



Australian Association
of Teachers of the Deaf
(Queensland) Inc

AATD (Qld) Inc Response to the 2020 Review of the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*

The Australian Association of Teachers of the Deaf (Queensland) Inc welcomes this opportunity to provide a response in relation to the 2020 Review of the *Disability Standards for Education (DSE) 2005*.

AATD (Qld) Inc is the professional association that represents qualified Teachers of Deaf and Hard of Hearing students in Queensland State, Catholic and Independent schools. Members work with children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing (D/HH) from birth/diagnosis; and students in both primary and secondary schooling. Teachers across the state are involved in various educational roles, such as: in classrooms, Advisory Visiting teachers across a number of schools, Heads of Special Education Services (HOSES), Regional Auslan Coaches/Principal Advisor –Auslan. Classroom teachers and allied and support staff, such as Educational Interpreters, Auslan Language Models, Speech Language Pathologists, and tertiary students are also represented. We are the Queensland branch of the National Australian Association of Teacher of the Deaf (NAATD).

Our Members were consulted using the Review's questions as a basis to gain a range of responses to the DSE and its implementation. Members were asked to specifically respond in their professional role as Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing (D/HH); not in any other role that they may have, *viz* parent, person with disability. They were encouraged to make other responses to the Review to take account of these personal experiences.

In Queensland the majority of students who are D/HH are enrolled in their closest school or one nearby if they are enrolled in a school that has a 'cluster program' for students who are D/HH. A small number of students who are D/HH who also have severe/profound Intellectual Disability are enrolled in special schools.

One primary school in Brisbane has a bilingual/bicultural program. Bilingual/bicultural education is about learning in two languages and two cultures – in this program English and Auslan. Cultures of both deaf and hearing communities are valued and form an important part of the school program. Students enrolled in a bilingual/bicultural class have the most exposure to the two languages and cultures however all students in the school are involved in some way, for example, school assemblies are always interpreted and all children sign the national anthem.

While digital technology has made great advances in hearing aids, soundfield amplification systems, Cochlear implants and the like, technology in and of itself does not 'solve' deafness

or hearing impairment. Qualified and experienced teachers of the D/HH are essential components of the students' education. This is due to the specialised knowledge, strategies and resources required to provide an education that realises the individual potential of a student who is D/HH.

The following is a summary of information from members in relation to DSE 2020 Review questions.

Enrolment in education and training

Q. What has been your experience of Deaf/Hard of Hearing students enrolling in Queensland schools?

AATD Qld members have had a range of experiences in the enrolment of students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing (D/HH) in Queensland schools. Schools that have an established program and/or history of enrolling students who are D/HH readily enrol new students. These schools have an understanding, not only of the Standards, but what is required on a practical, day-to-day basis for the students and the teachers.

However schools that are enrolling a student who is D/HH for the first time are more hesitant. This is usually due to a lack of understanding of the needs of the student to ensure the implementation of the standards, rather than a philosophical one.

Participation in education and training among students with disability

Q. What has been your experience of Deaf/Hard of Hearing students participating in Queensland schools?

Q. What has been your experience of students with disability being supported in education?

While members have good knowledge and understanding and they believe that the majority of classroom teachers have some knowledge of the DSE 2005, the implementation of these Standards prove to be more difficult and varying across schools. Therefore there is a range of levels of participation by students who are D/HH across schools in Queensland.

When there are teacher/s of the D/HH on staff within a school participation by and support of students is usually quite high. However, this is usually instigated by the teachers of the D/HH. This typically is due to the teachers of the D/HH having the specific and specialised knowledge of the teaching strategies and resources that are required by individual students. Many teachers of the D/HH continually run professional development sessions for classroom teachers to develop their knowledge and skills as to the specific requirements of individual students.

If a school has only one or two students who are D/HH the situation can be quite different. While all students who are D/HH have a teacher of the D/HH as a case manager, this teacher is not necessarily based at the school and so has less influence on staff on a daily basis. Some classroom teachers need to have information given to them a number of times

covering a number of contexts in order for them to be comfortable to use it on a daily basis in a range of circumstances. This can take some time for the teacher of the D/HH.

Harassment and victimisation of students with disability

Q. What has been your experience of students with disability experiencing harassment and/or victimisation in education settings?

All Queensland state schools have their own individualised Responsible Behaviour Plans, which covers aspects of bullying, harassment and/or victimisation. Each school implements these plans according to their own settings.

Members reported some cases of bullying, but none of victimisation. Members are often called upon to intervene, mediate and provide information to school staff and students in relation to the range of implications of being Deaf/Hard of Hearing.

Compliance with the Standards by education providers

Q. What has been your experience of compliance with the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* among education providers [individual schools]?

Our members' experiences are that school leadership teams and individual teachers philosophically believe that the Standards are required and wish to comply with them. However teams and teachers also recognise that they do not necessarily have the knowledge or skills to carry out some aspects of the Standards, *viz* taking reasonable steps to ensure that students with disabilities are provided with opportunities to realise their individual potential through their participation in education and training on the same basis as students without disabilities.

Members report that general classroom teachers usually do not have knowledge of or experience in teaching students who are D/HH to enable opportunities for them to reach their individual potential. Therefore they often rely on the knowledge of teachers of the D/HH.

In relation to school leaderships and classroom teachers who want to comply, the Standards provide avenues for teachers of the D/HH to provide information, strategies and resources to these teachers.

However, for the school leadership teams and individual teachers who do not believe it is their role or believe they are unable to provide equitable education for students who are D/HH, the Standards provide teachers of the Deaf/HH a platform from which they can operate.

Section 3: Awareness of the Standards

Q. Are there any particular actions that you think could be taken to increase awareness of the Standards and/or to make sure they are better understood [by school leadership teams and individual teachers]; especially in relation to students who are Deaf / Hard of Hearing?

The Standards need to become an integral component of the enrolment processes and in the various participation and support documents within each educational authority/sector and within the individual school processes. It is only through ongoing interaction with a set of Standards that one will gain an understanding of them.

AATD Qld realises that it may be beyond the remit of the Federal Department of Education, Skills and Employment to 'tell' state departments of education what information should be included within their enrolment process documents and within their various participation and support documents. However, until these Standards are seen on a regular basis, for many, they will remain a high level policy document that is not important in the day to day life of a teacher.

Section 4: Improving the Standards

Q. Before we ask for your thoughts on how the Standards might be improved, do you have any feedback or experiences on how the Standards have helped people with disability access and participate in education and training on the same basis as people without disability?

There is a need to be more explicit about the wide range of reasonable adjustments that could be considered for students who are D/HH in their education and for assessment. Members also believe that schools generally do not understand what "on the same basis" means because of the frequent comment that adjustments are made and so the students are NOT accessing or participating 'on the same basis'. There is also a perception that adjustments made for students who are D/HH are not necessarily fair on other students.

We recommend that input be sought from experts in the provision of education to students who are D/HH and we would be pleased to meet to discuss the development of additional support materials.

Q. How do you think the Standards could be improved to help overcome other barriers that may exist for some students with disability when accessing and participating in education and training?

The majority of members believe that the Standards themselves do not need any changes. What is required are more specific and rigorous Guidelines giving examples of best practice for the implementation of the Standards for the various groups of students with disabilities across the range of educational and training settings across Australia.

It is the implementation of these Standards that impacts the enrolment, access, participation and support of students who are D/HH across schools in Queensland; not the Standards themselves.

Q. How do you think the Standards could be improved to help better respond to situations such as COVID-19 or natural disasters?

Members believe that the Standards are at a 'policy level' such that they cover a range of situations. It is the implementation of the Standards in such situations that could be improved. Examples of implementation processes, strategies and resources should be written at the time of such situations and disseminated as soon as possible. This will enable state school sectors and individual schools to better implement the Standards during such unusual times and situations.

COVID-19 impacted the experiences of students who are D/HH significantly. In the future the vulnerable category should be broadened to include students who are D/HH so they can continue to be together at school for their learning.

The following impacts were some given by members:

- The needs of students who are D/HH were often the last ones considered
- For online videoing, there needed to be double the resources so another teacher could be with the student. Issues of child protection required teachers to record contact lessons to protect themselves
- Parents/caregivers and students were not happy with the lack of adjustments
- Students felt isolated and missed their peers. Communication barriers in videoconferencing made it more difficult to connect with peers socially during this time
- Frustration with bandwidth and file size limitations at school/home
- Lack of existing curriculum materials available with captions and in Auslan
- Resource modifications required were often requested at short notice and were often too late to be of use to the student.
- Concern about student wellbeing and their capacity to complete the work being sent home without support
- Students missed their friends and felt isolated, especially if their parents are unable to communicate with their own children as they are not competent in Auslan
- Students didn't always have a device or internet access
- Families couldn't communicate well and school staff weren't available to help them understand their schoolwork
- Resources shared by the school weren't accessible, for example, they were not modified to their level, videos were provided without captions or Auslan translations
- Videoconferencing platforms used by schools for virtual live class sessions did not support access for students who are D/HH
- Schools did not make use of captioning for students to access what peers and teachers were saying
- Students found it hard to see the Auslan interpreter on the screen as the image was too small.

Q. How do you think the knowledge and capabilities of educators and education providers could be strengthened to ensure they comply with the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*?

Q. What should be done to improve educators' and education providers' awareness of the Standards; especially in relation to students who are Deaf / Hard of Hearing?

As we have stated previously, more specific and rigorous Guidelines giving examples of best practice for the implementation of the Standards for the various groups of students with disabilities across the range of educational and training settings across Australia are required.

Summary:

In summary and referring to the Terms of reference for the 2020 Review members of AATD Qld have indicated that the Standards are clear and appropriate; and that stakeholders know about, and understand, the rights, obligations and measures of compliance in the Standards.

In the 15 years since the Standards were developed, issues still arise with the application and therefore compliance with the Standards. Many school leadership teams and individual teachers throughout Queensland do not believe they have the knowledge and skills to meet the individual needs of students who are D/HoH.

Recommendations:

AATD (Qld) recommends that:

- the reviewers should

If you have any queries or would like further information please contact me as per the details below.

Yours sincerely

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