

## **Disability standards for education 2020 review**

### **Submission – Greg Ashman**

I am a teacher working at an independent school in Australia. I believe teachers have a worthwhile perspective that is perhaps not captured in the way the standards are currently framed.

The current framing takes a legal perspective focused on *individual* rights. Teachers need to enact these standards in a classroom of 25-30 students. This different focus – individuals versus classrooms full of students – means that some issues are missed. In addition, there needs to be more of a focus on the *efficacy* of any adjustments made for students with a disability (which is only addressed implicitly in the standards).

### **Efficacy**

What is an efficacious adjustment? Is it anything recommended by a specialist? And what does efficacious mean? Ostensibly, this is about participation in the lesson. However, take the example of a student who is dyslexic. Would a reasonable adjustment be to adjust the instruction so that this student does not need to read anything or would it be to provide a targeted reading intervention? The first adjustment would accommodate the dyslexia whereas the second would address it. Both may be appropriate at different times. However, if dyslexia is potentially treatable but is always accommodated, then such an adjustment would lead to a perverse outcome.

If an adjustment is recommended, then by what standard is its efficacy to be judged? An adjustment made for one reason – e.g. allowing a student a choice of topic – may have negative educational impacts. How are these to be balanced? What is the role of teachers in evaluating efficacy? If recommending a particular type of adjustment becomes a trend among specialists, but its efficacy is doubted by teachers, what options are available?

There is perhaps a need for a bank of efficacious adjustments supported by high quality data e.g. from randomised controlled trials. Where such data is not available, the pursuit of it should be an aim of government, supported by government research grants. This way teachers may have confidence that the adjustments they are making are efficacious and of advantage to the student.

### **Whole class interactions**

Suppose it is recommended that a child be given the opportunity to get out of his or her seat and walk around the classroom a number of times per lesson. If it is one child in a class, such an adjustment may indeed be reasonable. However, if it were to be applied to 10 students out of a class of 25, this would lead to an unmanageable situation. Therefore, adjustments cannot be viewed in isolation and the guidance needs to clearly reflect this.

Furthermore, there is tentative evidence that whole-class supports and routines – such as positive behaviour support – can aid individuals with certain disabilities and disorders. However, such a whole-class approach is undifferentiated at the individual level and falls foul of the legal need to make a specific adjustment for an individual child. And yet, if such approaches are beneficial, they should be reflected in the standards.

Many of these issues could be addressed through an expanded and improved set of Exemplars of Practice. These need to be developed *alongside* teachers and with the practical requirements of implementing these adjustments in mind.