

# Effectively Supporting Students (August 2010)

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# KEY PRINCIPLES: ASSISTING STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

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## Key principles underpinning support for students experiencing difficulties in learning, regardless of the cause

- Students with specific learning needs are entitled to acquire the knowledge, skills, understandings, values and recognised credentials that enable them to participate in a changing society
- The Department, through its state offices, regions and schools, is responsible for the quality development and delivery of inclusive education and training for students with learning difficulties
- Students experiencing difficulties in learning may need accommodations and learning adjustments to enable them to access and participate in learning on the same basis as other students
- The equitable allocation of resources based on need is essential to meet the additional educational needs of students with difficulties in learning

## Key principles for the effective operation of services supporting students with learning difficulties

- A whole school commitment is essential to meeting the needs of students experiencing difficulties in learning
- School learning support teams assist schools and teachers to meet the specific learning needs of their students
- The school community, learning assistance personnel and other professionals work collaboratively to support students with learning difficulties
- Coordination and monitoring of learning assistance services and student learning outcomes within a quality teaching framework is essential
- Ongoing professional learning assists class teachers, executive and support staff to build their capacity to meet the specific learning needs of students
- School Learning Support Teachers work within policy guidelines to assist schools to provide for students experiencing difficulties in basic areas of learning
- An emphasis on early identification of students experiencing difficulties in learning and early intervention at all stages of learning is most effective
- The establishment of transition processes between settings assists schools to ensure continuity in student learning with appropriate support

Policy link: [https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/general\\_man/general/learndiff/PD20060342.shtml](https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/general_man/general/learndiff/PD20060342.shtml)

# IDENTIFYING STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS

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In any one school there will be students who may experience difficulties with learning. These difficulties may vary in cause, nature, intensity and duration. Learning difficulties may arise at any time throughout a student's school life. Students may experience difficulties in learning because of the ways in which they learn or the rates at which they learn. These students will have differing levels of educational need, which may require the provision of one or more educational support services over varying periods of time.

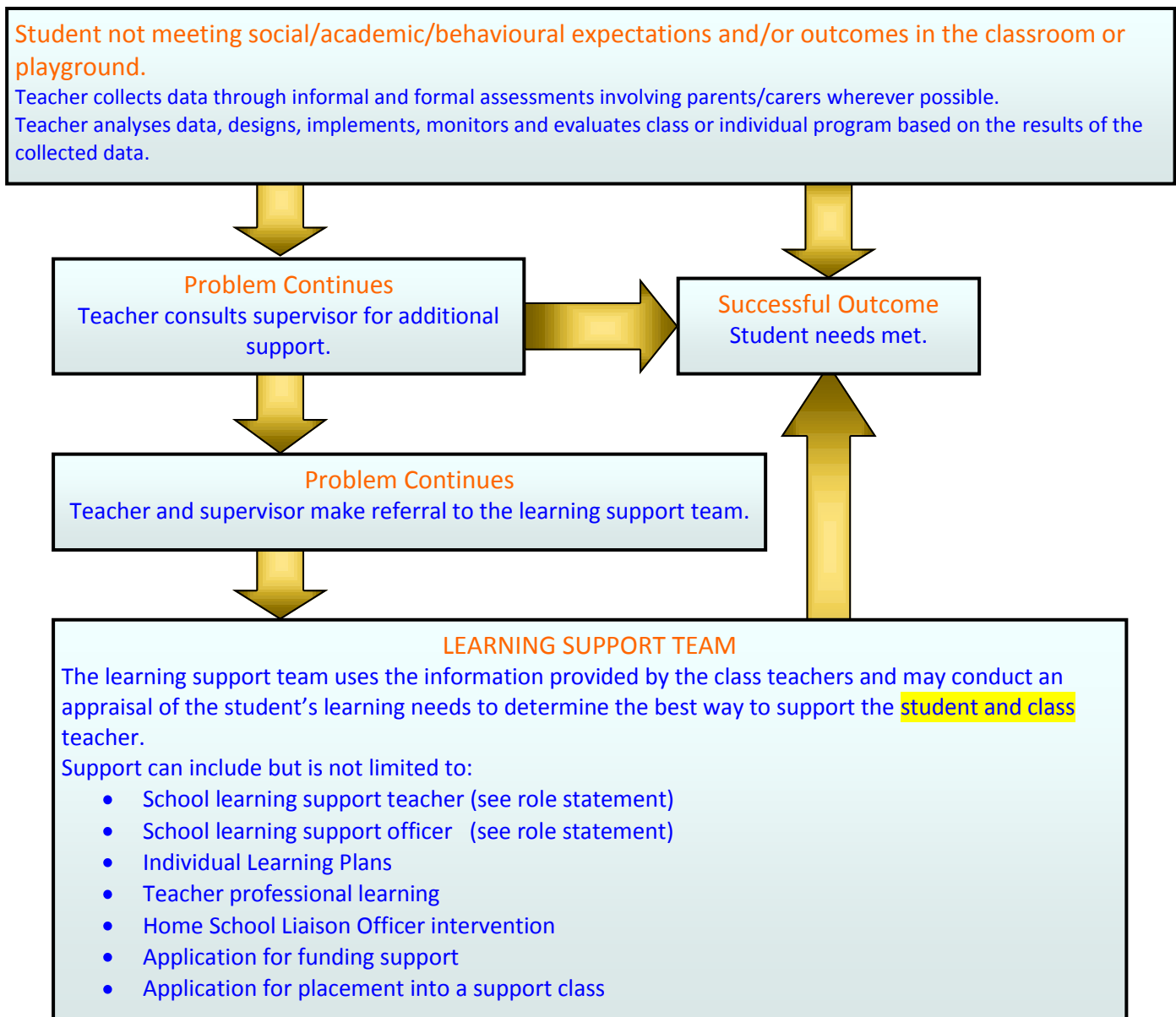
The prime responsibility for meeting the specific learning needs of students with difficulties in basic areas of learning lies with the school and the classroom teacher.

<p><b>The Class Teacher</b></p>	<p>In any classroom at any given time there are a range of students with different learning needs. Class teachers use a variety of strategies to cater for the needs of all students in their class and use a variety of appropriate assessment strategies to judge student academic, social and emotional development.</p> <p>In some cases, class teachers need support to effectively cater for students with additional learning needs within the mainstream classroom. The student is then referred to the school's learning support team.</p>						
<p><b>The School Learning Support Team</b></p>	<p>The school learning support team assists the school and teachers to meet the specific learning needs of their students. It plays a key role in ensuring that the specific learning needs of students experiencing difficulties in learning are met.</p> <p>An important role of the learning support team, in relation to individual students, is an appraisal of student needs. The appraisal process identifies the student's educational achievements and support needs. It forms the basis for decision making regarding goals, agreed educational outcomes, programming and support needs in an educational setting.</p>						
<p><b>Parents and/or caregivers</b></p>	<p>Parents and caregivers provide valuable information to the school about the learning needs of their children.</p> <p>Parents should be consulted and informed as part of the appraisal process for their child.</p>						
<p><b>Other agencies</b></p>	<p>Information about individual students can be obtained from a variety of agencies such as:</p> <table data-bbox="391 1727 1374 1800"> <tr> <td>Paediatrician</td> <td>Psychologist</td> <td>Health Care professionals</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Speech Pathologist</td> <td>Occupational Therapist</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>This information may include a confirmation of a disability, highlight strengths/weaknesses, and include specific programs to support the class teacher.</p>	Paediatrician	Psychologist	Health Care professionals	Speech Pathologist	Occupational Therapist	
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Speech Pathologist	Occupational Therapist						

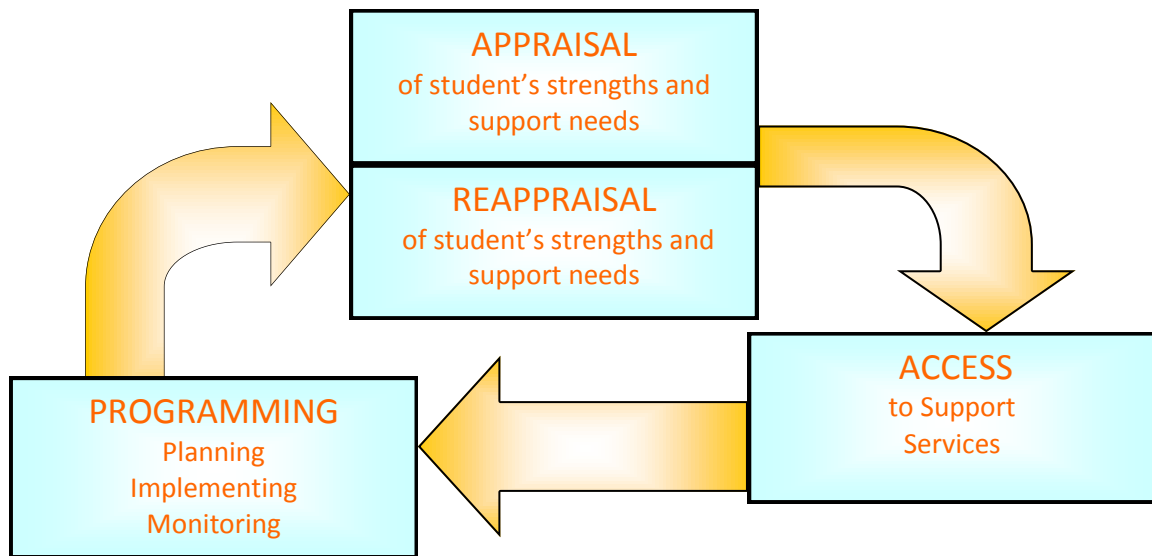
# PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS

Students with additional learning needs are entitled to acquire the knowledge, skills, understandings, values and recognised credentials that enable them to participate in a changing society. A whole school commitment is essential to meeting the needs of students experiencing difficulties in learning.

These students may need accommodations and learning adjustments to enable them to access and participate in learning on the same basis as other students.



# THE SUPPORT CYCLE



<p><b>Appraisal of student strengths and support needs</b></p>	<p>Appraisal forms the basis for decision-making regarding goals, agreed educational outcomes, programming and support needs in an educational setting. The appraisal process is collaborative. It involves all those with significant information or the capacity to assist educational decision-making. For students with disabilities and learning difficulties, schools should give consideration to the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students' achievements and support needs in:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Curriculum key learning areas</li> <li>- Communication</li> <li>- Personal care and safety</li> <li>- Social skills</li> <li>- Mobility</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Determination of longer term goals</li> <li>• Identification of intended learning outcomes</li> <li>• The nature and level of support required for the students and school personnel in that particular setting.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Access to Support Services</b></p>	<p>This stage of the support cycle involves facilitating the student's access to effective educational programs through the provision of support identified during the appraisal process. An important role of the learning support team in relation to individual students is the identification of student needs and the provision of appropriate support.</p>
<p><b>Programming Planning Implementing Monitoring</b></p>	<p>Programming involves developing a framework for instruction based on the student's learning plan. A learning plan should be developed collaboratively with all those who have an interest in the education of the student. The plan should align the student's educational needs identified through the appraisal process with appropriate curriculum and effective instructional strategies.</p>
<p><b>Reappraisal of learning outcomes</b></p>	<p>Reappraisal refers to the process of measuring the effectiveness of an educational program and the services which support its implementation in a particular setting. Goals and outcomes of the student's learning plan are also reconsidered at this time. A new set of goals and agreed outcomes may be generated and consequent programming and resource implications will need to be addressed.</p>

Special Education handbook [https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/general\\_man/general/spec\\_ed/handbook.pdf](https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/general_man/general/spec_ed/handbook.pdf)

# ADJUSTMENTS TO SUPPORT ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING

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The *Curriculum planning and programming, assessing and reporting to parents K-12* policy outlines requirements for the provision of educational programs in the NSW Department of Education and Training.

All schools are required to implement the policy which:

- accounts for the needs of every student
- addresses each Key Learning Area in each year of schooling (K-6)
- encourages flexible delivery
- includes minimum Board of Studies requirements for years 7-12
- identifies the need for:
  - adjustments to support access and participation in learning activities
  - access to special provisions for assessment.

Adjustments are measures or actions taken in relation to teaching, learning and assessing that enable a student with a disability or additional learning needs to access and participate in education according to their individual needs. They include:

- adjustments to the environment, resources or teaching and learning strategies that support students to access the same curriculum content and outcomes as their age/stage peers; and
- adjusted learning programs for those students who are accessing different curriculum content and outcomes than their age/stage peers.

Adjustments may include:

- adapted teaching and learning strategies to meet individual student needs such as: instructional scaffolding; presentation of content in smaller, more manageable steps; additional demonstration of key facts, concepts, strategies and procedures
- changes to the content of the teaching and learning program that reflect individual student needs
- adjustments to enable access to particular learning experiences
- adjustments to assessment
- opportunities for additional guided practice, independent practice and feedback
- changes or modifications to the classroom, furniture, equipment and physical spaces
- provision of resources and equipment for the student such as sign language, Braille, a reader or scribe, access to technology, and support for personal care.

Some students may be supported by a range of adjustments to meet their specific needs. For example, a student may have an adjusted learning program in one or more KLA while accessing the same curriculum outcomes and content as their peers in other KLAs with support through technology and additional time for certain tasks.

Decisions about adjustments are made in consultation with the student and/or their parent or carer as appropriate.

In Years K-6 teachers must give careful consideration to the outcomes students are working towards. If the content or depth of understanding is substantially changed from that which is expected of the student's cohort then a learning adjustment has been made. An example might be a unit on the family. The class is working towards an understanding of extended families. One student is working towards identifying close family members in photographs. While the student is engaged in the same unit of work as the rest of the class a learning adjustment has been made in response to this student's personalised learning needs.

In the Years 7-10 the Life Skills outcomes and content are embedded into each of the 42 syllabus documents. Life Skills outcomes and content provide a learning adjusted program as do the Life Skills patterns of study in Years 11-12. A student may require accommodations to access their learning adjusted program.

Policy Link: [https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/curriculum/schools/curric\\_plan/PD20050290.shtml](https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/curriculum/schools/curric_plan/PD20050290.shtml)

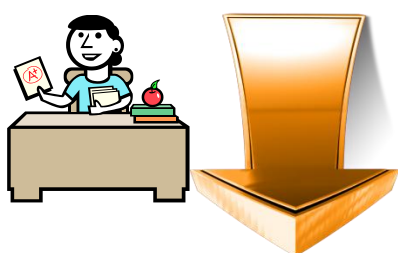
# SCHOOL LEARNING SUPPORT PROGRAM RESOURCES

As part of the *School Learning Support Program*, two resources are allocated to schools; **school learning support teacher positions** and **funding**.

This chart provides guidance for principals and school learning support teams in relation to the use and administration of the resources received through the program.

Students supported through the *School Learning Support Program* are those with lower level support needs including those with difficulties in learning and confirmed disabilities.

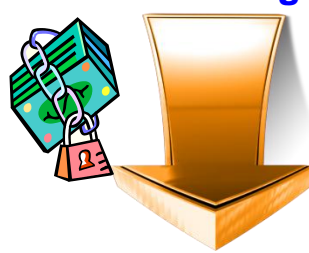
## Teacher Positions



### School Learning Support Teacher Positions

- These are allocated to your school as a *staffing allocation*, for example 0.1, 0.8, etc.
- You **do not** pay for these from the funding allocation
- Should you employ a temporary teacher into the position the code used is for an UNFILLED VACANCY
- This allocation cannot be converted to funding

## Funding



### Funding

Funding is allocated as a tied grant and can only be used for salary purposes to support students with additional learning needs.

Approved uses include the following:

- Training and development activities (teacher relief and school learning support officer training)
- Additional teacher time
- School Learning Support Officer time
- Teacher release
- Transfer of duty
- Program coordination time

In employing teachers or SLSO the CEPS code to be used is 005

**Funding** from the *School Learning Support Program* is targeted to support students with additional learning needs without the requirement for a disability confirmation. This funding is additional to and supplements existing school resources and other targeted funding received by the school. Principals have the responsibility for determining the most appropriate ways of using their total annual funding to support students with additional learning needs and their class teachers.

Students with lower level support needs may demonstrate need in one or more basic areas of learning. The school's learning support team will consider the needs of the individual student when allocating teacher time and funding support. For example, using the funding allocated, the school's learning support team may decide to provide initial assistance at a more intensive level and reduce support as a student gains skills and independence.



The **school learning support teacher** is a targeted position to assist schools to provide direct support for students with additional learning needs and their class teachers.

The school learning support teacher will, through the school's learning support team, provide direct and timely assistance to students in regular classes with additional learning needs from diverse cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds and their teachers. Emphasis in the role will reflect school priorities and programs that support students with additional learning needs.

The school learning support teacher position should not be used to:

- establish a separate class
- provide relief for absent teachers or executive
- provide academic extension programs for gifted students
- provide release from face-to-face teaching for staff members
- permanently assist any one section of the school or any particular subject area.



# EFFECTIVE LEARNING SUPPORT TEAMS

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*We recommend the Department establish a consistent approach to the operation and professional development of learning support teams.*

*~Auditor General's report, 2006*

The learning support team is a whole school planning and support mechanism. It is formed with the purpose of addressing the learning support needs of individual and groups of students through the coordination, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of educational programs.

A prime function of the learning support team is to ensure that the needs of all students in the school are being met. This is achieved through the team facilitating collaborative planning between teachers, support staff, parents and students.

The school learning support teacher will, through the school's learning support team, provide direct and timely assistance to students in regular classes with additional learning needs from diverse cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds and their teachers.

## Membership

Membership of the learning support team is determined by each school according to local needs. However, in general the team usually includes:

- a team facilitator ( a member of the school executive);
- school counsellor;
- teacher representatives;
- specialist personnel (for example, specialist teachers in learning assistance, English as a Second language (ESL), Reading Recovery, Aboriginal Education Officer); and
- other specialist personnel, for example, school learning support officers, parents and carers participate as necessary.

Participation will vary according to the needs of the school and function of the team at a particular time.

## Elements of Effective Learning Support Teams

- Student learning needs and support are included in school plans and school implementation plans
- The work of the learning support team is promoted and staff are engaged with its role
- There are clear procedures, processes, roles and responsibilities which are documented
- There is a well documented, organised structure for the learning support team
- Regular meetings and planning sessions are timetabled with agendas and minutes
- The work of the learning support team is regularly evaluated
- There is strong executive support for the learning support team
- All stakeholders across the school community are represented
- The learning support team targets needs rather than individual students
- A whole school integrated team approach is favoured
- Analysis of data drives planning and priorities
- Professional learning for staff is based on need
- Regular communication/feedback to teachers occurs
- Involvement of parents/carers is valued
- Support may include professional learning, team teaching, expertise within school, an outside agency, peer tutoring, etc.

# LEARNING PLANS

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A learning plan is a process to formally tailor learning for a student or a small group of students when their specific learning needs place them at risk of not progressing to their next stage of learning. A learning plan does not have to be a separate document developed for an individual student as, in many instances, a learning plan for a specific student or group of students will be incorporated, maintained and monitored within the classroom program.

A learning plan is an agreed response of the school to identified educational needs for the individual student or a small group of students as it tailors teaching and learning to support individual student learning and engagement. It enables schools to demonstrate accountability for providing an appropriate educational program for every student as required by the:

- Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- Disability Standards for Education 2005
- The Department's Curriculum planning and programming, assessing and reporting to parents K-12 policy (2006).

Any student or small group of students who are at risk of not progressing to their next stage of learning may benefit from a learning plan that responds to their individual learning needs. Learning plans build on and respond to students' learning history including their diverse cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds along with additional needs associated with such things as:

- difficulties in learning including dyslexia
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- language and communication
- behaviour disorders
- various confirmed disabilities
- mental health problems.

An effective learning plan is a working document for the teachers and other staff who work with students. It is developed by teachers in collaboration with students, parents/carers and other relevant staff or service providers and contains clear language that teachers, parents/carers and students understand to describe:

- long term goals that reflect Board of Studies syllabus outcomes
- short term specific, achievable and measurable targets
- adjustments to support access and participation in learning activities
- key implementation strategies
- specific resources or equipment
- assessment tasks and monitoring strategies
- negotiated contributions to be made by home, school and other services.

# EDUCATION PLANS FOR STUDENTS IN OUT OF HOME CARE

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The NSW Government plan *Keep Them Safe: A shared approach to child wellbeing* states that within 30 days of entering out of home care, all preschool and school aged children and young people in out of home care in government schools will have an individual education plan prepared for them, which is reviewed annually by the Department of Education and Training and by the responsible case worker. (Recommendation 16.8)

The principal is responsible for ensuring the development of an individual education plan for a student in statutory out of home care who is enrolling in the school or when it is known an existing student is entering care. The principal is responsible for ensuring its development within 30 school days of notification that the child or young person has entered, or is in, out of home care and revised at least annually.

The individual education plan may include other plans such as a disability, transition, behavior or health care plan, the NSW Services Case Plan or the NSW Health assessment/health care plan.

The principal should be aware that the individual education plan and attachments may contain potentially sensitive or confidential information. Consideration must be given to what should be included and what should be made available to others, on a 'need to know' basis. All staff are expected to manage personal information about students appropriately.

## The Individual Education Plan

The individual education plan should identify:

- the academic, social, behavioural, emotional and wellbeing needs of the child or young person
- strategies for achieving the identified outcomes for the student and what is needed to achieve them; taking into account available resources
- who will be responsible for implementing the strategies or providing identified resources or support service
- the timelines for implementing the plan
- monitoring strategies and responsibility
- review dates, including annual review date of the individual education plan.

The individual education plan should:

- outline a meaningful educational program which builds on and responds positively to the student's learning history including their life experience, cultural, linguistic, religious or spiritual beliefs, gender and socio-economic background
- be age and developmentally appropriate
- be flexible and future-oriented
- be a strength-based model with a focus on what is needed to support the student to access and participate in education on the same basis as all other students to achieve improved educational, social and behavioural outcomes
- aim to retain the student at school
- clearly articulate roles and responsibilities
- provide/document information on student progress

- contain a record of important decisions and actions
- be reviewed on a regular basis according to the needs of the child or young person (at least annually, when circumstances change and when the child or young person changes school)
- be developed by teachers in collaboration with the student, carers, caseworker and other relevant staff or service providers.

## The Role of the Learning Support Team

The learning support team oversees the development, review and monitoring of the individual education plan for a child or young person in out of home care. It is a collaborative process which should involve key people including:

- the child or young person
- the principal or nominee
- the teacher
- year advisor, head teacher welfare and other staff such as support teachers learning assistance
- school counsellor, if applicable
- the carer
- the caseworker
- other professional staff (for example, speech therapists) and designated non-government agencies, where appropriate.

If an individual education plan has been developed in a previous school, it will be reviewed by the learning support team and updated, within 30 school days, to meet the current needs of the student. When a student transfers to a new school, a copy of the individual education plan should be forwarded to the new school in a timely manner.

## Filing, documenting and access to the individual education plan

Care should be taken to manage sensitive or confidential information about students appropriately. The individual education plan should be kept in a secure place and available only to those staff who need this information to support the student.

The principal must ensure that the carer and the student are provided with a copy of the individual education plan as soon as possible after it is developed and whenever it is reviewed. A copy should be provided, by the carer or school, to Community Services NSW or the designated government or non-government agency with case management responsibility.

A copy of a child or young person's individual education plan may be provided to NSW Health, as appropriate, to contribute to the child or young person's health assessment/health care plan.

At times, if required and if appropriate, Community Services NSW may share information contained in, or an entire copy of, the individual education plan with another government or non-government agency. They may also share a copy of the individual education plan with birth parents or other key birth family members to support the maintenance of a child or young person's identity and relationships within their birth family.

### Out of home care in government schools policy

[https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/student\\_serv/student\\_welfare/outhome/PD20100402\\_i.shtml?level=Schools&categories=Schools%7CAccess+%26+equity%7COut+of+home+care](https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/student_serv/student_welfare/outhome/PD20100402_i.shtml?level=Schools&categories=Schools%7CAccess+%26+equity%7COut+of+home+care)

### Out of home care in government schools policy implementation

[https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/student\\_serv/student\\_welfare/outhome/implementation\\_1\\_PD20100402\\_i.shtml](https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/student_serv/student_welfare/outhome/implementation_1_PD20100402_i.shtml)

# Personalised Learning Plans for Aboriginal Students

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*That each Aboriginal student have a personalised plan that will be developed by the school in partnership with parents/caregivers and include targets for learning against syllabus outcomes and agreed family support strategies, e.g. home reading strategies, attendance, transition from primary to secondary education.*

*Review of Aboriginal Education 2004: Recommendation*

Personalised learning plans are intended to be an integral part of teaching and learning. The emphasis is on the process of building partnerships between schools and communities to support learning achievements and enhance the wellbeing of students.

Personalised Learning Plans are:

- The foundations to strengthening constructive relationships with parents and/or carers
- Localised and developed in partnership with parents and/or caregivers while co-opting the assistance of Aboriginal support staff and other 'specialist' staff and agencies
- Linked to and aligned with other plans a student may have e.g. individual learning plans (IEPs), career pathways and behaviour modification plans while remaining autonomous
- Reflective of students' academic goals and aspirations while wrapped in a culturally inclusive context that is considerate of the student's spiritual and physical health and wellbeing
- Dynamic and should be an evolving document that is monitored and reviewed periodically, ensuring currency of student progress and development.

They:

- Consolidate student learning
- Profile student cultural, social and academic considerations
- Provide a blue-print for learning that can be customised to student requirements which are both holistic and comprehensive while sensitive to student needs and aspirations.

Personalised Learning Plans are localised and as such may reflect a combination of varying formats which are inclusive of the following essential elements:

- Collaborative processes negotiated with parents and/or caregivers, relevant support staff, specialists, government and non-government agencies
- Cultural considerations and/or programs
- Rigorous academic standards and expectations
- Set targets and goals
- Dynamic key strategies and actions
- Health and wellbeing

*Ensure planning at a local level promotes Aboriginal student attendance and engagement and that Personalised Learning Plans are relevant and communicated to key stakeholders.*

*~Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy 2009-2012*

**Note:** Teachers need to recognise and be responsive to Aboriginal students' culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Further support in working with, and developing personalised learning plans for Aboriginal students can be obtained through regional Aboriginal Education Consultants.