

The Disability Royal Commission

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (DRC) made 222 recommendations, including 15 specifically relating to education.

At the heart of the DRC report was that students with disability continue to experience poorer education outcomes than their peers, and more can be done to address violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of students with disability.

Many findings reflect what we hear from families – that their children experience high rates of exclusionary discipline, challenges with reasonable adjustments, confusion around rights and support, and high rates of restraint and seclusion.

This snapshot highlights our priority areas and key recommendations for change.

It is important change occurs across the education system, including both public and non-government schools.

ACD priorities

1. Accountability, transparency and oversight
2. Reasonable adjustments
3. Exclusionary discipline
4. Rights, advocacy and support
5. Restraint and seclusion

1. Accountability, transparency and oversight

For changes from the Disability Royal Commission to be meaningful and fit-for-purpose, the right people need to be around the table. Students with disability, their families and the organisations that support

them have invaluable expertise and must be engaged in the process.

Key opportunities include:

- Establishing a stakeholder taskforce to coordinate actions with representation of students with disability, their families and key organisations. Committing to annual progress reports against the implementation of recommendations.

2. Reasonable adjustments

The number one education issue families raise with ACD's Support Line is reasonable adjustments. Families talk about feeling their children's needs aren't understood or met and that this has a negative impact on their children's educational outcomes, engagement with peers and sense of belonging in school.

ACD's Support Line had a 230% increase in calls about reasonable adjustments between 2020 and 2023

Key opportunities include:

- Developing a fit-for-purpose training for principals and school leaders on creating inclusive schools, with the latest resources on reasonable adjustments for staff.
- Making the most of education support staff by implementing the 'Education support staff working in classroom support roles guidelines'.
- Ensuring Student Support Group meetings and reasonable adjustments are evaluated to monitor whether they improve educational outcomes for students.

3. Exclusionary discipline

Students with disability continue to be overrepresented across suspensions and expulsions. Families regularly call ACD because their child has been discouraged from attending school, put on a reduced timetable or had daily requests for early pick-ups. Victoria doesn't have a system-wide picture on the rate of exclusionary discipline for students with disability or enough safeguards to support schools and reduce exclusionary discipline for students with disability.

At least 27% of school education calls to ACD's Support Line involved a child experiencing exclusionary discipline between 2019 and 2023

Key opportunities include:

- Restricting the use of exclusionary discipline (suspensions, expulsions, reduced timetables, early pickups and informal suspensions and expulsions) so it can't be used as a disciplinary measure, and only used as an option of last resort to avert the risk of serious harm.
- Publicly reporting on the use of exclusionary discipline across all schools.
- Identifying and supporting schools with high rates of exclusionary discipline.
- Requiring schools to implement individual behaviour plans and reasonable adjustments before opting for exclusionary discipline.

4. Rights, advocacy and support

Students and families can't always access the support they need to achieve positive outcomes. This is because the support doesn't always exist, the information is hard to find, or there are limited resources.

ACD's Support Line had an increase of 160% education-related calls over a five-year period. Key issues include reasonable adjustments, exclusionary discipline, behavioural support, school communication and meetings, and transitions

Key opportunities include:

- Increasing investment in disability advocacy organisations.
- Expanding the independent complaints service and creating an independent case management process to support students and families with exclusionary discipline.
- Proactively provide students and families with information about their rights, refer to disability advocacy organisations and relevant complaint processes.
- Collecting comprehensive data and reporting annually against key metrics.
- Investing in a transition support service for students with disability.

5. Restraint and seclusion

The true rate of restraint and seclusion in Victorian schools is unknown, making it difficult to understand whether reduction and elimination strategies are working. Victorian government schools publish annual data but there is no equivalent for non-government schools, and no publicly available data on reducing and eliminating restraint and seclusion in any school sector.

Key opportunities include:

- Requiring all registered schools to meet minimum benchmarks to reduce and eliminate restrictive practices.
- Reporting annually with disaggregated data on restrictive practices in education settings.