



SUBMISSION OF ALL MEANS ALL TO THE ANTI-BULLYING RAPID REVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

1. All Means All – The Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education (**All Means All**) is a nationwide multi-stakeholder organisation working towards the implementation of an inclusive education system. This includes the removal of the legal, structural, and attitudinal barriers that limit the rights of some students, including students with disability, to access an inclusive education in regular classrooms in Australian schools. Our work is guided by the human rights framework, including the principles embodied in United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities (**CRPD**)¹ and other relevant international human rights treaties and instruments.
2. All Means All's members and stakeholders include people with disability and their families, educators, academic and other experts in Australia. We work to actively foster connections and collaborations within and across specific stakeholder groups, to support the achievement of our shared objectives.
3. All Means All is the Chair and national Co-convenor of the [Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education \(ACIE\)](#), an initiative that brings together organisations from around Australia that share a commitment to advance Inclusive Education in Australia. ACIE is a coalition of 25 not-for-profit organisations that have a combined representative membership of over 1.2 million.
4. All Means All is also a member of [Inclusion International](#), the international peak body representing people with intellectual disability and their families. All Means All's Executive Director of Government Relations and Advocacy, Stephanie Gotlib, is the elected Asia Pacific Regional Co Representative for the Inclusion International Council. We are also a member of the [Equitable](#)

¹ United Nations General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, 13 December 2006, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 2515, p. 3.

[Education Alliance \(EEA\)](#), an Asia-Pacific focussed community of practice for organisations, ministries, agencies and NGO's working towards more inclusive and equitable educational systems.

5. All Means All acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work, and we pay our respects to Elders, past and present, across the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations across Australia.
6. We also wish to recognise the generations of people with disability, and their families and allies, who have worked to advance the understanding and *realisation* of human rights, equality, and inclusion for all. We honour and respect their vision and legacy.
7. All Means All commends the Australian Government for leading the development of an approach to a consistent national standard to address bullying in schools (both prevention and response), and for undertaking this rapid, expert-led Anti-Bullying review (this **Review**).
8. We also thank the Review for the opportunity to meet on 4 June 2025 and provide face-to-face feedback.

OVERVIEW

9. This Submission focuses specifically on bullying behaviour that targets students with disability and explores the importance of school-wide inclusive education reform in effectively addressing all forms of bullying.
10. It highlights the pervasive and disproportionate impact of bullying on students with disability, and the urgent need to address this issue through a human rights-based, systemic response. In summary, we urge that bullying of students with disability be understood not simply as an isolated behavioural problem, but also as a symptom of deeper structural and cultural issues in our education system. We outline how inclusion – in policy and practice – is fundamental to combatting bullying.
11. We have drawn on a growing body of evidence, including findings of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (**Disability Royal Commission**), which demonstrate that segregation and exclusion in education contribute to higher rates of bullying and abuse of students with disability. Conversely, genuine inclusive education fosters respectful and cohesive school cultures that significantly reduce the risk of bullying.
12. This Submission identifies key systemic factors that enable or exacerbate the bullying of students with disability such as segregated settings, low expectations, inadequate supports, and poor staff training. It recommends concrete reforms to embedding anti-bullying strategies within broader inclusive education reforms, consistent with Australia's international human rights obligations. All Means All's position is that only by transforming school culture and systems to be truly inclusive can we effectively protect all students from bullying and create learning environments where every student is safe, valued, and able to thrive.

BULLYING AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

13. Students with disability experience disproportionately high rates of bullying and harassment in Australian schools. This is a long-standing and well-documented issue. For example, national surveys conducted by Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) annually have persistently found that students with disability experience bullying at more than twice the rate among the general student population.² The Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission's 2012 *Held Back* report similarly found that six out of ten students with disability reported being bullied because of their disability.³ This bullying often includes abuse and violence – students have reported being punched, kicked, spat on, taunted, and even physically choked by peers.
14. The harm caused by bullying is profound. Bullying undermines mental health, impedes learning, and can drive students with disability out of schooling altogether when they feel school is not a safe place. Bullying of students with disability is frequently not random or incidental; rather it is often enabled or exacerbated by systems and environments that fail to ensure inclusive school cultures and practices.
15. In its Final Report, the Disability Royal Commission highlighted that segregation in education contributes directly to bullying, discrimination, and violence against students with disability. It found that exclusionary cultures—whether through 'special' settings or through marginalisation within mainstream settings – compound student vulnerability and perpetuate harm. In other words, an education system that applies deficit labels, isolates or 'others' students with disability creates conditions in which bullying becomes more likely and more severe. Although the Commissioners were divided on the future of special schools, they unanimously affirmed that enforced isolation is unacceptable and that segregation can cause inherent harm. This recognition must shape how the relationship between segregation and bullying is understood.
16. International human rights bodies have recognised the link between inclusive education and protection from bullying. For example, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in its General Comment No.9 emphasises that 'measures taken for the implementation of the rights contained in the CRC regarding children with disabilities, should explicitly aim for the maximum inclusion of those children in society.'⁴ The Committee also calls on schools to 'take all measures to combat school bullying and pay particular attention to children with disabilities providing them with the necessary protection while maintaining their inclusion into the mainstream

² See for example Children and Young People with Disability Australia, *Three in Four Disabled Students Are Bullied or Excluded at School – and It's Getting Worse, New Survey Reveals*, (Media Release, 10 April 2025); see also CYDA's Survey reports cyda.org.au/category/submissions/surveys/

³ Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, *Held Back: The Experiences of Students with Disabilities in Victorian Schools* (Report, September 2012) <https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/resources/held-back-the-experiences-of-students-with-disabilities-in-victorian-schools-sep-2012/>.

⁴ CRC/C/GC/9 at [11].

education system.⁵

17. However, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*⁶ (CRPD), provides the most comprehensive and up-to-date expression of the right of children with disability to education, in Article 24, and the fundamental principles that underpin that right.
18. Relevantly, Article 24 of the CRPD guarantees the right to inclusive education at all levels, mandating that States Parties ensure an inclusive education system. In recognising inclusive education as a legal right, the CRPD affirms that inclusion is fundamental to the dignity and equality of people with disability, and it situates inclusive education as a cornerstone of preventing abuse, neglect, and exclusion in all its forms.
19. All Means All submits that effectively preventing bullying must include systemic transformation. We cannot separate bullying from the broader school culture in which it occurs and believe that a genuinely inclusive school environment is the most effective protection for students with disability against bullying.
20. Research consistently demonstrates that when students with disability learn alongside their non-disabled peers in regular classrooms (and receive appropriate supports) they foster more positive social attitudes and inclusive school cultures. Inclusive educational practices are also strongly linked with enhanced peer attitudes toward disability, increased social acceptance and reduction of stigma⁷. This reinforces that inclusive classrooms benefit all students, not only academically but also in building empathy, respect, and social cohesion.
21. Further, while research on bullying of students with disability shows that bullying is prevalent across both mainstream and segregated education settings, it also suggest that students with disability are victimised to a greater degree in segregated special classrooms and schools. In other words, segregation does not provide the socially protective benefits that are so frequently claimed - it in fact has the opposite effect.⁸ When students with disability are segregated or denied full inclusion, it not only stigmatises the students as 'other' but also removes the social protections of an inclusive peer community.
22. There is also evidence to suggests that students with complex disability and higher needs are particularly at risk of being victimized in segregated settings, more so than students with complex disability in general education settings.⁹ Alarmingly, a 2014 study by Caldas and Bensy in the American

⁵ CRC/C/GC/9 at [42(e)].

⁶ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, opened for signature 30 March 2007, 2515 UNTS 3 (entered into force 3 May 2008, ratified by Australia 17 July 2008).

⁷ Littel, Corcoran & Pillai, *Effect of Inclusive Practices on Attitudes: A Meta-Analysis Study*, 2022, EJ1392588 (ERIC)

⁸ Chad A. Rose, Lisa E. Monda-Amaya, and Dorothy L. Espelage, 'Bullying Perpetration and Victimization in Special Education: A Review of the Literature' (2011) *Remedial and Special Education* 32 2 114-130, 125; See also Chad A. Rose, Dorothy L. Espelage, Steven Aragon and John Elliott, 'Bullying and victimization among students in special education and general education curricula' (2011) *Exceptionality Education International* 21, 2-14.

⁹ Ari Kaukiainen, Christina Salmivalli, Kirsti Lagerspetz, Milla Tamminen, Marja Vauras, Hanna Mäki and Elisa Poskiparta, 'Learning Difficulties, Social Intelligence, and Self-Concept: Connections to Bully-Victim Problems' (2002) *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology* 43. 269-78; Gale M. Morrison, Michael J.

context found that students with more complex disability, including intellectual disability and autism, are at particular risk of severe and chronic sexual abuse and victimisation in segregated settings¹⁰ While a reference to sexual abuse may seem extreme, it points to a broader reality: isolation increases vulnerability, particularly for those students with complex disability and higher needs. In contrast, genuinely inclusive schools strive to build communities of respect, understanding and support, which serve as a powerful protection from bullying.

23. In summary, disproportionate levels of bullying of students with disability cannot be divorced from questions of inclusion, equality, and school culture. They reflect a structural problem requiring structural solutions.
24. The following section examines some of the systemic factors in Australian education that contribute to the heightened incidence of bullying against students with disability.

SYSTEMIC CONTRIBUTORS TO BULLYING OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

25. The experiences of students with disability in the Australian education system, including disproportionate levels of bullying, reveal patterns of marginalisation that both fuel and exacerbate bullying. Bullying does not occur in a vacuum; certain systemic and institutional factors create an environment where students with disability are more likely to be targeted and less likely to receive support.
26. It should be noted that the patterns of bullying of students with disability can be obscured by lack of specific data. A transparent reporting regime is required to identify where risks are highest and allow for targeted interventions and tracking of their effectiveness.
27. Key systemic contributors to bullying of students with disability include:
 - 28.1 **Segregated education settings** – the ongoing practice of educating students with disability in separate ‘special’ schools, units or classes apart from their peers without disability. Segregation not only physically isolates students with disability but also reinforces stigma by marking them as ‘other’, ‘different’, or ‘lesser’.
 - 28.2 This separation denies students the opportunity to be seen and accepted as equal and valued members of a school community. It denies the opportunity for disability to be understood as an aspect of diversity that strengthens communities, and instead positions it as something that should be shut out and separate from everyone else. Segregating students with disability creates a separate physical environment where bullying and abuse can occur away from the eyes of the broader school population. Notably, the Disability Royal Commission identified disability segregation as a factor that materially

Furlong and Geoff Smith, Factors Associated with the Experience of School Violence Among General Education, Leadership Class, Opportunity Class, and Special Day Class Pupils’ (1994) *Education and Treatment of Children* 17, 356–369; Mona O’Moore and B. Hillery, ‘Bullying in Dublin Schools’ (1989) *Irish Journal of Psychology* 10, 426–441.

¹⁰ Stephen J. Caldas and Mary Lou Betsy, ‘The Sexual Maltreatment of Students with Disabilities in American School Settings’ (2014) *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 23, 345-66.

increases the risk of violence and abuse of children with disability.

28.3 Low expectations and ableist attitudes. One of the most significant barriers students with disability face is a pervasive and systemic culture of low expectations. Sadly it is still a common perception that disability is equated with inability. Consequently students with disability are frequently not afforded the same opportunities for academic, social, or leadership participation as their peers without disability. This marginalisation perpetuates the notion, that children with disability are less valued. When school environments normalise the devaluation and exclusion of students with disability, they create the conditions in which bullying is more likely to occur, and is less likely to be recognised.

28.4 Families in All Means All's School Inclusion Parent Network consistently report that bullying of students with disability is downplayed, dismissed or tolerated by school authorities in ways that would not be acceptable if directed at students without disability. This disparity reflects entrenched systemic ableism that too often frames such behaviour as inevitable or less serious. As further discussed below, training is critical to build the capacity of school staff to recognise ableist assumptions embedded in school cultures, understand their own biases, take proactive action to address the normalisation of bullying of students with disability and build genuinely inclusive school environments necessary to prevent such bullying.

28.5 Poor practices in inclusive education and lack of teacher training. Many teachers, support staff and school leaders have not received adequate training in inclusive education practices or behaviour supports. Moreover, research further shows that typical teacher training often lacks specific content that is needed to prevent and respond to bullying of students with disability¹¹.

28.6 For example, when schools fail to provide necessary accommodations, resources, and supports¹² for students with disability, such as lack of communication supports, it can create frustration, isolation, distress and dysregulation for those students. This may leave a student struggling academically or socially, disengaged, unable to fully participate in school life and socially isolated, making them more vulnerable to bullying.

28.7 Lack of knowledge and skill by school staff can also lead them to misinterpret a student's behaviour (for instance, viewing a student's communication of distress as 'misconduct'). A common response to these situations is the use of exclusionary discipline (i.e. suspensions, exclusions and at times restraint and seclusion,¹³ which further

¹¹ Luz E Robinson *et al*, 'Developing a Multi-Tiered System of Support-Based Plan for Bullying Prevention Among Students With Disabilities: Perspectives From General and Special Education Teachers During Professional Development' (2023) 15 *School Mental Health* 826

¹² Julie Causton, Chelsea P. Tracy-Bronson and Kate MacLeod, 'Beyond Treats and Timeouts: Humanistic Behavior Supports in Inclusive Classrooms' (2015) *In International Journal of Whole Schooling* 11(1), 68-84.

¹³ The Disability Royal Commission heard that students in special schools are 'almost guaranteed to receive a restraint or seclusion' at some point in their schooling (DRC Restrictive Practices Research Report, 2023). These findings underscore that segregated environments not only lack the social protection

stigmatises students with disability.

28.8 Further, poor inclusive practices can themselves unintentional enable bullying behaviour. For example if a teacher publicly points out a student's difference or repeatedly separates them from the class for support, this may inadvertently single the student out for peer harassment.

28.9 Broadly, environments that are not universally accessible or responsive to individual needs often lead to situations where students with disability are seen as the 'problem' or become targets of resentment or ridicule, placing them at increased risk from bullying.

28. These systemic issues are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Together, they create an environment where students with disability often contend with multiple factors that place them at a heightened risk of harm – a 'perfect storm' in which direct bullying by peers is compounded by the entrenched system bias that positions the student as excluded, undervalued and/or underserved. We note that the Disability Royal Commission's Final Report catalogued a range of such experiences – including gatekeeping and discrimination in enrolment, high rates of bullying and abuse, practices of restraint, seclusion, and disproportionate suspension. Addressing bullying therefore requires not only behaviour-focused interventions, but also a commitment to deep structural and cultural reform to realise inclusive, rights-based education.
29. In particular, Commissioners Bennett, Galbally and McEwin concluded that special schools are stigmatising, discriminatory, and incompatible with Australia's obligations under the CRPD. They emphasised that no parallel system of segregated education can comply with the requirement under Article 24 to build a universally accessible, quality and inclusive education system for all. These findings lend weight to calls for a structural transition toward inclusive schooling as a precondition for preventing bullying.
30. While we understand that this Review is focussing on the effectiveness of bullying strategies and interventions, we urge the review to explicitly acknowledge these root causes and make clear that effective anti-bullying strategy cannot be siloed or superficial. It must be embedded within a broader rights-based framework for inclusive education.
31. In our view, the adoption of a structured, evidence-based tiered support framework (such as a Multi-Tiered System of Support or MTSS) holds significant promise for addressing the complex and multifaceted drivers of bullying, particularly as experienced by students with disability. To be effective, such a framework must explicitly address disability-based bullying and be embedded within a broader commitment to inclusive education. MTSS provides a layered model of prevention and intervention that promotes inclusion, facilitates early identification of risk, and delivers graduated levels of support tailored to individual student needs¹⁴.
32. Under the MTSS model, Tier 1 interventions establish universal strategies to create positive, inclusive school climates and build social-emotional

that inclusive settings can offer but actively increase the risk of harm. In this context, bullying must be viewed within a continuum of systemic violence.

¹⁴ Robinson *et al* (n 11).

competence across the student body. Tier 2 offers targeted support for students at elevated risk of bullying or social isolation, including small group interventions, peer connection programs, and trauma-informed and restorative practices. For example, schools like Bob Hawke College in Subiaco, Western Australia, utilise 'peer circles' through an MTSS framework to provide targeted Tier 2 social support for students at higher risk of bullying or social exclusion, including students with disability¹⁵. Tier 3 provides intensive, individualised responses for students who experience or engage in persistent bullying, incorporating trauma-informed support and coordination with external services where appropriate. The MTSS approach is grounded in continuous data collection, active student participation, and whole-school accountability mechanisms that support systemic change.

33. In practice, any national anti-bullying approach should be tied to efforts to transform the education system from one that excludes and stigmatises students with disability, to one that genuinely welcomes, includes and values all students regardless of disability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

34. Given the known safeguarding that inclusive education provides in relation to the prevention of bullying, we **RECOMMEND** that the Australian Government commit to progressive realisation of the right to Inclusive Education. An initial step of such a commitment being the development of a National Roadmap for Inclusive Education as recommended by the Disability Royal Commission in recommendation 7.13 of its Final Report.
35. We **RECOMMEND** the adoption of a human rights-based understanding and conceptualisation of the right of students with disability to inclusive education, consistently with Article 24 of the CRPD and General Comment No. 4, in all bullying prevention policies, and the anchoring of all anti-bullying policy in human rights and inclusion. This means that all anti-bullying programs adopted in education contexts must specifically address disability-based bullying.
36. We also **RECOMMEND** framing anti-bullying standards around principles of non-discrimination, reasonable accommodation, full participation, and respect for diversity. Bullying should be understood as a violation of students' rights to safety, equality, and education on an equal basis with others.
37. We **RECOMMEND** embedding bullying prevention in school-wide inclusive reform: This would see bullying addressed as a school cultural issue that requires a whole-of-school approach. This would involve cultivating a positive and inclusive culture through strong leadership, policies, and practices. This should include the development of capabilities through the curriculum that build understanding of disability as an aspect of human diversity that strengths communities. It should also include comprehensive

¹⁵ Sam Jeremic, 'Bob Hawke College Nominated as Finalist for WA Education Awards for Peer Support Program' *PerthNow* (online, 18 June 2025) <https://www.perthnow.com.au/local-news/perthnow-western-suburbs/bob-hawke-college-nominated-as-finalist-for-wa-education-awards-for-peer-support-program-c-12377713>

professional development for all staff. Educators should be trained in creating classroom environments that celebrate diversity and use universal design for learning. The goal should be sustainable cultural change: making inclusion and respect foundational values in every school rather than just standalone or one-off anti-bullying programs,

38. Specifically, we **RECOMMEND** the development and implementation of anti-bullying strategies through a school-wide multi-tiered support framework (e.g. Multi-Tiered System of Support or MTSS) to ensure a coherent, scalable approach that aligns universal prevention efforts with targeted and individualised supports, ensuring that students experiencing or at risk of bullying receive timely and appropriate intervention and supports. Embedding bullying prevention in schools into a multi-tiered support framework would support schools to adopt inclusive school-wide practices, establish early warning indicators, implement targeted peer and social skill-building programs, such as 'peer circles', and deliver intensive support for students with complex needs.
39. We **RECOMMEND** that the Anti-Bullying Review recognise that segregation on the basis of disability is a negative systemic phenomenon that heightens the risk of bullying of students with disability.
40. We **RECOMMEND** the collection and public reporting of data on bullying in schools, with data disaggregated by student disability status, type of school and setting (mainstream/general or special/segregated), and other relevant factors.
41. We **RECOMMEND** that schools be required to report serious incidents (such as violent or repeated bullying) to education authorities and that there are clear consequences or improvement plans where schools fail to protect students. In line with this, we support strengthening legislative and policy frameworks so that protecting students from bullying is seen as a core *duty of care* and a condition of school registration or funding.
42. Finally, we **RECOMMEND** that schools and systems be required to proactively include students with disability in designing and implementing anti-bullying policies and solutions. Student-led initiatives (e.g. 'peer circles', inclusive student councils, or 'buddy' or 'connection' programs that provide safe relationships and safe spaces between students at risk of bullying and students who can provide support or enhance social standing) should be supported as part of anti-bullying strategies. Research and experience show that empowering students to take leadership in promoting inclusion can significantly improve social dynamics and reduce bullying. Students with disability should be given platforms to share their perspectives on what makes them feel safe or unsafe at school. Moreover, all students should be taught about their rights and responsibilities in an inclusive school, encouraging them to speak out when they witness bullying and to support peers who might be at heightened risk of bullying. By fostering a sense of shared responsibility and empathy among students, schools can create a community where bullying is actively rejected by peers, not just policed by adults.

CONCLUSION

43. We urge this Review to recognise that bullying of students with disability is not simply a behavioural issue, but a structural and systemic problem reflecting structural and systemic shortcomings. The message from countless inquiries, reports¹⁶, and the lived experiences of students and families is clear: to truly address bullying, we must change the systemic conditions that give rise to it and which allow it to persist.
44. Australia has the knowledge, evidence, and now a mandate through the Disability Royal Commission's recommendations to act. We must build school communities founded on respect, dignity, equity, and belonging for every student. If we do so, we will not only reduce bullying and violence, but we will improve educational outcomes and wellbeing for all students, with and without disability. Together, we can ensure that schools across Australia are safe and inclusive for every learner – places where all truly means all.
45. All Means All appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this Review. We would welcome further engagement as the national anti-bullying approach is developed, and are available to provide additional information or clarification as required.

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¹⁶ NSW Legislative Council, Children and young people with disability in New South Wales Educational Settings (2024); Western Australia Legislative Assembly, Education and Health Standing Committee, Report 6: A Different Kind of Brilliance – Report of the inquiry into support for autistic children and young people in schools (March 2024); Final Report of the Disability Royal Commission (2023); Senate Inquiry into the Issue of Increasing Disruption in Australian Classrooms (2023); Review of the National School Reform Agreement (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2022); Review of the Disability Standards for Education (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Education, 2020); Strengthening School and Systems Capacity to implement effective interventions to support student behaviour and wellbeing in New South Wales public schools (Pearce et al., 2020); South Australian Department for Education, Report of an Independent Inquiry into Suspensions, Exclusions, and Expulsions in South Australian Government Schools. South Australian Government, 2020); Review of Education for Students with Disability in Queensland state schools (Deloitte Access Economics, 2017); NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Students with a Disability or Special Needs in New South Wales schools (NSW Parliament Portfolio Committee No. 3, 2017); NSW Audit Office Supporting students with disability in NSW public schools (NSW Audit Office, 2016); Victorian Review of the Program for Students with Disabilities (Victoria Department of Education and Training, 2016); Access to Real Learning: Current levels of access and attainment for students with disability in the school system, and the impact on students and families associated with inadequate levels of support (Commonwealth of Australia, Australian Senate Committee, 2016); Report of the Select Committee on Access to the South Australian Education System for Students with a Disability (Parliament of South Australia, 2015); ACT Report of the Expert Panel on Students with Complex Needs and Challenging Behaviour (Shaddock, Packer and Roy, 2015); Review of the Disability Standards for Education (Commonwealth of Australia, Urbis, 2015); Review of the Experiences of Students with Disabilities in Victorian schools (Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, 2012); Review of the Disability Standards for Education (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012); NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the Provision of Education for Students with Disability or Special Needs (General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2, 2010); NSW Auditor-General's Report Performance Audit: Educating Primary School Students with Disabilities (NSW Audit Office, 2006); Australian Government Senate Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities (Commonwealth of Australia, Senate Committee, 2002).