

Building an Inclusive Education System for Western Australia.

WAESPAA's position on the Review of the School Education Act 1999.

Authors: Yolande Stewart, Natalie Hatton, Rebecca Wheatley-Deal

Oversight: Jo Markovic, President, WAESPAA

In consultation with: WAESPAA 2025 Executive Committee

1. Executive Summary

The *Review of the School Education Act 1999* reaffirmed Western Australia's commitment to ensuring that all students can access and participate in education on the same basis as their peers. Among its key findings was the recognition that inclusive education must be embedded as a guiding principle of the State's public education system. The Review called for a coherent framework to operationalise this principle — one that translates aspiration into consistent, equitable practice across all schools.

The Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators Association (WAESPAA) welcome this direction and offers its professional insight to support the next stage of reform. WAESPAA represents the leaders and practitioners with the deepest lived experience in delivering education to students with diverse and complex learning needs. Its members have led inclusive practice across every level of the system — from Education Support Schools and Centres to Specialist Learning Programs and collaborative mainstream models. This collective experience offers the Department of Education a practical understanding of how inclusion functions day to day, what conditions enable success, and where the system faces structural challenges.

WAESPAA's position is that inclusive education must be understood as a system-wide principle encompassing a continuum of services. This paper responds to the most relevant recommendations from the *Review of the School Education Act 1999* and outlines eight key elements that define and enable inclusion in practice. These elements; access, participation, universal design, functional needs-based support, collaboration, funding, accountability, and workforce capability, represent both the philosophical and operational foundations of inclusive education. Each element aligns with specific recommendations from the Review and demonstrates how policy intent can be translated into practical, achievable action.

WAESPAA does not seek to lead implementation but to inform it. Our contribution lies in bridging the gap between high-level policy and school-level delivery, providing the professional insight needed to design a framework that is principled, realistic, and embraced by those who will bring it to life. By drawing on the experience of those who deliver inclusive education every

day, the Department can develop a framework that strengthens both specialist and mainstream capacity, ensuring inclusion is embedded across the continuum.

The result will be a cohesive and future-focused education system that reflects Western Australia's values of equity, excellence, and community. Through continued collaboration between the Department and WAESPA, inclusive education can become not only a legislative requirement but a lived reality. One where every learner, in every setting, is welcomed, supported, and empowered to thrive.

2. Context and Rationale

The *Review of the School Education Act 1999* has reaffirmed the State's commitment to ensuring that all Western Australian students can access and participate in education on the same basis as their peers. The Review made a series of recommendations that collectively seek to strengthen equity, participation, and coherence across schools. Of relevance to WAESPA are those recommendations that address inclusive education, support for students with disability, and the development of a clear framework to operationalise inclusion across the continuum of provision.

This position paper responds directly to those most relevant recommendations. It does not seek to restate all findings of the Review, but to provide professional insight and lived guidance on how the Department of Education can translate its intent into practice. WAESPA's contribution focuses on how inclusive education can be effectively implemented across all learning environments, ensuring that policy commitments lead to meaningful change for students, families, and educators.

Western Australia has a proud record of supporting students with diverse and complex learning needs. Education Support Schools, Centres, and Endorsed Programs have played a critical role in this system for decades, providing targeted expertise, resources, and environments that enable students to achieve meaningful outcomes. However, as expectations around inclusion evolve, there is a growing need to strengthen the coherence between these specialist settings and mainstream schools. The Department of Education now faces the task of designing a framework that maintains the strengths of existing provision while ensuring that inclusive principles underpin every learning environment.

The Association's collective knowledge provides valuable insight into how policy translates into practice, what conditions enable success, and where the system faces ongoing challenges. This perspective is particularly important at this stage of reform, as it ensures that the design of an inclusive education framework is informed by those who have delivered inclusion effectively in real-world settings.

3. Definition of Inclusive Education

The foundation of an effective and equitable education system lies in a shared understanding of what inclusive education means in practice. The *Review of the School Education Act 1999* calls for this clarity, recognising that consistent interpretation across all schools is essential for achieving both legislative intent and educational excellence. WAESPA strongly supports this

direction and endorses the following definition and key elements of inclusive education, as previously presented to the Director General of Education.

WAESPAAC upholds the following definition of inclusive education:

Inclusive Education is grounded in equity, this ensures that every student is welcomed, supported, and empowered to learn. Inclusive Education allows any student to progress and thrive in an appropriate educational setting.

This definition provides both a philosophical and operational foundation for reform. It recognises that inclusion is not a single model of schooling, but a system-wide principle that must be reflected across the continuum of educational provision. Every learning environment (from local school classrooms to specialist programs) has a role in delivering inclusive education, guided by these shared principles of equity, access, and excellence.

A key strength of the continuum model is that it retains choice for families and learners. Students have diverse preferences, abilities, and ways of engaging with learning. A genuine inclusive system acknowledges and accommodates this diversity by providing multiple pathways within a unified framework. There are six key elements that give structure and substance to the definition of inclusive education. Together, they translate the principle of inclusion into the practical conditions needed to make it work across the public education system.

Key elements include:

1. Access on the same basis as peers, with reasonable adjustments within the WA Curriculum.
2. Students must be supported to participate in the curriculum within environments that meet their individual needs, with access to personalised supports that enable meaningful engagement and learning
3. Universal design for learning and differentiated instruction.
4. Funding metrics need to be consistent across all settings.
5. Systemic accountability and data monitoring.
6. Appropriate resourcing and training to support students across all school contexts.

These elements align with the intent of the Review of the School Education Act 1999 by embedding inclusive education in legislation, supporting it through system design, and ensuring consistent application across schools. They provide the framework for reform, making inclusion measurable and actionable. Together, they outline how access, participation, curriculum design, needs-based support, collaboration, funding, accountability, and workforce capability can create a system that adapts to learners rather than expecting learners to adapt to the system. In doing so, they bridge policy intent and practice, offering a roadmap for achieving inclusion that is both principled and practical. Section 4 builds on this foundation by

examining how these elements operate in practice and inform the next stage of framework design

4. Guidance on the key elements of inclusive education

The *Review of the School Education Act 1999* reaffirmed Western Australia's commitment to inclusive education, recommending that inclusion be defined, legislated, and embedded across all levels of schooling. The challenge now is to translate those commitments into practical action across the public education system.

4.1. Access on the Same Basis as Peers

Scenario

Creating an inclusive education system means ensuring every student can access and participate in learning on the same basis as their peers. Schools play a vital role in achieving this by making reasonable adjustments that enable engagement and success. When **expectations for these adjustments are clear and consistent**, decisions are guided by functional need rather than diagnosis or local resources. This consistency promotes equity, strengthens opportunity, and ensures families experience a system that is fair and responsive to individual student needs.

Action

Drawing on decades of practice across Education Support Schools, Centres, and Programs, WAESPA members have found that equitable access depends on embedding the concept of reasonable adjustment within school culture and system design. Effective schools treat access as a proactive design principle rather than a reactive obligation. They create learning environments that anticipate diversity, modifying physical spaces, timetables, communication methods, and curriculum presentation to ensure that all students can learn and participate alongside their peers. These adjustments are based on functional needs observed in the classroom, not on diagnostic labels or administrative thresholds. WAESPA's experience shows that when educators are supported to make flexible, timely decisions, access becomes a natural part of teaching, regardless of school type and environmental spaces.

Outcome

This approach demonstrates how inclusive education can fulfil the intent of Recommendation 6 of the *Review of the School Education Act 1999*, which calls for Western Australian legislation to recognise the obligation to provide reasonable adjustments to avoid discrimination. It also aligns with the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA)* and Article 24 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, both of which enshrine the right to equitable access to education. In practice, schools that adopt this model report greater clarity, families experience stronger trust in the system, and students gain consistent opportunities to learn and participate in community life. By understanding access as a shared system responsibility rather than a local negotiation, WAESPA's experience shows that inclusion begins not with placement, but with design, ensuring every student can engage meaningfully, confidently, and with dignity.

4.2. Participation

Scenario

Students with additional learning needs often find that participation is limited to physical presence rather than genuine engagement. While enrolled in school, many experience reduced access to learning and social interaction because classroom structures or teaching practices are not designed to accommodate their differences. WAESPAA members have observed that this challenge is not due to unwillingness, but to inconsistent clarity on how to balance curriculum expectations with individual learning goals. The result can be isolation within classrooms or withdrawal from age-appropriate peer groups, diminishing both learning progress and social connection.

Action

Through years of experience leading diverse learning environments, WAESPAA members have found that genuine participation requires deliberate practice of individualised support to ensure that the curriculum and instruction align with individual learning profiles. In schools led by WAESPAA members, this is achieved through collaborative planning between classroom teachers, education assistants, and allied health professionals, supported by consistent communication with families. Practical strategies include co-teaching arrangements, peer mentoring, adaptive scheduling, and differentiated assessment tasks that maintain rigour while enabling success. When these structures are supported by time, training, and shared expectations, participation moves beyond attendance to meaningful engagement.

Outcome

This approach demonstrates how participation fulfils the intent of Recommendation 4 of the *Review of the School Education Act 1999*, which calls for inclusive education to be enshrined in legislation in line with Article 24 of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. It also reflects the principles of the *Disability Standards for Education (2005)*, ensuring that students learn “on the same basis” as their peers. In schools applying these practices, students experience stronger academic growth, greater confidence, and improved wellbeing; families report increased trust and satisfaction; and educators gain clearer structures for supporting diverse learners.

4.3. Universal Design for Learning

Scenario

In many classrooms, learning experiences are still designed around a “typical” student profile, leaving those with different learning styles, communication needs, or sensory preferences at risk of exclusion. Teachers often face the challenge of responding to a wide range of abilities within a single class without sufficient structures, planning tools, or professional support. WAESPAA members have observed that while educators are committed to inclusion, they frequently lack the time, training, or flexibility to design lessons that anticipate and accommodate this diversity.

The result is that adjustments are often reactive — made after a student begins to struggle — rather than embedded from the outset.

Action

Through their collective experience, WAESPAA members have found that the most effective approach is to apply Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles alongside differentiated instruction as core components of lesson planning and school design. UDL encourages teachers to design curriculum, resources, and assessment methods that allow for multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression — recognising that students learn best through different pathways. Differentiated instruction complements this by providing tiered levels of support within the same learning environment, ensuring that each student can progress toward shared learning goals. Schools that consistently apply these approaches build flexibility into their planning, use assistive technologies effectively, and create collaborative environments where teachers, education assistants, and specialists co-design learning experiences. WAESPAA members have seen that these practices improve learning outcomes for all students, not only those with additional needs, by promoting participation and reducing barriers before they arise.

Outcome

This approach directly supports Recommendations 1 and 2 of the *Review of the School Education Act 1999*, which call for expanding the Act's objects and introducing guiding principles that promote inclusive education and universal measures. Embedding UDL and differentiated instruction into system policy and school practice gives tangible effect to these recommendations, while also aligning with Article 24(2)(c) of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, which requires education systems to facilitate effective learning environments. In schools where these practices are well established, students experience higher engagement, teachers report improved confidence in meeting diverse learning needs, and families see greater alignment between their child's abilities and classroom expectations. WAESPAA's lived experience confirms that when universal design becomes standard practice rather than an exception, inclusion shifts from accommodation to expectation — creating classrooms that are flexible by design and equitable by nature. DOE has to allow more opportunities for staff development and professional learning within the school year.

4.4. Funding Consistently

Scenario

Many schools face challenges in determining what appropriate support a student requires because of lack of clarity regarding reasonable adjustments, capacity and support. WAESPAA members have seen a reliance on formal diagnosis as a catalyst to additional support or differentiation. It is evidenced that early identification of additional need, correct supports and early intervention result in better outcomes for children, who require less support as they progress. We have also seen that individual funding allocation differs from setting to setting.

Action

WAESPAA members have adopted this approach by using multidisciplinary assessment tools that identify a student's capacity for learning, communication, social participation, and emotional regulation. Assessments are conducted collaboratively by teachers, education assistants, psychologists, and therapists, ensuring that supports reflect the student's need in the classroom. Schools that operate under this model can respond quickly — adjusting the level of support needed that can evolve with the student, without waiting for external verification. WAESPAA's members also highlight that this model requires system alignment: funding, reporting, and professional learning all need to reinforce functional rather than categorical thinking.

Outcome

This approach aligns directly with Recommendation 3 of the *Review of the School Education Act 1999*, which proposes reframing the definition of disability to align with the social model — recognising that barriers arise from the environment, not the individual. It also reflects the principles of Article 24(2)(d) of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, which calls for support measures within the general education system that maximise academic and social development. In practice, schools adopting functional needs-based approaches report earlier access to intervention, reduced administrative burden, and more equitable resource distribution. For students, it means support is timely, personalised, and adaptive; for families, it provides confidence that their child's needs are recognised through observable function, not bureaucracy; and for educators, it fosters collaboration, flexibility, and a clearer sense of professional agency.

4.5. Systemic Accountability and Data Monitoring

Scenario

While inclusive education is widely supported as a principle, measuring its real-world implementation remains inconsistent across the system. WAESPAA members have observed that many schools lack reliable mechanisms to track student engagement, progress, or outcomes for students receiving additional support. Reporting requirements often focus on compliance measures rather than effectiveness, leading to limited visibility of what inclusion looks like in practice. Without consistent, system-level data, it becomes difficult for the Department to identify gaps, allocate resources equitably, or assess the impact of reforms. This inconsistency also makes it harder for educators and leaders to benchmark success, reflect on practice, and plan continuous improvement.

Action

WAESPAA's experience shows that inclusive practice paired with meaningful data collection, used as tools for learning, (not compliance) lead to better outcomes for students. Effective systems collect and interpret information about participation, progress, wellbeing, and support — not just enrolment or attendance. In practice, WAESPAA-led schools employ local data tracking tools that capture functional skills, communication progress, and engagement indicators, which complement academic reporting. These systems help educators identify

what is working and where adjustments are needed, creating feedback loops that improve both teaching and planning. At the system level, WAESPA believes data monitoring must be consistent across all settings — mainstream, specialist, and support programs — using shared definitions and transparent reporting processes. When accountability focuses on improvement rather than blame, schools are more empowered to learn from evidence and adapt their approaches. This approach fulfils Recommendations 13 and 14 of the *Review of the School Education Act 1999*, which call for stronger obligations on the Department to monitor inclusion and evaluate reforms through measurable outcomes. It also supports Article 24(2)(e) of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, which requires states to ensure that education for people with disabilities is delivered effectively and monitored appropriately. In practice, schools that use data to inform inclusion see greater consistency in student progress, stronger accountability for resourcing decisions, and more transparent communication with families. For the Department, a unified data system enables strategic planning, equitable funding allocation, and evidence-based policy refinement. WAESPA's experience confirms that accountability and data, when aligned to learning rather than compliance, are powerful tools for building trust and driving continuous improvement across the education system.

4.6. Appropriate Resourcing and Training Across All School Contexts

Scenario

Educators across local and specialist settings consistently express a desire to deliver high-quality, inclusive education but often lack the sustained training, staffing support, or time to do so effectively. WAESPA members have observed that professional learning in inclusive practice is frequently delivered as isolated sessions rather than as part of a continuous capability-building framework. Without adequate and targeted investment in professional development, schools can struggle to maintain consistency and quality in inclusive practice, particularly as student cohorts become more diverse.

Action

WAESPA's collective experience shows that meaningful inclusion relies on an education workforce that is confident, skilled, and supported. This is achieved through system-wide investment in both initial teacher education and ongoing professional learning focused on practical inclusive strategies. WAESPA-led schools demonstrate the value of structured mentoring, co-teaching, and collaborative professional learning communities that bring together classroom teachers, education assistants, and allied professionals. These approaches build shared understanding and collective responsibility for inclusion. The Association has also found that effective inclusion requires strategic resourcing — including time for collaboration, manageable workloads, and access to specialist expertise. By integrating training with resource planning, schools can sustain a professional culture that values inclusion as part of everyday practice rather than as an additional responsibility.

Outcome

This approach aligns with the *Review of the School Education Act 1999*, which emphasises the need for workforce strategies that embed inclusive education into teacher development and leadership programs. It also reflects Article 24(4) of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, which requires that education professionals receive the necessary training to implement inclusive education effectively. In practice, schools that invest in professional capability and adequate resourcing experience stronger teaching quality, reduced staff turnover, and higher levels of student engagement and achievement. Families see greater consistency in the quality of support provided across schools, while educators report increased confidence and shared accountability for inclusion. WAESPAA's experience demonstrates that sustained professional learning and resourcing are not supplementary to inclusion — they are the foundation that enables it to thrive across every educational context in Western Australia.

5. WAESPAA's Guiding Role

WAESPAA is the professional voice of educational leaders who deliver inclusive education across Western Australia. Its members head Education Support Schools, Centres, Programs, and Specialist Learning Programs that collectively support thousands of students with diverse and complex needs. WAESPAA's contribution to implementation is grounded in partnership. The Association provides the Department of Education with professional insight that ensures the design and delivery of inclusive education reforms are practical, evidence-based, and sustainable. While WAESPAA's members already lead inclusion through their daily work, the Association does not seek to assume responsibility for system delivery. Instead, it acts as a professional reference body, helping to ensure that policy development and implementation are informed by those with deep operational knowledge of schools and students.

Drawing on this experience, WAESPAA can assist the Department to translate the *Review of the School Education Act 1999* into actionable strategies. It offers professional advice on how inclusive principles intersect with curriculum, funding, staffing, and accountability frameworks, helping to identify where existing systems can be strengthened. WAESPAA's guidance also supports the integrity of the continuum of provision by promoting coordination between specialist and mainstream settings, preserving parental choice, and ensuring that pathways between learning environments remain open and responsive.

Through its state-wide network, WAESPAA contributes to workforce capability by identifying the skills, supports, and professional learning structures that underpin high-quality inclusion. Its members provide models of best practice and mentor colleagues, ensuring that inclusion becomes a sustained professional standard across the system. The Association also strengthens collaboration between educators, families, and allied professionals by demonstrating how shared planning and communication build trust, improve outcomes, and give families an active voice in decision-making.

Ultimately, WAESPAA's role in implementing inclusive education is to bring professional expertise, practical experience, and a collaborative mindset to the design and realisation of reform. By drawing on WAESPAA's insight throughout implementation, the Department can build an inclusive education system that is cohesive, credible, and responsive to every learner across our state.

Conclusion: A Shared Pathway Forward

Western Australia is well positioned to lead the next generation of inclusive education reform. The *Review of the School Education Act 1999* has set a clear direction, one that calls for inclusion to be embedded across all schools and supported by coherent system design. The task now is to move from principle to practice: to translate that intent into structures, supports, and capabilities that allow every student to learn, participate, and thrive.

WAESPAA's contribution provides the professional foundation for this work. The Association's members bring decades of experience in leading education for students with complex and diverse needs, and their insight offers the Department of Education a grounded understanding of how inclusive education functions in practice. This paper has outlined the definition and key elements of inclusion and demonstrated how these align with, and give practical form to, the recommendations of the *Review*.

The way forward lies in partnership. By engaging WAESPAA throughout the design and implementation process, via the newly formed Disability Reform Unit, the Department of Education can draw on deep professional knowledge, evidence from practice, and a strong network of leaders who are already delivering inclusive education every day. This collaboration will ensure that reform is not only principled but workable, balancing aspiration with feasibility, and rights with real-world delivery.

Through this partnership, Western Australia can build an inclusive education system that is cohesive, equitable, and future-focused, one that preserves parental choice, values student diversity, and upholds excellence in educational delivery and stakeholder engagement. By embedding these principles across every level of the system, the State can demonstrate national leadership and ensure that every learner, in every setting, has the opportunity to succeed.

Glossary

Inclusive Education: Every student can learn and take part, in a setting that is appropriate for them.

Reasonable Adjustment: A change to the program, or mode of delivery, to assist a student to engage in the learning content.

Universal Design: Planning settings & lessons so all students can learn. Every student learns best when the setting meets their needs.

Setting: A learning environment that helps a student feel comfortable and ready to learn.

Tokenistic Integration: Simply putting a student in a classroom without supports is not inclusion—it is physical presence without meaningful engagement.