

5 June 2025

Dear Deputy Chair and Commissioner de Fontenay,

Re: Submission to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into improving school student outcomes with the best available tools and resources

ACD is the leading advocacy service for children with disability and their families in Victoria.

We are a not-for-profit organisation led by, and for, families of children with disability.

For more than 40 years we have been advocating to improve the lives of children with disability and their families. We focus on families raising children with any disability or developmental delay from birth to 18.

Our vision is an inclusive community where children with disability and their families thrive.

We work by:

- Empowering families
- Building inclusive practice
- Advocating to advance the rights of children with disability.

Through our work we reach thousands of Victorian families raising children with disability each year. Their experiences inform our systemic advocacy.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into improving school student outcomes, and particularly how tools and resources can be used to address persistent inequities in student outcomes.

Targeted resources to address existing inequities in student outcomes

ACD welcomes targeted investment and resources to improve student outcome, however we are concerned that universal approaches — particularly those that focus heavily on technology as a silver bullet — risk reinforcing existing disadvantage.

Education reform and lesson planning materials must recognise differentiation.

In 2023, following four and a half years of evidence gathering, the Disability Royal Commission released its final report. The Commission found entrenched failings in the education system and widespread systemic neglect of students with disability.

Key findings included:

- A lack of meaningful collaboration with students with disability and their families in planning, decision-making, and provision of adjustments
- Inadequate or inappropriate adjustments and supports not tailored to students' individual learning needs
- Disproportionate use of exclusionary practices, such as suspensions and expulsions
- Persistent low expectations and negative attitudes towards students with disability
- Prevalent 'gatekeeping' practices limiting access to the school of choice

These findings strongly reflect what ACD hears directly from families. Education is consistently the most common issue raised through our Support Line, with hundreds of calls each year from families experiencing barriers in the education system.

As a result of these inequities, students with disability are more likely to leave school early, report negative experiences, and face poorer educational outcomes.

In March 2025, ACD held a consultation with teachers who are also parents of students with disability, focused on inclusion in the education system.¹ Participants shared how their personal experiences as parents had reshaped their understanding of disability and influenced their teaching practices.

To improve disability inclusion, they emphasised the need for greater time, resources, and investment in building teachers' understanding of disability, including support for developing and implementing Individual Learning Plans and adopting strategies to meet the diverse needs of students in the classroom.

The Disability Royal Commission also identified workforce capability — such as understanding disability, implementing inclusive practices, de-escalating challenging behaviours, and promoting positive behaviour — as a key contributor to inequitable outcomes.

To improve student outcomes, ACD urges the Productivity Commission to prioritise its focus on the development of resources, tools, and strategies that support teachers to address these systemic causes of inequity, particularly for students with disability.

In turn, teachers will be better equipped to use their time effectively in the classroom, and disparities in student outcomes across different groups will be reduced, raising overall outcomes for all.

A critical understanding of existing student performance indicators

While improving student educational outcomes is a welcome ambition, ACD cautions the Productivity Commission on how some existing measures (e.g., NAPLAN testing) can further marginalise students with disability. For example, we hear from families about students being asked to stay home during testing periods to avoid impacting school results.

Additionally, data collection on the experiences and outcomes of students with disability remains inconsistent or incomplete across states and territories. For instance, there are no standardised measures or policies in place to track rates of partial attendance, which is a significant issue impacting ongoing education attrition for many students with disability.

We urge the Productivity Commission to consider these data limitations, including the lack of disaggregated and disability-specific data, in its work to assess and improve student outcomes.

Thank you for considering our submission. We would be pleased to provide further information if required.

Warm regards,

Karen Dimmock
CEO

[REDACTED]

ⁱ ACD. (2025). *Snapshot: Reflections on disability inclusion in education from teachers who are parents of children with disability*. Available at [Snapshot: Reflections on disability inclusion in education from teachers who are parents of children with disability](#)