

**CURRICULUM POLICIES FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN AUSTRALIA****Tania Aspland****Poulomee Datta****Joy Talukdar***University of Adelaide*

*The curriculum policies for students with special needs across Australia have been reviewed. The Curriculum Framework in the Australian Capital Territory is used to inform their school based curriculum. The Northern Territory Curriculum Framework describes what learners are expected to achieve and what learners have achieved. The New South Wales and Western Australian Curriculum Framework identifies some essential and fundamental learning in each subject area and common outcomes for all students. The Tasmanian curriculum is organised into areas and standards, the areas being content based. The Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework is based on a set of essential learnings embedded within standards across all key subjects. The South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability Framework are also based on essential learnings constituting of a series of expected outcomes in each subject area. The Victorian Essential Learning Standards outlines a set of common state-wide standards which schools use to plan student learning programs. In spite of each of the state and territory government's commitment towards inclusion, as manifested in the curricular provisions, the present review surfaces the lack of specialised documentation for these discrete group of learners.*

Policy regarding curriculum, assessment and reporting in Australia has most recently been reshaped by a national commitment to the Australian Curriculum. However, as education is also a state responsibility in Australia, each state continues to implement previously developed local government policy with regard to curriculum, assessment and reporting. As signatories to the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australia 2008*, state and federal Ministers of Education throughout Australia have committed to providing all young Australians with opportunities through schooling and training to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. This commitment is to be enacted in a number of ways, one of which is the promotion of a world class curriculum incorporating a number of learning areas (English, Mathematics, Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, The Arts, Languages, Health and Physical Education and Information Communication Technology). Another is to develop a rigorous and comprehensive system to assess student progress to inform teaching, to enable the self monitoring of student learning and, to assess student achievement against goals and standards.

As a result, curriculum assessment and reporting policies are in a state of flux across Australia. The call for an inclusive curriculum is universal in Australia. It does not emanate solely from the special education sector. It is supported across all sectors of the education system. There is an absence of coherence in curriculum for students with special educational needs across many jurisdictions internationally that, in statutory terms, already have a national curriculum. In the United Kingdom, a constant struggle has been inevitable from the inception of a 'curriculum for all' - to secure truly 'inclusive' national curricula (Martin, 2006; Aird & Aird, 2006; 2007). Currently, curriculum reform across Australia is being led by the national government curriculum authority, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) which is an independent statutory agency established by Commonwealth legislation to oversee the development and implementation of a national curriculum. The national curriculum will be accessible to all young Australians, regardless of their social or economic background or the school they attend.

In Australia at the present time, many teachers and school leaders attempt as best as they can to meet the needs of students with special educational needs through differentiation, modification and accommodations in their teaching. Some use individualised plans in order to include these students in the curriculum, while others lay importance on the independent life skills outcome for this discrete group of learners.

The following study reviews the various policies that currently exist across the six States and two Union Territories in Australia in relation to the curriculum and how students with special educational needs are being supported within the curriculum framework in each state. The key issue for this review lies in the mission of ACARA and all other countries in designing a national curriculum, assessment and reporting that will equip all young citizens including those with special education needs and disabilities. Each of the domains of curriculum within the six states and two territories in Australia is addressed, in turn.

#### *Australian Capital Territory*

*Every chance to learn*, the Curriculum Framework in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) provides government and non-government schools in the ACT with the framework on which to base their school curriculum plans from preschool to year 10. The ACT Curriculum Framework ensures that all students are provided with a core of discipline-based study from the eight key learning areas of the arts, English, health and physical education, languages, mathematics, science, the social sciences and technology. It also ensures that learning in the key learning areas is underpinned by, and connected with, the essential interdisciplinary knowledge, understandings and skills required for students to prosper in the 21st century. The 25 Essential Learning Achievements are organised according to their discipline-based or interdisciplinary nature within the eight key learning areas (ACT Department of Education and Training [ACT DET], 2008).

Literacy and numeracy are integral to effective learning across the ACT Curriculum Framework. Each Essential Learning Achievement has an overview statement, with essential content and markers of progress described in four bands of development, namely Early childhood – preschool to year 2, Later childhood – year 3 to year 5, Early adolescence – year 6 to year 8, and Later adolescence – year 9 to year 10 (ACT DET, 2008).

Ten principles underpin the Curriculum Framework for ACT schools and the curriculum decisions that schools make when exercising their school-based curriculum responsibility. The first two principles lay the foundation for this Curriculum Framework. Eight principles support schools in making school-based curriculum decisions on the basis of the framework. One among the eight principles states that curriculum should be equitable and inclusive. This means that curriculum decisions should ensure that all students have access to learning regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, disability, physical or intellectual attributes, language, culture, religion, age and social or economic condition. It should enable all students to realise their individual potential. This aspect of the curriculum encompasses students with special needs (SEN) within the broader ACT Curriculum Framework. The ACT Department, however, has no specific policies related to students with special needs. All schools use the ACT Curriculum Framework *Every Chance to Learn* to inform their school based curriculum development and adhere to the standard National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) guidelines. Nevertheless, a set of guidelines for the development and monitoring of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) that are required for every funded special needs student does exist (ACT DET, 2011).

#### *Northern Territory*

The Northern Territory Board of Studies (NTBOS) develops and provides high quality curriculum, assessment, reporting and certification to students in the Northern Territory (NT) from Preschool to Year 12. The *Northern Territory Curriculum Framework* (NTCF) describes what learners are expected to achieve (the Intended Curriculum) and is used to determine what learners have achieved (the Achieved Curriculum). One of the six key principles of the NTCF is Inclusivity. Inclusivity means all learners, irrespective of culture, language, socio-economic background, geographical location, disability or gender, must be given the opportunity to access a diverse and empowering education. Learners' backgrounds, interests, prior understandings, experiences, learning styles and learning rates should be valued and considered (Northern Territory Government, Department of Education and Training [NTG DET], 2009).

The Northern Territory Curriculum Council as well as the Department has a *Disabilities Policy* with supporting guidelines, reinforced with the NT Curriculum and NT Assessment and reporting framework. The NT schools are expected to enable all learners to achieve their goals by providing opportunities for learners to achieve the outcomes and standards described in learning progress maps for each area of learning. These progress maps provide the major elements of curriculum, around which schools and teachers can design the intended curriculum, assess learner progress against these outcomes and standards to determine learner achievement and report on learner achievement and progress. The outcomes inform curriculum planning and assessment in the NT (NTG DET, 2009).

#### *New South Wales*

The *K–10 Curriculum Framework* establishes parameters for the Board of Studies New South Wales curriculum for the compulsory years of schooling. It identifies the learning essential for all students and guides the evaluation and revision of individual syllabuses. Further, it clearly articulates standards that show what students are expected to know and be able to do at each stage from Kindergarten to Year 10. There are a set of principles which guide the development and implementation of the Board of Studies curriculum requirements and syllabuses. One among the many principles is that education must be inclusive of all students attending schools in New South Wales. This is achieved through a Curriculum Framework which takes into account the diverse needs of all students, provides equitable access, participation, and outcomes for all students, enables schools to provide programs that engage each student according to their backgrounds, needs and interests and allows the full range of students to demonstrate achievement (New South Wales Government, Board of Studies NSW [NSWG BSNSW], 2002).

The Education Act in New South Wales prescribes minimum curriculum requirements for Years K–6 and Years 7–10. School authorities determine whether schools will deliver curriculum that exceeds the minimum curriculum requirements (NSWG BSNSW, 2002). The Board's K–6 syllabuses describe standards for Early Stage 1 and Stages 1 to 3. In the K–6 curriculum, students with special education needs are provided for in the following four ways. Firstly, through the inclusion of outcomes and content in syllabuses which provide for the full range of students including those with special educational needs. Secondly, through the development of additional advice and programming, support for teachers to assist students with special needs to access the outcomes of the syllabus is provided. Thirdly, the development of specific support documents for students with special education needs is provided. Fourthly, teachers and parents plan together to ensure that syllabus outcomes and content reflect the learning needs and priorities of all students including those with special needs (NSWG BSNSW, 2007).

Students with special education needs build on their achievements in K–6 as they progress through their secondary study and undertake courses to meet the requirements for the School Certificate (NSWG BSNSW, 2007). The Board of Studies awards the School Certificate to students who have completed the mandatory curriculum requirements for Years 7–10. This is a period of learning, typically of two years duration. Stage 4 refers to Years 7 and 8. Stage 5 refers to Years 9 and 10. The syllabus document specifies what students are expected to learn about and learn to do in a particular subject. All Years 7–10 syllabuses are inclusive of the learning needs of the full range of students (NSWG BSNSW, 2010).

Most students with special education needs participate fully in learning experiences and assessment activities provided by the regular syllabus outcomes and content, although they may require additional support, including adjustments to teaching and learning activities and/or assessment tasks. However, for a small percentage of these students, particularly those with an intellectual disability, the Life Skills outcomes and content in each syllabus provide a more relevant, accessible and meaningful curriculum option. The decision to access Life Skills outcomes and content is a collaborative one that involves parents, caregivers, teachers and support staff. A student who follows a Life Skills course of study in one subject is not precluded from the regular outcomes and content of another syllabus. The decision is made on a subject by- subject basis with consideration to the needs, interests, strengths and goals of the individual student (NSWG BSNSW, 2010).

#### *Tasmania*

The *Tasmanian Curriculum* is organised into seven areas and five standards. Each area is further organised into strands that describe the content and processes in each area. Teachers use performance criteria to make valid assessment judgements in each area. Standards state what students can do. The Curriculum is organised from standard one to standard five, describing the years of schooling from Kindergarten to Year 10 (Department of Education, 2010).

Schools are encouraged to provide rich learning experiences in all areas of the Tasmanian Curriculum. In consultation with their communities, schools are best placed to make decisions about the personal learning program of each student. The Tasmanian Curriculum is based on an agreed set of Values, Purposes and Goals refined through extensive consultation. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Principles which were revised in 2008 and are inclusive underpin the Tasmanian Curriculum Framework for all students (Department of Education, 2010).

The goal for Tasmanian students is that they have the opportunity to learn and achieve the highest outcomes they can in a personalised learning program drawn from all areas of the Tasmanian Curriculum. Most students with a disability or additional needs are educated in their local schools alongside their age peers while being provided with a rich, balanced curriculum and support to meet their particular learning needs. If families in partnership with educators consider attendance at a regular school as an unsuitable option, students may be eligible to attend a special school. All students with special needs in Tasmania are entitled to an Individual Education Plan (IEP) within the Tasmanian Curriculum (Department of Education, 2010).

In Tasmania, in relation to the school sector, the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority (TQA) deals only with senior secondary adhering to guidelines set under the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority Act 2003, whereas, the Department of Education is responsible for curriculum and assessment from K–10. With regards to the curriculum, a suite of special needs courses are adopted and accredited by the TQA. Each course within the suite has a whole-of-life approach and aims to offer better outcomes in all aspects of students' lives and to assist people with disabilities to access achievable pathways to further training and or employment outcomes. Some students may need this full suite of courses for study in both their years 11 and 12, some may need it for only part of their course load, and some may need some for year 11 before moving into other programs for Year 12. These courses are all at a preliminary level (preliminary to TQA level 1), i.e. below AQF Certificate I. They are sometimes referred to as life skills courses and, in other jurisdictions, as access courses (Department of Education, 2010).

#### *Western Australia*

In Western Australia (WA), the Curriculum Framework sets out what all students should know, understand, value and be able to do as a result of the programs they undertake in schools in Western Australia, from kindergarten through to year 12. It is neither a curriculum nor a syllabus, but a framework identifying common learning outcomes for all students, whether they attend government or non-government schools or receives home schooling. The Curriculum Framework makes explicit the learning outcomes which all Western Australian students should achieve. Some schools in WA have been moving towards an outcomes approach for some time. An outcomes approach means identifying what students should achieve and focusing on ensuring that they do achieve. The outcomes-focused approach provides schools with more flexibility to enable teachers to develop different learning and teaching programs to help their particular students achieve the outcomes. These learning outcomes are set out within the overarching and eight Learning Area Statements. Schools and teachers then utilise the Curriculum Framework to develop their own learning and teaching programs according to their circumstances, ethos and the needs of their students (Government of Western Australia Curriculum Council [GWA CC], 2010).

The Curriculum Council has identified and endorsed as one of its Principles, a set of core shared values to underpin the Curriculum Framework. The Overarching Statement provides an overview of the five clusters of core shared values which include an expanded set of thirty-two values. Each of the eight learning area statements explicitly or implicitly endorses these values in a manner suited to the area. The Framework offers inclusive learning opportunities for all students (GWA CC, 2010).

In WA, the Curriculum Framework is for all students and it depends on each jurisdiction to provide practical support to teachers on how to plan teaching and learning programmes for students with special needs within this Framework. The Inclusivity statement within the Curriculum Framework ensures that all students with special needs are supported. To monitor the progress of students with special needs, a personalized and documented education plan is prepared through which reporting takes place. There is the balanced curriculum in WA which means principals and teachers engage in whole school planning to ensure that there is appropriate curriculum emphasis for each phases of schooling. A small number of students with specific physical or intellectual disabilities may not be able to participate fully in activities and programs designed to achieve certain outcomes set out in the Curriculum Framework. For students

with intellectual disabilities, there is a focus on the achievement of outcomes in literacy, numeracy, socialisation, and health and wellbeing (GWA CC, 2010).

It should be noted that initially, the Foundation Outcome Statements were specifically designed for students with special needs. However, it is no longer in use. Teachers and schools may use it for planning but it is not used for assessment and reporting purposes.

### *Queensland*

The Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) developed the Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting (QCAR) Framework in partnership with the Department of Education, Training and the Arts, Education Queensland, Queensland Catholic Education Commission and Independent Schools Queensland. The QCAR Framework aligns curriculum, assessment and reporting. The QCAR Framework has five components that are interrelated and designed to work together to provide a broad education for all students (Queensland Government, Department of Education, Training and the Arts [QG DETA], 2007). The five components include a set of Essential Learnings across all Key Learning Areas which identify what should be taught and what is important for students to have opportunities to know, understand and be able to do. They can be accessed either by key learning area or by juncture. Secondly, the standards for the Essential Learnings are integral to the alignment of curriculum, assessment and reporting. For teachers, parents and students, they provide a common frame of reference and a shared language for describing the quality of student achievement. The Standards are achievement standards linked to the Essential Learnings. Using a 5-point scale, the Standards describe how well a student has demonstrated their learning based on a collection of evidence. They can also be used to report student progress and achievement. The Standards range from A to E and are the same for all key learning areas. Thirdly, an online Assessment Bank for use in everyday assessment practices of teachers by providing access to a range of quality assessment tools is another integral component of the QCAR Framework. Fourthly, Queensland Comparable Assessment Tasks (QCATs) in Years 4, 6 and 9, provide information to teachers about student demonstrations of learning in a selection of Essential Learnings, and promote consistency of teacher judgements is crucial to the QCAR Framework. Fifthly, guidelines for reports that have been designed to support consistency of reporting across Queensland make the QCAR Framework comprehensive (QG DETA, 2007).

In Queensland it is expected that all students, including students with disabilities, have the opportunity to engage with the learning specified in the mandated curriculum documents (QG DETA, 2009). Articulated through the policy statements in the P-12 Curriculum Framework, are the expectations in Queensland that schools and teachers enable all students, including students with disabilities, to access and achieve the learning described in the mandated curriculum documents. This may involve adjustments to assessment procedures, teaching materials, learning experiences and / or variation to same-age cohort juncture (Queensland Government, Department of Education and Training, 2008).

In Queensland, policy dictates that the intended curriculum for all students be drawn from the mandated curriculum. For some students with disabilities, their intended curriculum thus encompasses the mandated curriculum plus individual learning goals that maximise their access and participation to the mandated curriculum. All students, including students with disabilities are required to address the QCAR Essential Learnings in all Key Learning Areas each year from Year 1 to Year 9 with the exception of Languages other than English (QG DETA, 2009).

It is imperative in Queensland schools to ensure that every Year 10 student undertakes Senior Education and Training (SET) planning. For some students with disabilities, the SET plan incorporates the record of learning goals and educational adjustments that have been planned to assist the student transition to their post schooling pathway. Further, schools are also to ensure that all students in the Senior Phase of Learning undertake a program of learning that makes them eligible for the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) or a Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA) on exiting Year 12 (QG DETA, 2009).

Most students with disabilities in Queensland schools participate fully with the learning experiences and assessment activities described in the mandated curriculum. Additional support, including adjustments to the pedagogy and assessment, may be required to facilitate reasonable adjustments to the curriculum that enable fuller participation of these students in the same age-cohort program. Students, who are accessing a curriculum that is significantly varied from that of their same age cohort, will nevertheless have their program drawn from the mandated curriculum (QG DETA, 2009).

The policy document Curriculum Guidelines for Students with Disabilities is designed to assist teachers and school administrators to translate the P-12 Curriculum Framework into practice for students with disabilities. The P-12 Curriculum Framework sets the expectation that schools and teachers enable all students to access and achieve the learning described in the mandated curriculum documents. This may involve adjustments to content, assessment procedures, teaching materials, learning experiences and teaching styles. It requires that the curriculum is designed for flexibility and supports teachers to be responsive to students' educational needs in a proactive way (QG DETA, 2009).

#### *South Australia*

The South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework describes a single, cohesive Birth to Year 12 curriculum entitlement for all learners within children's services and schools. The SACSA Framework is based firmly on a commitment to the principle that all children and students should have access to a common curriculum. Essential Learnings are understandings, dispositions and capabilities which are developed through the Learning Areas that form an integral part of children's and students' learning from birth to Year 12 and beyond. Within the SACSA Framework, five Essential Learnings have been identified. They are Futures, Identity, Interdependence, Thinking and Communication. Literacy, numeracy and information and communication technologies are key dimensions of all Essential Learnings, and in particular the Communication Essential Learning. Skills, knowledge and understandings in these are explicitly interwoven throughout the Curriculum Scope and Standards for all Learning Areas in the SACSA Framework. In the SACSA Framework the Learning Areas have been transformed and redefined by the interweaving of the Essential Learnings, Equity Cross-curriculum Perspectives and Enterprise and Vocational Education (Government of South Australia, Department of Education and Children's Services [GSA DECS], 2001).

The SACSA Framework is deemed a curriculum entitlement, and so it must be inclusive of all learners. For this aspiration to be achieved at least two things must be realised from a curriculum perspective. First, the curriculum should recognise and build upon learner diversity, providing every learner with learning and assessment experiences which optimise their opportunities. Thus the SACSA Framework has been constructed with particular attention being paid to the educational entitlements of the learners with disabilities or learning difficulties. Second, equity perspectives must be represented across the curriculum. The intention here is to ensure that the knowledge and cultures of those groups in society that have the least power and who are most vulnerable should form a central focus of curriculum content and practice (GSA DECS, 2001).

The Standards in the SACSA Framework represent the expectations of all learners. They provide a common reference point for educators to use in monitoring, judging and reporting on learner achievement over time. For each Learning Area there are Curriculum Standards comprising a series of expected Outcomes. The Curriculum Standards in the SACSA Framework are presented as performance standards that depict the developing capabilities of children and students along a continuum of ever-improving performance. They are broad descriptions of expected growth in performance. The alignment of standards of performance with years of schooling is intended to establish a common basis for describing the progress of learner performance at the end of a two-year period. The Standards do not depict the growth of any individual learner, but rather provide a picture of expected progress. Individual learners are likely to perform differently within different dimensions of performance at any particular point in time. Learners need to be provided with learning programs designed to help each of them reach the Standards (GSA DECS, 2001).

However, the Standards are not modified to suit particular students with special needs. Students with a severe intellectual disability and/or severe multiple disabilities who may not be able to achieve all the Standards in the Learning Areas continue to work towards individual goals identified through the negotiated curriculum planning process. These goals thus, must be developed within the framework of the curriculum and, where possible, within the context of appropriate Standards. Some children and students with disabilities may not progress through the Standards at an even rate. Nevertheless, students with special needs are supported within the SACSA Framework through the Negotiated Education Plan (NEP). The purpose of the NEP is to support access, participation and achievement in the mandated curriculum for students with disabilities (GSA DECS, 2001).

*Victoria*

The Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) outlines what is essential for all Victorian students to learn during their time at school from Prep to Year 10. They provide a set of common state-wide standards which schools use to plan student learning programs, assess student progress and report to parents. The VELS is based on best practice in Victorian schools and draw on national and international research about how students learn. The Standards are designed for all Victorian students. They provide a whole school curriculum planning document for the development of individual programs for students with disabilities. All such programs are designed within the curriculum described in the Essential Learning Standards (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority [VCAC], 2007).

The delivery of VELS is carried out through Levels 1 to 6. At Levels 1 and 2 the focus is largely on foundational literacy and numeracy skills and the development of physical, personal and social capacities. It is not until Level 3 that students are expected to achieve standards in disciplines such as Science and the Humanities. At Levels 4 and 5 it is appropriate that students be supported and expected to achieve the full range of knowledge and skills in each of the three interrelated strands that comprise the Standards. At Level 6 the Standards are designed to enable schools to construct coherent programs which include each of the five broad disciplines, a strong focus on developing the full range of interdisciplinary and physical, personal and social knowledge, skills and behaviours, and the capacity for students to pursue pathway-related studies which meet their needs, and dovetail with the programs available in Years 11 and 12. Learning progress for student achievement is set at four stages A to D. These stages are not associated with any set age or year level that links chronological age to cognitive progress. As students progress through these stages the level of support decreases as they proceed towards becoming independent learners. The stages focus largely on foundational literacy and numeracy skills and the development of physical, personal and social capacities. At Stages A to D standards are written for English, mathematics, health and physical education, the Arts and Interpersonal Development (VCAC, 2007). The four stages are Stage A: Beginning to Explore, Stage B: Active Exploration, Stage C: Intentional Participation and Stage D: Building Independence (VCAC, 2007).

The VELS provide a strong foundation for improving the learning of all students. They outline key principles that enable schools to provide enriching educational experiences for students while preparing them to live in an inclusive society that can meet modern and globalised demands. The educational principles imply that schools are responsible for developing a wide range of appropriate teaching and learning strategies for all students. For schools, this means developing curriculum described in the VELS but tailored to individual circumstances. The educational principles within the Standards also imply that schools, teachers and students have responsibility for ensuring student success in learning and can be applied when developing individual learning plans for students with disabilities. They provide a strong foundation for improving the learning of all students and a framework for integrating planning for students with disabilities into a whole school curriculum. Working within a whole school curriculum plan, a student's program support group will decide how to meet learning standards for individual students (VCAC, 2007).

The *VELS – Students with Disabilities Guidelines* provides a framework for teachers to develop programs for students with disabilities that are consistent with the VELS by linking the rationale and structure of the VELS to individual program development and assessment for students with special needs. The Guidelines contain a framework for planning inclusive curriculum so that teachers can equip all students with the knowledge, skills and behaviours to help them succeed in a world that is increasingly complex, rapidly changing and rich in information and communications technology. The framework is linked to a whole-school approach to curriculum planning, and reflects the three core strands of essential learning in Physical, Personal and Social Learning, Discipline-based Learning and Interdisciplinary Learning (VCAC, 2005).

While focusing on students with disabilities, the approaches outlined in the Guidelines are valuable for all students. There is no single approach to curriculum planning. However, an inclusive approach incorporates the belief that all students can learn and progress, and a commitment to a collaborative relationship between students, family, school and the community (VCAC, 2005). For students with disabilities, units of work can be linked to the Standards by developing a whole school plan, identifying key concepts from the learning focus statements, incorporating domains across the three strands, identifying relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours from the relevant domain, setting goals and developing individual learning plans and providing alternative learning pathways for demonstrating achievement of the Standards (VCAC, 2005). The primary purpose for developing an individual learning

plan for students with special needs is to provide a framework and guide that links the specific learning needs of the student to the three strands (VCAC, 2005).

Therefore, the following similarities inevitable regarding the provision of curriculum for students with special educational needs across Australia are outlined in the following sections. Firstly, a strong commitment from state governments to inclusivity through school based curriculum planning was demonstrated. Inclusion here not only involves curriculum design but also ways to accommodate student learning differences and difficulties to enable access to the curriculum (Hehir, 2005). Secondly, only one Curriculum Framework was provided by states across Australia for each of the learning areas, and it was a common expectation that classroom teachers were responsible for curriculum modifications. Thirdly, at the level of curriculum design for students with special educational needs, the negotiated approach to individualised planning was the dominant approach advocated across all states of Australia. Fourthly, the various state curriculum frameworks and policy statements were mandated as the key resources to be used by teams in planning for learners with special educational needs. There is little evidence of any extra or specialised documentation for this discrete group of learners that diversifies content knowledge away from mainstream policy documents.

### **Conclusion**

Within the mandate of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australia 2008, at the level of policy and in the domain of curriculum a relatively consistent profile can be portrayed for both the general school population and students with special educational needs. Disability is a significant concern for the present Australian government. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Bulletin (AIHW), 2008, it was identified that 101,700 students with an intellectual disability were placed in schools in 2003. However, of these students, 66% had learning difficulties, 41% experienced social difficulties and 31% communicated unsuccessfully in the broader society. Further, of that cohort only 9% of students proceeded to post-school study options (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Bulletin (AIHW), 2008).

This cohort is being identified as an increasingly marginalised group of the Australian community who suffer from social exclusion (Mangan & Stephen 2007) and who, despite government intervention, fall further behind mainstream groups in relation to education. This highlights the significance of special government funding to support students with disabilities to access and participate in an educational setting without experiencing discrimination – a high priority for the Australian government. This manuscript therefore, comprised a scoping of some of the current policies in curriculum for students with special educational needs in Australia. Each document illustrated a cohesive approach to curriculum policy frameworks across Australia. Further, it can be inferred that though the principle of flexibility was evident at the level of policy, but only with a standards based approach within each curriculum framework. The theme of inclusion was evident throughout all policy documents where it was argued that in every state or territory all students have a right to education and should be granted access to learning through a general school curriculum, responsive to individual student needs. However, the one size fits all approach with some politically correct and inclusive statements to soften the impact on all were the dominant principle across Australia. In all systems there was a noticeable lack of strategic vision for special education generally. Unlike the situation in other countries, there is no evidence that alternative curriculum procedures are legislatively possible, despite the fact that the concept is educationally sound. This results in multiple levels of misalignment amongst curriculum, teachers and students. Teachers are finding it increasingly difficult to cope well with the challenges of differentiation and individualisation of learning to be more inclusive of learners with special educational needs within the general curriculum framework.

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