

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mrs Hersey to the Minister for Education:

Early Diagnosis of Special Needs

- 1. Can you please explain the process for a Northern Territory government school student to receive special needs funding and support? What kind of diagnosis is required?**

School funding for Students with Disability

Funding to meet the education needs of students with disability (SWD) in NT Government schools is provided in a number of ways as described in detail in the Fact Sheet at Attachment A, however none of these require a diagnosis. While diagnosis may be useful for schools and parents to clarify whether a student's performance might be explained by the child having a disorder or disability, this is not a prerequisite for funding.

Diagnosis-based SWD school funding ceased in 2019 and was replaced with automatic, annual funding allocations through the School Resourcing Model, based on existing data collections such as the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) and student numbers collected in Age Grade Census each August and validated by school principals. All Australian schools participate in the NCCD. This data collection is based on the professional judgement of teachers, who determine:

- the broad type of disability a student might have, and
- the level of adjustment the student has received to access and participate in education on the same basis as other students.

To support this process, schools must have a range of evidence that may include professional diagnosis – however, this is not necessary as a school can impute disability based on other evidence, such as parental report of disability in conjunction with evidence of an assessed individual needs profile that identifies the functional needs of a student with disability.

Schools can also apply for one-off funding each year to meet the needs of students who need complex, sustained adjustments to access learning, or who demonstrate extreme behaviours.

Schools choose how best to use their annual SWD funding allocation across established categories that include specialist staff recruitment, assistive technology and professional learning. This ensures schools can deliver tailored and localised support to embed inclusive practices for students with disability.

SWD funding allocations are in addition to the needs-based funding that all schools receive based on a range of weightings such as school size, socio-economic status, year level, and remoteness.

It should be noted that specialist schools and centres are funded on a different model and receive a flat rate per student (see the Fact Sheet at Attachment A for more information).

Support for schools with SWD

The Department of Education (the department) centrally funds and provides all schools with services and support from specialist advisors, allied health and counselling staff to support the needs of all learners, including SWD. While diagnosis may be useful for parents and school staff to clarify whether the student's learning needs might be impacted by the child having a disorder or disability, diagnosis is not a precondition of receiving this support. The specialist services are provided to schools on a referral for service basis and include:

- support for individual students as well as capability building for school staff across disability, inclusion, wellbeing and positive behavior,
- advice about understanding the needs of students and documenting their adjustments for the NCCD (including development of personalised plans), and
- accessing additional funding sources and ensuring the right equipment is in place at the school.

2. What is the average wait time between a referral for a specialist assessment through the public system to get a special needs diagnosis for a child in the Northern Territory? What has been the longest wait time?

The department does not provide a diagnostic service, however where schools have requested support with a child's educational needs, departmental psychologists, occupational therapists and speech pathologists may help to assess the child's learning needs and work with pediatricians, other NT Government and private allied health staff and other specialists to assist in their investigations or seek diagnostic decisions.

Every effort is made to action referrals from schools for support within a school term, however this can be impacted by a range of factors including regional demand, school priorities, staffing levels, parent engagement and triaging of service based on whether a student has been identified by the team as high, medium or low priority.

To improve the timeliness of actioning referrals for services, the department is reviewing the referral process in consultation with other NT public health services and with reference to best practice.

3. What is the average age at which children are diagnosed for the purposes of receiving special needs funding and support at Northern Territory government schools?

As noted in the response to question 1, diagnosis is not required for SWD funding or support in NT Government schools. These schools receive SWD funding for students from preschool to year 12 based on the NCCD levels of adjustment validated by the principal. The current NCCD per student rates are provided to schools annually and distributed through the School Resourcing Model. Schools can submit applications for students who are new to government schools and therefore were not included in the NCCD during the first year of school (including preschool).

With regard to support, NT Government schools can access the specialist support provided by the department covered in the response to question 2, for children of all ages. Schools can also engage with NT Government or private sector specialists to access support.

The department employs early childhood intervention advisors who work with families, early childhood staff and external organisations to identify and maximise learning outcomes for children who have a disability or a developmental delay, from birth to six years of age.

4. How many Northern Territory children currently receive specialist support or funding for their education?

It is not possible to quantify the number of students receiving specialist support, as this could cover support provided by teachers at schools, support provided by departmental staff, or external specialists.

In 2022, \$68.7m has been distributed to schools to support the needs of 6,760 students with disability through the School Resourcing Model, or as grants. An additional \$23.9m has been distributed to schools in 2022 in 'universal students with disability funding'. This funding provides every mainstream school with \$880 for every full-time equivalent student to build the school's inclusive practices, which will benefit every student, not just those with disability.

Students with Disability Funding Fact Sheet

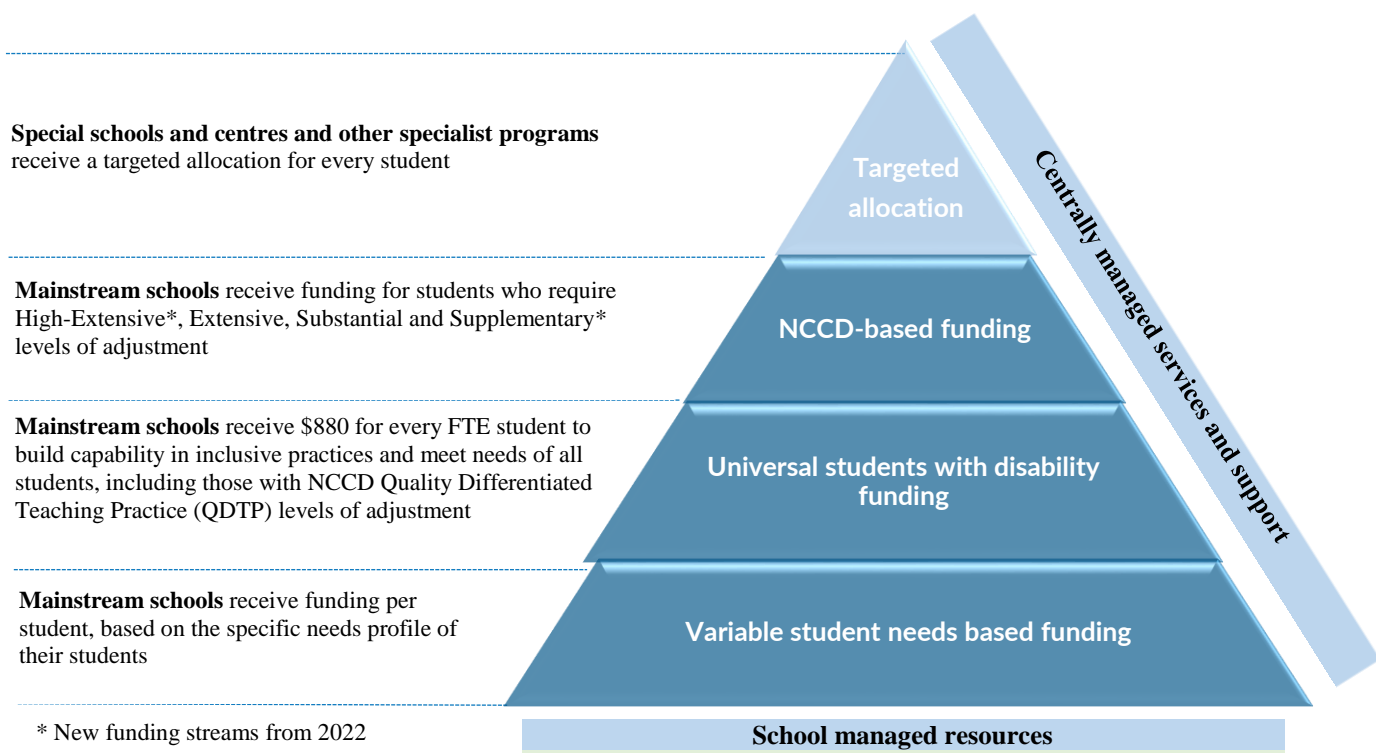
Introduction

The Department of Education is committed to providing high quality, inclusive education for students with disability, and supporting schools to meet the needs of all students. The department's commitment is outlined in the [Framework for Inclusion 2019-29](#).

Funding for students with disability is provided to Northern Territory (NT) Government schools in several ways. Schools have the flexibility to determine how to use their allocated funding under established categories including specialist recruitment, assistive technology and professional learning. This ensures schools can deliver tailored and localised support to embed inclusive practices for students with disability.

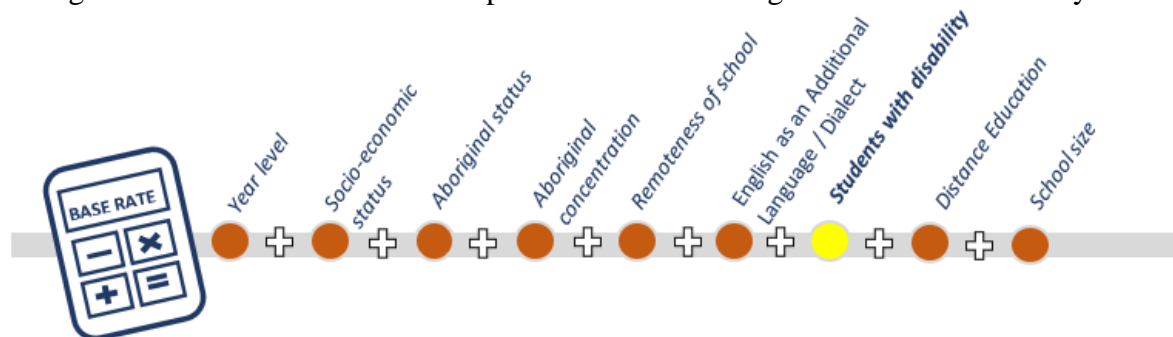
This Fact Sheet outlines the types of funding available to schools to support students with disability and provide inclusive education.

Summary of funding for students with disability



Variable student needs-based funding

Most funding is allocated to mainstream schools through an equitable, student needs-based funding formula. The formula provides a base amount for every student in an NT Government school, from preschool to secondary years. It is weighted to provide additional funding for students and schools with specific needs including students with disability.



Universal funding for students with disability

All mainstream schools receive an annual, flat rate for every full time equivalent (FTE) effective enrolment. This funding is provided to meet the costs of building staff capability in inclusive practices and delivering educational adjustments to students with disability. This includes students who require Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice (QDTP) levels of adjustment, as determined by the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD).

From 2022, this amount will be \$880 per FTE effective enrolment. The Universal funding for students with disability allocation is provided in the school's variable funding component of the School Resourcing Model (SRM) and is included in the schools per student rate.

NCCD-based funding

All Australian schools participate in the NCCD. The NCCD collects data annually about school students with disability in a consistent, reliable and systematic way. The collection of data for the NCCD is based on the professional judgement of teachers who determine the level of adjustment required to enable students with disability to access and participate in education on the same basis as other students. The levels of adjustment are:

- Extensive
- Substantial
- Supplementary
- QDTP.

Mainstream schools receive a funding allocation through the SRM based on the number of students, who were reported as requiring the following levels of adjustment in the previous year's Census:

- Supplementary (\$1,200) (new from 2022)
- Substantial (\$3,400)
- Extensive (\$5,100)
- High-Extensive (\$20,000) (new from 2022).

Supplementary, Substantial and Extensive levels of adjustment are defined under the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability ([NCCD Guidelines](#)).

New funding streams in 2022

From 2022 schools will receive:

- new funding based on the number of students reported as receiving Supplementary levels of adjustment in the previous year's Age Grade Census, using existing NCCD school reporting processes.
- new funding based on the number of students requiring complex, sustained extensive adjustments (High-Extensive funding).

These changes aim to provide funding more targeted to the needs of students while a new

Professional Dialogue Fund

If a new enrolment is a student with disability, the school can apply for funding for that student through the Professional Dialogue Fund. This provides contingency funding for students deemed eligible who were not captured through the previous years' NCCD process.

Targeted funding

The funding for the 5 NT Government special schools, 8 special education centres and a range of specialist programs, is based on indexed historical costs. These costs are adjusted in term 1 and term 3 to reflect movement in student numbers.

Per student adjustment rate

Special teaching allowances provided for teachers in special schools and classes are centrally funded and are not included in the per student adjustment rate.

The level of funding for students attending special schools recognises that additional funding is required for the concentration of high need students at those schools and the level and diversity of their needs.

Mainstream schools with special centres

Students enrolled in special centres are excluded from calculations for the mainstream student needs-based funding formula per student rate. Effective enrolment for the whole school

includes student attendance at the special centre. Students who are absent due to sickness, funerals, health care or other sanctioned instances count as present in calculating effective enrolment.

Expenditure guidelines for 2022

Mainstream schools have flexibility to determine how to use allocated funding to deliver support that will best embed inclusive practice for students with disability, provided it falls within the funding categories identified in Table 1.

Table 1: Inclusive education and funding for students with disability funding categories

No.	Funding Categories	Description
1.	Specialist recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appointing or employing specific disability/inclusion staff in schools to support students with disability. For example: education sign interpreters, speech pathologists, special education teachers, occupational therapists, school counsellors, psychologists and special education support officers.
2.	Increasing workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employing staff to support students with disability. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Backfilling existing staff who are undertaking inclusive education related professional learning Additional release time/emergency relief teachers to support planning and preparation Employing additional support staff due to increased enrolment numbers of students with disability Increased number of students with multiple/high level needs Additional classes to enable smaller classes and assist with making adjustments
3.	Professional learning related to inclusion and disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement or provide access to disability education related professional learning. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole school approaches to supporting students with disability Supporting teacher exchange from remote locations Facilitating or providing access to online or face to face professional learning and training Discipline specific to student needs
4.	Support programs and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purchasing externally delivered programs or preventative/remedial interventions for students with disability. For example building resilience through specialist services.
5.	Equipment and technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purchasing specific equipment, assistive technology to support learning for students with disability. For example alternative and augmentative communication supports, sensory tools, Soundfield Systems and engine rooms.
6.	Infrastructure and environmental modifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor building or internal environmental modifications to support students with disability and/or strengthen inclusive school environments up to \$5,000. For example individual listening devices. <p><i>*Any environmental modifications that require a building permit and certification is excluded from this funding category.</i></p> <p><i>**Residual Non-Urgent Minor Repairs funding may be utilised to assist schools with funding infrastructure repairs.</i></p>

Monitoring and accountability

Schools funding is provided based on identified student needs. There is an expectation that funding received for specific needs is used to support students with those needs.

Centrally managed school services and support

The department provides services and support from specialist teams to help schools meet the needs of all learners. These services include professional learning and/or programs about disability, inclusion, wellbeing and positive behaviour. The specialist teams work in partnership with schools to build the capability of school staff to support their students.