different from any other student.**

– STUDENT WELLBEING AND SPECIAL NEEDS PROGRAM MANAGER



## EARLY YEARS

## PRIMARY

## SECONDARY

## VOCATIONAL

## HIGHER

## STORY



Alice started her Women's Studies course at TAFE at the start of 2015. In her final year at school she had taken the opportunity to do TAFE subjects, and this opened up the possibilities of further study. Alice acted early on her interest in continuing her studies, and met with the TAFE disability access and equity officer and the National Disability Coordination Officer several months before courses started. The meeting was convened at Alice's school and she was provided with course information to consider her options. Following this discussion Alice decided she would like to enrol in Women's Studies, so the TAFE Disability Access and

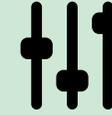
Equity Officer liaised with the coordinator of the course to plan for Alice's participation. Alice also met with the course staff to engage in the planning.

Alice is non-verbal and uses a wheelchair, and is accompanied by a nurse and a carer. At the same time Alice transitioned from high school to TAFE she was also moving from the children with disability support system to the adult system, and securing new carers.

The Women's Studies course has large discussion components. Alice is provided with the material for the discussions in advance of the class, in electronic and large print formats. This allows her to consider her responses and program them into her phone, which electronically plays her response during the class. The lecturers and students are aware that Alice may need longer to respond because she has to program all her responses via her phone. This technology supported Alice during a recent assessment that required students to deliver a presentation. Alice was able to fully participate because she programmed her PowerPoint presentation to play directly on her instruction.

The course can include discussion of sensitive experiences and because of this it is unusual to have non-participants (such as nurses and carers) in the room. The TAFE Disability Access and Equity Officer and the Subject Coordinator worked with Disability SA to ensure the selection of a carer for Alice who would be appropriate to the course setting. The carer is welcome to contribute to discussion on her own behalf, reflecting the inclusive setting the course works to provide.

In practical terms, the TAFE needed to develop a personal emergency evacuation plan for Alice. This meant ensuring that all the classes she attended were held on the ground level to enable emergency access without a lift, and in rooms large enough to accommodate Alice's wheelchair, carer and nurse.

REASONABLE  
ADJUSTMENT

The TAFE made reasonable adjustments to the delivery of training and assessment and the physical environment, including:

- investing time before Alice enrolled to meet with her, her parent and Disability SA to understand her needs and preferences
- ensuring Alice's classes were held on the ground floor and in large enough classrooms
- providing her with discussion material before the class to allow her time to program responses into her phone
- structuring the course to enable Alice to fully participate through half-day attendance
- working with Disability SA to find a carer for Alice who could contribute and support Alice in her studies.

“

**I've learnt how to become a more independent young woman...I am more independent by being able to look up things for myself, such as movie times. – ALICE**

”

## OUTCOMES



The reasonable adjustments made have enabled Alice to fully participate in her course, classes and assessments.

After finishing school, Alice was ready to become more independent. Starting a course at TAFE was a key step in supporting Alice's journey to greater independence. She still needs practical supports, such as her nurse and carer, but wherever possible, TAFE and her parents support her to be independent.

Initially there had been some uncertainty about how to include Alice in the course, and the potential of upsetting the rhythm of the class. However, working with Alice has opened up the eyes of the program area and the broader TAFE to the possibilities of including students with disability.

Similarly, for other students, it provided many with their first experience of working closely with a person with disability. The Subject Coordinator noted that over time some of the barriers to communication have fallen as people get to know Alice.

The TAFE staff have worked with a lot of external agencies that Alice was already connected with in order to achieve her goal. This has been a positive experience of partnership and one that the TAFE are keen to continue with all students with complex needs, not only students with disability.

## COSTS



Alice's technology, carer and nurse are funded through Disability SA.

There were no direct costs to the TAFE associated with making adjustments, beyond minor readjustments to classroom location and layout.



**The impact is that Alice can participate...The reasonable accommodations and adjustments that the program area has put in place to support Alice have assisted in her achieving her study goals. It is great to see her succeeding.**

*- THE TAFE DISABILITY ACCESS AND EQUITY OFFICER*



## SKILLS AND BEHAVIORS



Open communication has been vital to success. Prior to starting, meetings were held with Alice and the TAFE Disability Access and Equity Officer, between Alice and the program staff, and Alice's mother and the TAFE. Shared information, planning and implementation has kept the plan on track, and established the trust needed for Alice to seek any further support or clarification.

On a practical note, consent arrangements were needed for information sharing, as Alice is aged over 18 years. This has enabled timely communication between everyone committed to Alice's success at TAFE, which includes her personal and family goal of independence.

TAFE staff had to overcome preconceived notions, particularly about whether the course could be structured to be inclusive of Alice. The program coordinator noted that success has come, in part, through a willingness to give things a go, reflecting Alice's willingness to be proactive and take the initiative in reaching her goals.

## EARLY YEARS

## PRIMARY

## SECONDARY

## VOCATIONAL

## HIGHER

## STORY



Matt is a final year student studying physiotherapy at the University of South Australia. Transferring from a course in human movement after first year, Matt saw physiotherapy as the chance for a rewarding career. Matt is a confident, very capable student. He has a visual impairment and is legally blind.

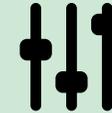
Ahead of transferring to physiotherapy, Matt met with the program director as well as the manager of the university's disability services unit. Initially, the program director was uncertain and nervous about how Matt's participation could be supported and particularly, how other academic staff would receive his inclusion in the course.

Matt, the program director and the manager of the disability services unit worked together to develop an approach, and documented it in a disability access plan. The plan helped the academic staff adjust their course content to support Matt, and was reviewed each semester throughout his four-year course. Before each semester began, Matt and the program director met with relevant academic staff to discuss any barriers that would need to be considered in each subject. Over time, Matt required less input from disability services as the academic staff became more aware of his needs, and Matt more aware of how to navigate the system.

A highlight of Matt's time at university was his practicum placement with a physiotherapist, who also has a vision impairment. Through this experience Matt gained valuable advice about practical adaptations to assessing patients mobility and injuries. For example, when a patient is walking, Matt learnt how to take a hands-on approach to understand any abnormalities. The placement was arranged by the program director, who had links with this physiotherapist.

The university disability services unit manager is now working with Matt, who has recently completed his course, to discuss registration and future employment. Matt accepts there are some environments where he might have limited registration, such as in the hospital setting, but everyone is confident that Matt can practise successfully after he leaves university.

## REASONABLE ADJUSTMENT



Adjustments to Matt's course fell into two main categories: the adjustments made to support his participation in academic 'classroom' theory; and the adjustments made for his clinical placement. The adjustments included:

- access to lecture slides before the lecture to enable loading onto an electronic reader
- enlarged copies of tutorial materials (font size 20+)
- extra time in exams (20 minutes per hour) to allow for extra reading time
- early engagement by the program director with placement locations
- preparation for using public transport to clinical placements, such as taking the route before the placement so Matt knew where to get off the bus, and having other students assisting with pick up and drop off
- orientation of the placement site ahead of the clinical placement commencing
- having an assistant on hospital clinical placement to help with reading clinical notes and visual monitors (no assistant was needed on other placements)
- early engagement with potential placement locations by the program director to ensure reasonable adaptations would be made on site so he could learn as much as possible from the practicum.

Engaging with a student's disability support plan and the adjustments needed to enable Matt's participation was a new experience for many of the academic staff. Some required reassurance that the reasonable adjustments were appropriate steps to meet the university's obligation to provide access to the curriculum and did not create an advantage.

## OUTCOMES



As a result of the reasonable adjustments, Matt was able to fully participate in his course and finished his course at the end of 2015. Matt graduated as one of the most successful students in his class, with an above-distinction average, and eligibility for membership of the prestigious Golden Key International Honour Society.

Importantly, Matt was able to participate in practicum, which ensured his full completion of the course. Even in the most difficult settings for a student with a vision impairment — such as the hospital setting, reasonable adjustment allowed Matt to fulfil the course requirements.

As a result of his placement with a physiotherapist with vision impairment, Matt gained greater confidence and certainty about what he could achieve. Matt has now been employed by the university to mentor other students and present his experiences at forums.

Matt's participation has directly addressed the negative assumptions of some staff and students about disability. As a result of working with Matt, one of his lecturers has written a journal article reflecting on her own journey from trepidation to understanding how many barriers are so easily addressed, and how other more substantive ones can be effectively worked through.



**Everyone who has had Matt in their course has shifted their thinking... “it would be fine to have someone with a visual disability” [study physiotherapy].** – PROGRAM DIRECTOR



## COSTS



The University disability services unit accessed Commonwealth funds to provide for the reasonable adjustments for Matt. These funds covered access to assistive technology, such as screen readers and software, and printing costs for alternative print production. The disability services unit also covered most of the costs of the student employed to assist Matt in his hospital placement.

The cost to the university was largely limited to the time to negotiate and achieve adjustments. The program director noted that this was equivalent to the time she invests in supporting other students with a range of learning needs or elite athlete commitments. Matt also invested a considerable amount of his own time in meeting with university staff, in particular the disability services unit, to achieve his outcomes.

## SKILLS AND BEHAVIOURS



On the whole, Matt found that the university staff were very supportive. Nevertheless, a few retained their reluctance, and addressing these barriers required patience and persistence by Matt, the program director and the disability services manager, who worked to promote an understanding of the university's obligations under the Disability Standards for Education 2005, and by setting the tone of expectations. Matt's contribution was highly effective self-advocacy, engaging with staff that had hesitations about his participation and using his strong communication skills to allay their fears. Engaging at the beginning of each stage of the process — for each year and each subject — proved vital to achieving the final outcome: a qualified physiotherapist who is expected to make a valued contribution to his patients and the profession.