

## Disability Strategy Reference Group

### Background

The NSW Department of Education’s Disability Strategy (2019) sets out the department’s plan for providing children and young people with disability, their families and the broader community with an education system that meets their needs. We aspire to build an education system in which children with disability thrive academically, develop good physical, mental and emotional health, and gain the skills to live a fulfilling, independent life post-school. We envisage an education system where all schools and classrooms have the support they need to educate and include the range of children and young people in their local community.

In its Disability Strategy (2019), the NSW Department of Education defines inclusive education system as: “Inclusive education means that all students, regardless of disability, ethnicity, socio-economic status, nationality, language, gender, sexual orientation or faith, can access and fully participate in learning, alongside their similar aged peers, supported by reasonable adjustments and teaching strategies tailored to meet their individual needs.”

The Inclusive Education Statement for students with disability (2020) built on this by outlining:

“Inclusion needs to be embedded in all aspects of school life and be supported by culture, policies and everyday practices. A more inclusive education system is one where:

- Students with disability are learning to their fullest capability.
- Parents and carers are treated like partners in their child's education.
- Teachers possess the necessary skills to effectively educate children with disability, and feel confident doing so.
- School leaders wholeheartedly support and enable inclusive education practices.
- Specialists work alongside teachers, providing support and guidance.”

The Disability Strategy sets out a commitment to “continue conversations with stakeholders as we implement the strategy” in order to “keep building on the successes we’re having today in the hope of realising a more inclusive system tomorrow” The Disability Strategy Reference Group is one way the Department is delivering on this commitment.

<b>Chair</b>	Deputy Secretary, Learning Improvement: Ruth Owen
<b>Membership</b>	<p>The Reference Group members may be representatives of community organisations with a primary interest in the education and wellbeing of young people with disability, or individuals with lived experience of disability or parents/carers of children and young people with disability.</p> <p>Membership of the group will change from time to time with prospective members being required to present an Expression of Interest to the department.</p>
<b>Scope</b>	<p>The Disability Strategy Reference Group is a valuable source of advice to the Department of Education and provides feedback to the Department of Education in meeting the objectives and commitments of the Disability Strategy.</p> <p>Members will provide strategic advice and feedback on and test ideas with respect to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the impact of the strategy and its initiatives;</li> <li>• the work that needs to be done to realise the intended vision of the Disability Strategy; and</li> <li>• how the work from the Disability Strategy is being received in local communities.</li> </ul> <p>The Reference Group may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide information and advice on specific projects under the Disability Strategy</li> <li>• assist in sharing subject matter expertise, as well as experience as parents and others with lived experience of disability</li> <li>• help to share consistent messaging with schools and throughout local communities.</li> </ul> <p>The Reference Group will be regularly asked to prioritise issues to inform its meeting agendas.</p> <p>It is a consultative body.</p>
<b>Ways of working</b>	<p>Membership of the reference group will be reviewed annually to ensure diverse voices are heard.</p> <p>Membership will be sought through a publicly communicated expression of interest process.</p> <p>All members will be expected to observe the protocols outlined in this charter. The Charter will be endorsed by members on an annual basis or as required.</p> <p>All members and attendees will:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage respectfully; listen and respond respectfully to differing viewpoints</li> <li>• Encourage a safe environment for all to share honest, thoughtful and constructive feedback</li> <li>• Seek the input and views of all</li> <li>• Work together towards achieving improved outcomes and experiences for students with disability.</li> </ul> <p>The Department will provide feedback to members on how their feedback has influenced initiatives.</p>
<b>Confidentiality</b>	<p>Members of the Reference Group may receive information and materials that are confidential in nature or not for wider distribution until a later point in time.</p> <p>Documents such as meeting minutes, reports and presentations should not be disseminated outside the membership without agreement of the Chair.</p> <p>The Chair will aim to make it clear, in each meeting, where information has been imparted that is confidential. Members commit to respect the confidentiality of the forum and confirm whether something is confidential if it is unclear.</p>
<b>Operations &amp; resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings will be held via Microsoft Teams or face to face at 105 Phillip St, Parramatta. Even when held face to face, a Teams format will also be available to ensure maximum participation.</li> <li>• The Reference Group will meet eight times per calendar year, twice each school term.</li> <li>• The meeting frequency will be reviewed on an as needed basis. Matters may be dealt with out of session.</li> <li>• The Secretariat will be provided by the Department of Education, Disability Strategy Team.</li> <li>• Formal notes of meetings will be circulated after the meeting, and an opportunity provided to members to request clarifications or changes.</li> </ul>