

Guidance for using the Australian Curriculum with students with special education needs

1. Which students have 'special education needs'?

Students in Australian classrooms have multiple, diverse, and changing needs that are shaped by individual learning histories and abilities as well as cultural, language backgrounds and socio-economic factors. The Australian Curriculum acknowledges the commitment in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008) to *support all Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens*. Some students will need additional support to realise this goal and while every state and territory has its own definition and decision making process, ACARA identifies this group of students as having 'special education needs'.

2. What has ACARA done to make the Australian Curriculum inclusive of students with special education needs?

The curriculum has been purposely designed to provide teachers, schools and education authorities with the flexibility needed to fulfil their obligation to provide students with special education needs with the opportunity to access and participate meaningfully in education on the same basis as other students. The guidance provided by ACARA supports teachers of students with special education needs to use the Australian Curriculum in a way that complies with the requirements of the Disability Standards for Education under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA).

ACARA has sought advice through consultation with a range of peak organisations and authorities to ensure that the language used in the Australian Curriculum is inclusive and reflective of students with special education needs.

For example, consideration has been given to how words are used in relation to various impairments. Current advice from peak organisations emphasises the importance of using language that is used generally in the community such as 'look at', 'read', 'listen'.

Wherever possible, inclusive, rather than restrictive terminology is used in the Phase 1 learning areas. For example, to 'communicate' clearly rather than 'speak' clearly; to 'respond' to, rather than 'listen' to; to 'use active listening behaviours' rather than 'listen actively to others'; to 'record' rather than 'write' number sentences.

ACARA also recognises that a range of alternative formats can be used as appropriate curriculum adjustments to enable access and engagement with learning and assessment activities. For achievement standards, emphasis is placed on the skills and understandings that students are expected to demonstrate rather than the mode by which they do this.

For a small percentage of students particularly those with a significant intellectual disability, the Foundation to Year 10 curriculum content and achievement standards may not be appropriate or meaningful even with adjustments. During 2011, ACARA will develop additional curriculum content and achievements standards for this group of students in order to develop an Australian Curriculum that is inclusive of every learner.

3. What does the Australian Curriculum assume about planning of teaching programs for students with special education needs?

It is assumed that teachers and schools will:

- *comply* with their state/territory policies and guidelines that have been developed to reflect the requirements of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*; this legislation obliges teachers and education providers to make the necessary adjustments for students with special education needs so they can access and participate in education without experiencing discrimination
- *recognise* that many students with special education needs follow the same developmental progression as their peers but not necessarily at the same rate; some students progress differently in different learning areas or demonstrate skills in certain contexts
- *refer* to the Australian Curriculum content descriptions and achievement standards, and their own assessment information and personal knowledge of the student to determine each student's level of achievement within the learning continuum
- *identify* the next steps for the student's learning to help them progress along the learning continuum
- *check* that the intended learning for the student is:
 - rigorous - being deep, rather than broad; and active rather than passive
 - relevant – offering an appropriate level of challenge beyond that which they already know, understand and can do
 - meaningful – building on students' prior learning and accommodating their learning preferences and personal interests in a way which engages them
- *take into account* the needs of each student and adjust the learning activities, assessment strategies and/ or the learning environment as appropriate, that is,
 - in the way learning activities are organised and presented

- in the organisation of the learning environment
- in the assessment process and the ways in which students are expected to demonstrate the quality of their learning

4. What does the Australian Curriculum assume about assessment and reporting for students with special education needs?

The Australian Curriculum achievement standards provide an expectation of the quality of learning students should typically demonstrate by a particular point in their schooling, that is, the extent of their knowledge, the depth of their understanding and the sophistication of their skills.

The sequence of achievement standards, Foundation to Year 10, describes and illustrates progress in the learning area. This sequence provides teachers with a framework of growth and development in each of the learning areas and helps teachers plan for and monitor learning during the course of a semester or year. It will also assist teachers to make judgements about the extent and quality of learning. The achievement standards emphasise the skills and understandings that students are expected to demonstrate rather than the mode by which they do this.

Some students may not reach the standards at the same time as their peers, but will still follow the same sequence of learning. As students progress along this sequence, adjustments may be required to align the assessment strategies with the intended learning. This means also that where a student is being taught content from a year level of the Australian Curriculum that is different to that of their peers, they should be assessed against the relevant achievement standard for the year level at which they are being taught.

Whilst the Australian Curriculum achievement standards are the reference point, students will continue to be assessed and then reported on in ways consistent with the assessment and reporting requirements of the relevant state, territory or sector.

