

NDIS AND THE INTERFACE WITH SCHOOLS

NDIS, Australia's first national scheme for people with disability, provides funding directly to individuals thereby enhancing support for children and young people. Its implementation, however, has introduced challenges for school leaders, who face pressure to host external providers, and to manage the administration and risk management measures that accompany having providers on site.

While families and carers can request that NDIS funded supports be provided in schools and preschools during teaching and learning time, there is no automatic right for those supports to be delivered and principals consider those requests on a case-by-case basis. However, accepting one provider can create pressure to accept others and it becomes a contested space. Accepting all providers places additional workload burdens on schools.

ROLE DEFINITION COMPLEXITY

A clearer distinction has emerged between educational responsibilities (schools) and disability-related supports (NDIS). Schools are no longer responsible for funding or providing personal care, therapies, or assistive technologies that are classified as disability-related rather than educational. In practice, however, there is ongoing confusion about the boundaries, leading to role ambiguity and disagreement over funding responsibilities.

Special education teachers and support staff often take on additional responsibilities in managing student support plans and liaising with providers. There is no standardised training for educators on working within the NDIS framework, leading to inconsistent implementation across schools.

MANAGING STAKEHOLDER EXPECTATIONS

The NDIS language and processes are complex, and many families struggle to navigate the system, turning to schools for assistance. Parents often expect schools to advocate for their child's NDIS funding and believe that schools should help implement NDIS-funded supports, creating tension when schools push back on responsibilities that are not theirs. When hosting NDIS providers, teachers and leaders are expected to be the interface with families regarding NDIS plans and service delivery.

ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN AND WORKLOAD

Many principals and learning support teams report that managing NDIS-related administrative tasks has diverted time and resources away from teaching and school leadership, impacting school operations and student outcomes. Schools must liaise with multiple external NDIS providers, including therapists, support workers, and plan managers, and leaders must consider:

- » the safety and wellbeing of ALL students,
- » the benefit to the student receiving NDIS support at school,
- » resources (human and physical) are prioritised for teaching and learning
- » the impact on other students and their learning,
- » workplace health and safety, and
- » the good management and running of the school.

Schools often advocate for families to secure appropriate supports, as many parents are unfamiliar with how to navigate the NDIS system, and paperwork and communication with families regarding NDIS plans, eligibility, and service provision have added to the workload of school leaders. Some families directly hire support workers who may accompany their child at school, creating additional oversight responsibilities for school leaders. ►

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ACCESS INEQUITY

The NDIS has the potential to enhance student support, as families can access tailored disability supports beyond what schools provide. However, access to NDIS services is inconsistent, especially in rural and remote areas, due to provider shortages, long wait times and travel barriers. Limited availability of allied health services and inconsistent funding create further disadvantages, leaving many students without essential interventions, widening the gap between urban and regional schools, and placing additional pressure on educators to fill service gaps.

As well, schools in low socioeconomic areas report that many students who need support are not receiving it because their families struggle to navigate the system or meet eligibility criteria.

LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES

With more private therapists (e.g., speech pathologists, occupational therapists, behaviour support practitioners) now working within primary school settings, schools must establish clear protocols for managing NDIS providers on site, which may vary across jurisdictions. The absence of clear protocols for provider access and supervision complicates coordination, placing additional strain on school leaders and impacting equitable support for students with disabilities. It is not a requirement that NDIS providers can provide their service on a school site.

Many primary schools also lack appropriate, accessible dedicated spaces for NDIS providers, creating logistical challenges that impact student support, equity, and effective service delivery. Insufficient infrastructure, scheduling conflicts, and inadequate accessibility hinder effective service delivery.

APPA also wishes to highlight a growing community tension between private practitioners who choose to work with students at their own premises and NDIS providers who operate their businesses within school facilities, raising concerns about equitable access, duty of care, and the appropriate use of education spaces.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION

- 1 Role of schools**
APPA recommends a national statement clarifying the **role of schools** in enabling NDIS therapy on a school site to reduce the current confusion and ambiguity.
- 2 Stakeholder expectations**
APPA recommends the provision of **consistent guidelines for parents/carers** that outline the responsibilities of all parties – schools, providers and families – in the delivery of NDIS support for students within the school environment.
- 3 Administrative workload resourcing**
APPA recommends **administrative resourcing** to schools to meet increased coordination requirements for students in receipt of NDIS funding.
- 4 Equitable access**
Where NDIS provided support services are lacking, APPA recommends **targeted funding** to offer specialist support services, particularly in rural, remote, and lower socio-economic communities.
- 5 Logistics**
APPA recommends clear, consistent national **guidelines on school-NDIS engagement**, defining provider access, school responsibilities, and support service delivery across all sectors.

SUMMARY

School leaders are committed to improving outcomes for students with disabilities by delivering high quality education, supported by reasonable educational adjustments. NDIS support contributes to a student's ability to participate in their education. To address the growing pressures on school leaders, teachers and support staff as they liaise with NDIS providers, **APPA calls for the implementation of consistent practices, the establishment of clear guidelines, the provision of comprehensive training for staff engaging with NDIS providers in schools, and appropriate resourcing.** Teachers and school leaders need ongoing professional development to understand the NDIS and how it intersects with their roles.

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