



Inquiry into ACT Budget 2021–22
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Asked by Mr Johnathan Davis MLA on 21 October 2021 to Minister for Education and Youth Affairs:

In relation to: Specialist Schools for students with a disability (Output 1)

The per capita costs associated with having a student with a disability in a specialist school have risen beyond their targets. This represents an even greater percentage increase in costs compared to a student with disability in a mainstream school.

- a. Could you explain why this cost has risen above its projection?
- b. Do you have cost projections on the costs of including all students with disability in mainstream schools?
- c. Why are we investing this money into specialist schools rather than equipping mainstream schools with the appropriate facilities and resources to see all children with disability included alongside their peers in mainstream schools?
- d. Should full inclusion in mainstream schools be the government strategic policy, please outline the steps the directorate would need to undertake to begin this work?

MINISTER BERRY The answer to the Member's question is as follows:–

- a. As indicated in Note 7 of 'Table 19: Accountability Indicators' of 2021-22 Budget Statement F (page 15), the increase in the 2020-21 Interim Outcome from the 2020-21 target is primarily due to increased complexity of need and highly targeted support programs associated with students in specialist schools.

The increase from 2020-21 Interim Outcome to the 2021-22 Target is \$647 per student (or 0.8 per cent over the 2020-21 Interim Outcome).

- b. The Education Directorate does not have cost projections on the costs of including all students with disability in mainstream schools.
- c. All families, with students with disability, have the option to enrol their child in their local school, a small group program at their local school or a specialist school. Resourcing is allocated dependant on the family's choice of enrolment.
- d. Inclusion is one of the four principles under the Future of Education Strategy. During this term of government, as part of the Future of Education Strategy, the ACT Government has committed to "reviewing disability education together with people with disability and carers, and planning for the renewal of several ageing specialist schools".

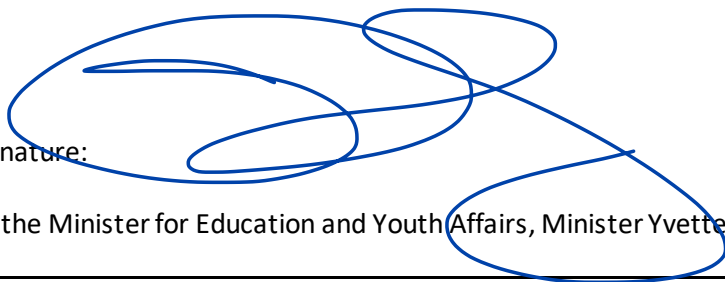
The review will be an opportunity to identify actions to ensure longer term direction and system reform that embeds inclusive cultures and educational practice in the ACT public school system, where students with disabilities are included in a way that *suits them and their families*.

This independently facilitated review, will provide qualitative research data that builds on extensive consultations already undertaken since 2015 to ensure students with disability, their families and carers, as well as the broader ACT community are engaged in the reform program needed to ensure all students have the option to access high quality education and care at their local school. The consultation will consider the short and longer-term options for ACT's specialist schools as the system progressively moves towards inclusion in all schooling settings, noting this will take time to achieve. This work provides a sound foundation for strengthening inclusive education more broadly in the ACT by informing an inclusive education strategy- a policy framework and roadmap. These tools will strengthen inclusive practices in a planned, systematic and complementary way.

Also included in this early work program is the objective to ensure students with disability can access and are included in their local/ Priority Enrolment Area (PEA) schools along with their mainstream peers, a goal that will be achieved for all ACT Schools by 2023. The ACT Government is committed to delivering inclusion reform and knows it will take time, commitment, resources, intentional planning, and implementation as well as consultation to achieve more inclusiveness in ACT Public Schools.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Secretary: Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion

Signature:



Date:

03/11/21

By the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister Yvette Berry