



Nationally Consistent Collection of Data School Students with Disability

**Education
Council**



Improving educational outcomes:
Emergent data on students with
disability in Australian schools

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Improving educational outcomes: Emergent data on students with disability in Australian schools

All Australian Governments and the non-government schooling sector are committed to supporting quality learning outcomes for all students.

All Australian governments and the non-government schooling sectors are committed to working together to ensure all students have access to a quality school education with appropriate personalised support and educational interventions. Nationally, these efforts are focussed on the development of a robust national curriculum that provides flexibility for teachers to take into account the different rates at which children in their classes learn and ensuring teachers have the appropriate skills and understanding to effectively meet the learning needs of all students.


Schools must make reasonable adjustments for students with disability so that they can participate in education on the same basis as other students.

For students with disability, this commitment is reinforced through the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) and the supporting *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (the Standards). Under the Standards, schools are required to make reasonable adjustments for students with disability to enable them to participate in education on the same basis as other students. Adjustments are made in the classroom at the individual student (e.g. provision of information or course materials in accessible format such as a textbook in braille) and group (e.g. adapting class lesson) levels.

The Commonwealth, state and territory governments and the non-government school sector have worked hard to improve knowledge and understanding of the Standards and increase the capacity of schools to better meet the educational needs of students with disability. This work intersects with and is aligned to the broader national reform agenda, which includes reforms such as the *National Disability Strategy 2010 – 2020* and the *National Disability Insurance Scheme*, that are focused on improving the lives of people with disability, their families and carers.

Data about students with disability has been inconsistent.

To date, there has been a lack of nationally consistent data about school students with disability in Australia with different definitions used in different collections. These differing definitions result in highly variable prevalence rates for students with disability being reported, depending on the definition and approach used to identify students with a disability.



For example, the most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers estimated that 292,600 children with disability were attending school in Australia, which is 8.3 per cent of all Australian children attending school in 2009. The Report on Government Services (2011) for the same year of data reports 164,517 students with disability were in schools and receiving targeted assistance.

The Report on Government Services 2016 indicates that the proportion of students with disability receiving targeted funding in 2014 varies from 3.8 to 7.4 per cent of enrolments across states and territories. Eligibility for targeted funding is based on varying state and territory requirements and the data reflects the differences between the states and territories.

All Australian governments agreed in 2008 to create a nationally consistent dataset about students with disability.

In 2008, as part of discussions on national reporting arrangements for schools, the Council of Australian Governments agreed to work towards a nationally consistent approach to identifying school students with disability. Improved information on students with disability is critical to helping to ensure education authorities, principals, teachers and other school staff have the necessary support in place to assist students with a range of complex needs.

A series of expert groups from government and non-government education authorities and experts in education for students with disability devised a model for the annual national data collection. After trials in 2011 and 2012, the Education Council Joint Working Group to Provide Advice on Reform for Students with Disability (the Joint Working Group) refined the model and developed a plan for implementing the data collection nationally.

Schools and governments are now reporting in a nationally consistent way on students with disability in Australian schools.

Over the three years since 2013, the *Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability* (the collection) has been progressively implemented in Australian schools, with 20% of schools participating in 2013, 73% in 2014 and 99.9% in 2015. As a result, schools and governments are reporting for the first time in a nationally consistent way on the number of students in Australian schools requiring an educational adjustment (as required under the standards) to access education because of a disability.

This is a significant achievement and the culmination of years of collaborative effort by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, non-government education authorities, disability stakeholders and schools. The benefits of the collection extend beyond the creation of nationally consistent data and include embedding schools' obligations under the Standards into school practices. The collection is having a positive impact on support for students with disability through providing an opportunity for schools to evaluate their learning and support systems and processes and make quality teaching for all students their core focus.



2015 was the first year that nearly all schools participated in the collection.

As 2015 was the first year that nearly all schools participated, Education Ministers have agreed to release high-level data from the 2015 collection. These results should be interpreted with caution given the early stage in establishing the collection model across 9,600 Australian schools.

It is anticipated that data quality will continue to improve over time as schools and teachers build experience through their ongoing participation in the collection.

The collection uses the broad definition of disability based on the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 definition of disability, with the focus on the level of adjustment.

The collection uses a broad definition of disability based on the DDA with the focus on the level of adjustment provided to a student based on their functional needs. The collection includes students who have disability that affects in some way their participation in education, but who may require only minimal additional support.


The collection relies on the professional knowledge, practice and judgements of teachers and school staff about the educational needs of their students. Through the collection, teachers make evidence-based decisions about: students who are receiving reasonable adjustments to access education because of disability; the level of adjustment being provided for each student with disability and the broad category of disability under which the students best fits.

Teachers are guided in their professional practice by the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers that were developed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership.

The evidence teachers and schools use to inform reporting in the collection are drawn from obligations set out in the Standards under the DDA. These require provision of reasonable adjustment where needed for a student with disability to participate in education on the same basis as students without disability. Schools draw on evidence in four general areas:

- assessed individual needs of the student
- adjustments being provided to the student to address their assessed needs
- ongoing monitoring and review of the adjustments
- consultation and collaboration with the student and/or parents and carers or associates.

Evidence used to inform reporting levels of adjustment and category of disability may include specialised diagnosis reports, individualised learning planning, records of assessments and records of discussions with parents, carers and, where appropriate, the student. The evidence used for decision-making will reflect a wide range of practices of teachers and schools. Each school's evidence will be contextual and reflect individual student needs and strengths and the school's learning and support processes and practices. Schools are not required to create new or additional evidence for the purposes of the data collection.



Due to the breadth of the definition of disability, the collection will include more students with disability than other existing school collections. This does not translate directly to providing a marker of unmet need but a better measure of the profile of students participating in schools and the support provided. It reflects and recognises teacher and school effort in providing adjustments for a diverse range of students with additional learning and support needs.

The collection uses functional descriptions of levels of adjustment.

Under the collection there are four levels of adjustment:

1. **Support provided within quality differentiated teaching practice (QDTP)**—the functional impact of disability would generally require ongoing monitoring by the teacher and school staff; for example personalised learning that is implemented without drawing on additional resources
2. **Supplementary adjustment**—provided to meet an assessed need at specific times to complement the strategies and resources already available for all students within the school – including modified or tailored programs, specialised technology, intermittent specialist teacher support
3. **Substantial adjustment**—designed to address more significant barriers to engagement, learning, participation and achievement such as frequent (teacher directed) individual instruction, adjustments to delivery modes
4. **Extensive adjustment**—provided when essential specific measures and resourcing are required at all times to address the individual nature and acute impact of the student’s disability and the associated barriers to their learning and participation

The levels of adjustment for each student could change over time. An individual student may have been provided with a higher or lower level of adjustment in the past and could require a higher or lower level of adjustment in their future schooling. The annual collection process reflects these changes.

There are also four broad categories of disability: physical, cognitive, sensory and social/emotional. Taking into account any medical diagnosis and the educational adjustment provided for each student, teachers use their professional judgement to determine the broad category of disability in which the student best fits.

Where a student has multiple disabilities, for the purposes of this collection they are only counted in one disability category; the one that most drives the educational adjustments provided for them.

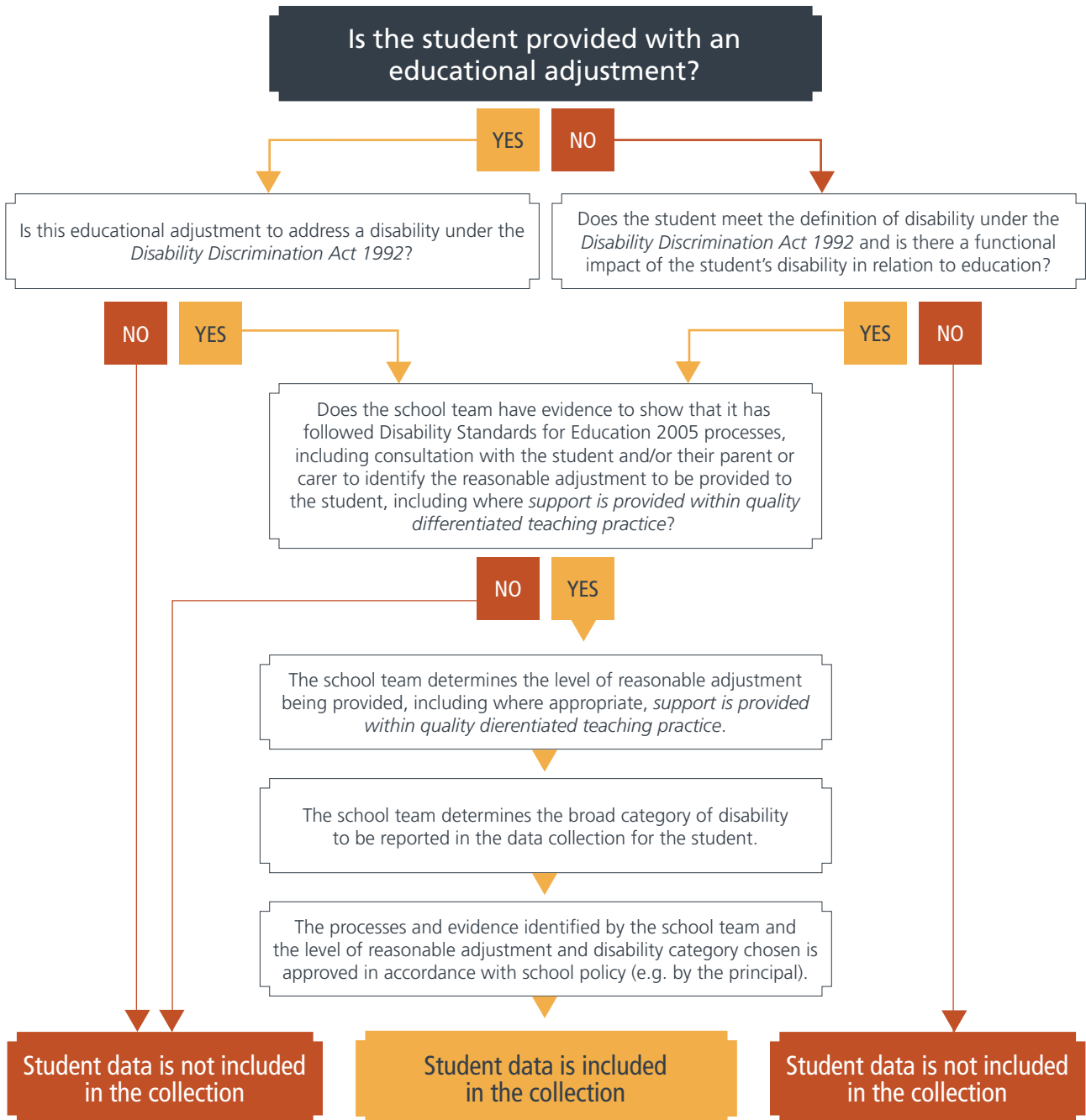
The flow diagram on page 5 shows the decision points that guide a school team’s decision as to whether or not to include a student in the collection.



Model of the National Data Collection

Throughout the school year school teams use evidence, including discussions with parents/carers, to inform decisions about the educational adjustments that they make for students with disability.

For this data collection, you should have evidence that shows you have made adjustments or incorporated support within quality differentiated teaching practice for each student. This should cover a minimum period of one school term, or at least 10 weeks, in the 12 months preceding the national data collection.





Quality and reliability of information is critical to the collection.

The annual collection aims to, over time, lead to nationally consistent, high quality data that will enable schools, education authorities and governments to gain a more complete understanding of students with disability in schools in Australia and how to best support them. This in turn will assist in future efforts to target resources and inform policy development for students with disability.

Given the staggered nature of the implementation of this collection and its use of a model based on teacher professional judgement, improving the quality of data collected through the collection is an iterative process.

As part of continued efforts to enhance data quality, the Joint Working Group engaged PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia to visit schools and work with education authorities in all states and territories to conduct two projects reviewing the quality and consistency of data collected under the 2014 and 2015 collections. These projects, known as the Continuous Quality Improvement Projects, involved PricewaterhouseCoopers working directly with teachers and school leaders to understand how well schools understood and applied the data collection model and what underlying processes were in place to support students with disability.

These projects found that participating schools' level of understanding of the collection's model, the DDA and the Standards contributes directly to the quality of the data collected. Further, as this understanding grows stronger each year the school participates, the quality of the data also improves.

In 2015, 27% of Australian schools participated in the collection for the first time.

In 2015, 27 per cent of schools participated for the first time (with a high proportion of these being Independent schools) and it is likely that the understanding of these schools may still be developing. The Joint Working Group is confident that the data collected will become more consistent and of higher quality over time as all schools continue to participate.

Teachers are supported through a range of relevant professional learning and training implemented across all schools.

A range of resources and guidance has been developed by the Joint Working Group to support teachers and schools to implement the collection, including:

- the National Quality Assurance Framework – designed as a support to schools, systems and authorities to help ensure the quality and reliability of the data collected
- a suite of professional learning and training materials to increase the understanding of school staff about their legal obligations towards students with disability and the data collection model.



The Joint Working Group has sought to drive continuous improvement in the judgements made by school teams about individual students, and in the consistency of the data across jurisdictions, sectors and schools. To that end, quality assurance measures and support materials for schools are reviewed annually, with the aim of identifying where they can be strengthened or enhanced for the next collection cycle.

In collaboration with the University of Canberra, a range of resources was developed to support teachers and schools to understand their obligations under the DDA and the Standards. A free website for parents and the community about the DDA and the Standards was also developed. It can be accessed at <http://resource.dse.theeducationinstitute.edu.au>.

States and territories and non-government education authorities have also developed their own products to support the collection. National communication products are also available including fact sheets, frequently asked questions, school stories and notices for staff completing the data collection.

Further work will be undertaken to support teachers and schools in the implementation of the collection to support ongoing improvements in data quality.

The collection is still in the early years of implementation.

As with any new collection, it will take time for the collection to mature and become an established part of school practice. The model for the collection is complex and is based on the professional judgement of teachers and schools to determine which students are to be included, the level of adjustment being provided and the broad category of disability under which each student best fits. As almost 30 per cent of schools participated in the data collection for the first time in 2015, it will take time to embed understanding of the collection model and therefore ensure accuracy and consistency of assessment.

Given the early stages of implementation, and the qualitative method of assessing student inclusion in the collection, it is important that the results presented in this report are viewed with an understanding of the developing data quality and consideration of the contextual information provided in this document.

The results show some observable variability across states and sectors. This may be attributable to a combination of factors including, but not limited to, some variation caused by different levels of understanding of reporting requirements and differences caused by a range of school and community contextual factors.

Any future use or publication of data and other issues arising from the collection, including student privacy, will be considered once data quality has been determined to be sufficient.



In the 2015 collection, students were identified across all levels of adjustment. The most commonly reported category of adjustment was supplementary (8.2%).

The 2015 collection identified 18 per cent (674,323 students) of all Australian school students as receiving an educational adjustment due to disability. These students fell into the following levels of adjustment in the collection:

- 5.5 per cent (206,058) support provided within quality differentiated teaching practice
- 8.2 per cent (307,257) supplementary
- 2.8 per cent (106,577) substantial
- 1.5 per cent (54,431) extensive.

The results show some variability across states and territories and sectors. Until the quality of the data improves, the data cannot be directly compared.

The results show some observable variability across states and territories and sectors. The reasons for this are currently unknown and it is inappropriate to make assumptions about the variability without further work being undertaken on quality assurance and moderation.

The reasons for the variability will be explored as part of a quality assurance project on the 2016 data. The variability may be attributable to different levels of school understanding of the data collection model. Alternatively it may reflect actual differences in the distribution of students with disability. Further, moderation processes across states and territories are not robust and require further consideration.

Until the reasons for variability are understood the data cannot be directly compared. The tables and graphs that follow are included to provide the community with a point in time view of progress to date in developing the national data collection.

The distribution of students with disability by sector and level of adjustment as a percentage of total school population is shown in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1 Distribution of students with disability by sector and level of adjustment as a percentage of total student population (2015).

Level of Adjustment	Government	Catholic*	Independent	All Sectors
Support within QDTP	5.8%	3.2%	7.4%	5.5%
Supplementary	8.3%	8.6%	6.9%	8.2%
Substantial	3.4%	1.7%	2.0%	2.8%
Extensive	1.9%	0.4%	0.8%	1.5%
All Adjustments	19.4%	14.0%	17.1%	18.0%

*Catholic independent schools have been included in the Catholic sector



The distribution of students with disability by sector and category of disability as a percentage of total student population is shown in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2 Distribution of students with disability by sector and category of disability as a percentage of total student population (2015).

Category of Disability	Government	Catholic*	Independent	All Sectors
Cognitive	10.9%	7.6%	8.2%	9.8%
Physical	3.3%	2.7%	4.5%	3.4%
Sensory	0.8%	0.5%	0.7%	0.7%
Social-Emotional	4.5%	3.3%	3.7%	4.1%
All Categories of Disability	19.4%	14.0%	17.1%	18.0%

*Catholic independent schools have been included in the Catholic sector

The distribution of students with disability by state and territory and level of adjustment as a percentage of total student population is shown in Table 3 below.

TABLE 3 Distribution of students with disability by state and territory and level of adjustment as a percentage of total student population.

Level of Adjustment	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	National
Support within QDTP	3.9%	6.2%	7.3%	5.9%	6.0%	3.1%	2.2%	3.1%	5.5%
Supplementary	10.1%	6.3%	7.7%	10.0%	7.9%	5.0%	5.3%	6.7%	8.2%
Substantial	2.6%	2.8%	3.9%	2.5%	2.0%	2.4%	4.0%	2.0%	2.8%
Extensive	1.3%	1.8%	1.8%	1.0%	0.8%	0.7%	2.0%	0.9%	1.5%
All Adjustments	17.9%	17.1%	20.7%	19.4%	16.7%	11.3%	13.6%	12.7%	18.0%

*The reasons for the variability across states and territories are currently unknown. Until the reasons for the variability are understood, data should not be directly compared.

The distribution of students with disability by state and territory and category of disability as a percentage of total student population is shown in Table 4 below.

TABLE 4 Distribution of students with disability by state and territory and category of disability as a percentage of total student population.

Category of Disability	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	National
Cognitive	9.8%	8.8%	11.0%	12.7%	9.2%	6.7%	6.6%	6.3%	9.8%
Physical	3.0%	3.5%	3.8%	2.0%	4.6%	1.8%	1.3%	2.6%	3.4%
Sensory	0.5%	0.5%	1.2%	0.8%	0.8%	0.3%	1.4%	0.4%	0.7%
Social-Emotional	4.6%	4.3%	4.6%	4.0%	2.1%	2.5%	4.3%	3.3%	4.1%
All Categories of Disability	17.9%	17.1%	20.7%	19.4%	16.7%	11.3%	13.6%	12.7%	18.0%

*The reasons for the variability across states and territories are currently unknown. Until the reasons for the variability are understood, data should not be directly compared.



The 18% of school students with disability identified through the collection are enrolled across all states and territories and sectors.

The distribution of students with disability within states and territories and Australia by level of adjustment is shown in Figure 1 and Table 5 below.

FIGURE 1 Distribution of students with disability within states and territories and Australia, by level of adjustment.

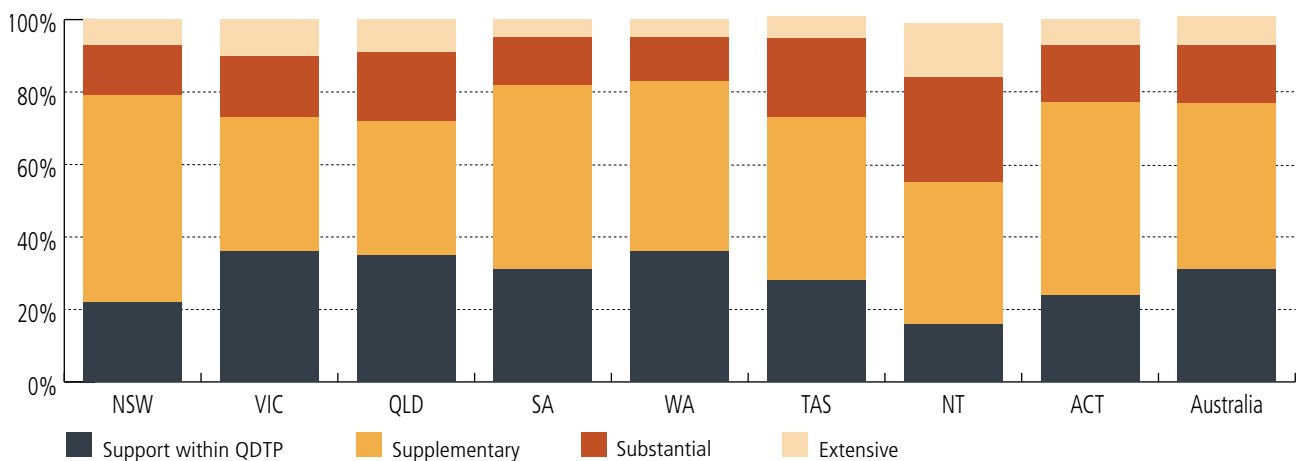


TABLE 5 Distribution of students with disability within states and territories and Australia, by level of adjustment.

State / Territory	Level of Adjustment				TOTAL
	Support within QDTP	Supplementary	Substantial	Extensive	
NSW	22%	57%	14%	7%	100%
VIC	36%	37%	17%	10%	100%
QLD	35%	37%	19%	9%	100%
SA	31%	51%	13%	5%	100%
WA	36%	47%	12%	5%	100%
TAS	28%	45%	22%	6%	100%
NT	16%	39%	29%	15%	100%
ACT	24%	53%	16%	7%	100%
Australia	31%	46%	16%	8%	100%

NB: numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding



The government sector has the highest share of the total Australian school population and also the highest share of students requiring adjustments.

The distribution of students with disability by sector and level of adjustment is shown in Figure 2 and Table 6 below. Figure 2 and Table 6 also show the distribution of all students across sectors for comparison.

FIGURE 2 Distribution of all students and students with disability by sector and level of adjustment.

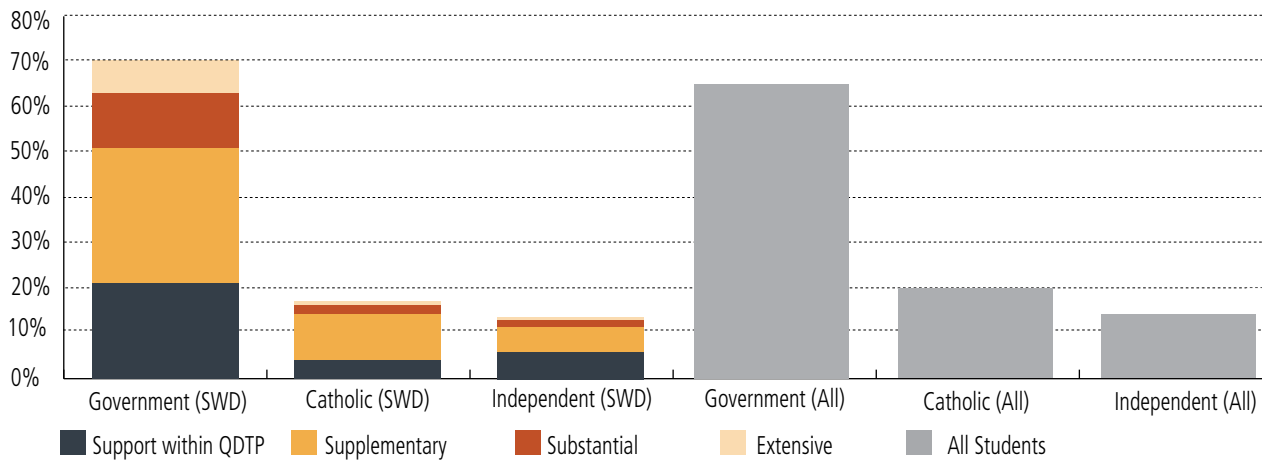


TABLE 6 Distribution of students with disability by sector and level of adjustment.

Level of Adjustment	Gov	Catholic	Ind	All Sectors
Support within QDTP	21%	4%	6%	31%
Supplementary	30%	10%	6%	46%
Substantial	12%	2%	2%	16%
Extensive	7%	1%	1%	8%
Share of all students requiring an adjustment	70%	16%	14%	100%
Share of all Australian school students	65%	20%	14%	100%



The most frequently identified category of disability was cognitive.

The distribution of students with disability within states and territories and Australia by category of disability is shown in Figure 3 and Table 7 below.

FIGURE 3 Distribution of students with disability within states and territories and Australia, by category of disability.



TABLE 7 Distribution of students with disability within states and territories and Australia, by category of disability.

State / Territory	Category of Disability				TOTAL
	Cognitive	Physical	Sensory	Social Emotional	
NSW	55%	17%	3%	26%	100%
VIC	52%	20%	3%	25%	100%
QLD	53%	19%	6%	22%	100%
SA	65%	11%	4%	20%	100%
WA	55%	28%	5%	12%	100%
TAS	59%	16%	3%	22%	100%
NT	48%	10%	10%	32%	100%
ACT	50%	21%	3%	26%	100%
Australia	54%	19%	4%	23%	100%

NB: numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding



The distribution of students with disability by category of disability and level of adjustment is shown in Table 8 below.

TABLE 8 Distribution of students with disability by level of adjustment and category of disability.

Level of Adjustment	Category of Disability				TOTAL
	Cognitive	Physical	Sensory	Social-Emotional	
Support within QDTP	37%	39%	4%	19%	100%
Supplementary	62%	11%	4%	24%	100%
Substantial	60%	7%	4%	29%	100%
Extensive	68%	7%	4%	21%	100%
All Adjustments	54%	19%	4%	23%	100%

NB: numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding

FIGURE 4 Distribution of primary level students with disability by category of disability was:

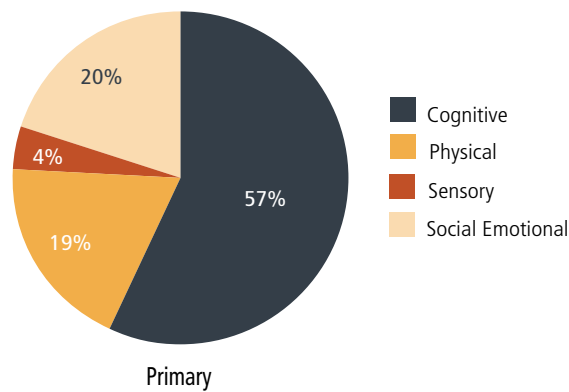
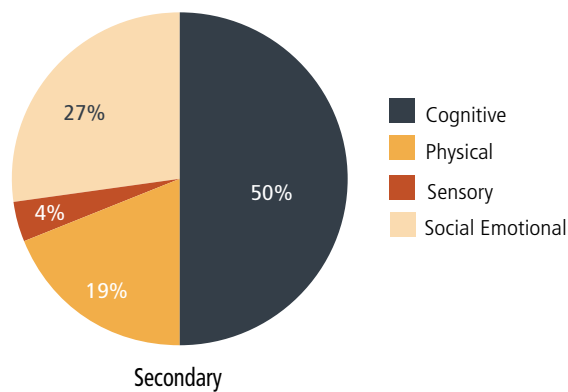


FIGURE 5 Distribution of secondary level students with disability by category of disability was:





Through their participation in the collection, schools are improving their support for students with disability.

The annual collection is more than a count of the number of students with disability; it aims to ensure better support for these students becomes routine in the day-to-day practice of schools through:

- Strengthening understanding of schools' legislative obligations in relation to students with disability and embedding these obligations into teaching and administrative practice
- Focusing attention on the individual educational adjustments required to support students with disability to participate in learning on the same basis as other students and enabling schools to better reflect on the needs of these students and to support them more effectively
- Facilitating a more collaborative and coordinated approach to supporting students with disability, including through prompting improvements in documentation at the school level
- Strengthening communication between schools, parents and the broader community about the needs of students with disability to increase transparency and reinforce an ongoing culture of inclusion and support for students with disability.

Continuous improvement in the collection, with a particular focus on achieving data that are robust, valid and reliable, is supported through regular and formal review of the data collection process. This approach has seen a continual improvement and expansion of the guidance and support for teachers, support staff and school leaders to assist improved understanding of the data collection.

Through assisting schools to meet the needs of students with disability more effectively, the collection plays an important role in complementing broader reforms underway in the schools sector supporting improved outcomes for all students.

The past decade since creation of the Standards has seen substantial policy reform for the education of school students with disability. Implementation of the collection is not only a significant educational reform in and of itself, it is also both directly and indirectly contributing to other current national and local initiatives that aim to support school leaders, teachers and parents to better meet the needs of all students, including students with disability.

This report aims to celebrate the enormous achievement the collection represents. The 2015 data collection is the culmination of years of collaborative effort and all education jurisdictions are committed to the continuous improvement of the collection.

Schools and education authorities are to be commended for their collaborative work to embed the Standards in teaching practice and present a more reliable, consistent and transparent view of students with disability across Australia. We will see the full impact of the collection over the coming years through continued fostering of a culture of inclusivity and ongoing improvements in support for students with disability in Australian schools. Council is pleased to present the results from the 2015 Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability.

