

Inquiry into Effective approaches to prevention, diagnosis and support for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Northern Territory submission

The Department of Education seeks to provide a written submission to the Inquiry into Effective Approaches to Prevention, Diagnosis and Support for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), specifically regarding item (g) awareness of FASD in schools, and the effectiveness of systems to identify and support affected students, in the terms of reference. This submission is supplementary to the Northern Territory (NT) Government's existing submission to the enquiry.

The department is committed to supporting children with FASD. The department has made a commitment to a range of priorities and actions under the Northern Territory's FASD strategy, *Addressing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder in the Northern Territory 2018-24* (https://digitallibrary.health.nt.gov.au/prodjsptui/bitstream/10137/7232/1/DOH_FASD_Strategy_Web.pdf)

For school related actions, the department's commitment under the NT Government's FASD strategy includes the following:

- to disseminate information on FASD and the effects it may have on classroom learning to all schools in an effort to raise awareness among teachers, reiterating the referral process to request support and guidance if required
- to deliver annual professional learning to teachers on FASD and its impacts, including effective strategies to support students.

To meet this commitment, the department's education advisors provide support and disseminate information to schools by identifying classroom strategies and adjustments for students with FASD. Professional learning is delivered to teachers to ensure understanding and awareness of FASD, inclusive of support available for students and their families. The department also offers free online training courses to all educators to raise awareness and understanding about FASD.

Additionally, the department has released the *Framework for Inclusion 2019-29*. The framework has a strong focus on building the capability of school staff to understand and respond to the needs of children and their families. The framework will establish professional development programs and resources to cater for students with additional needs. A number of specific disabilities have been identified as a focus of this work, including FASD and conductive hearing loss. The framework is available at <https://education.nt.gov.au/publications/framework-for-inclusion-2019-2029>.

Response to Intervention Model

The department supports children and young people with FASD in schools through service delivery based on the principles of the Response to Intervention (RTI) model. Assessment of student need informs a multi-level tiered service delivery approach to maximise student achievement and to minimise behavioural problems. The approach uses a range of student education data to:

- implement supports for students to achieve learning outcomes
- monitor student progress
- provide evidence based supports
- adjust the intensity and nature of the supports
- identify and support students with disabilities.

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Support for schools ranges from: whole school professional learning; targeted professional learning for teachers of specific cohorts of children; and classroom strategies and assessments for individual children.

At the classroom level, teachers identify learning difficulties and delays in children due to FASD, and provide the necessary support as determined by their ongoing assessment. The process of identifying students with FASD and making referrals to education advisors and other supports, is assisted by the annual collection of information through the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD). This process ensures students with diagnosed or imputed evidence of a disability are identified and provided with reasonable adjustments in the classroom, and are reported in line with the NCCD Guidelines. The evidence of adjustments collected at the school level is used to make a referral for additional support services as required. Schools have access to information and professional learning on the NCCD integrated referral process in order to access support and guidance to enhance classroom adjustments.

Through these measures, there is an increased awareness across school staff to identify and respond to students who are presenting with FASD. The department aligns its support for schools with other NT agencies, such as the Department of Health, to enhance its approach and better support students.

Whole-school approaches to support schools

Schools access professional learning for all staff that is inclusive of topics such as FASD diagnostic criteria, understanding and recognising the effects of FASD and the implementation of evidenced based classroom strategies. The department offers free online training courses for all educators on a range of topics that meet the learning and support needs of children with disability. Specifically, the Introduction to Special Education Needs course includes a module on FASD as one of six disabilities studied. Building teacher capacity to enhance confidence in implementing inclusive pedagogical approaches in learning environments, as well as raising awareness about FASD and the implications for teachers in the classroom, is a focus of the department's inclusion agenda.

Targeted approaches to support schools

The department's education advisors within the Student Wellbeing and Inclusion division, provide targeted professional learning on request for groups of educators addressing specific classroom strategies and programs that can support children and young people with FASD throughout the stages of schooling, ranging from early childhood to senior years.

Individual approaches to support schools

At an individual student level, teachers can refer children of concern to school psychologists to gather diagnostic information for paediatricians and multidisciplinary FASD assessment teams, to assist with the formulation of a diagnosis. The psychologists also provide advice to teachers on the development of goals and strategies in personalised learning plans informed by recommendations in diagnostic reports.

Education advisors also provide intensive classroom support for program planning and strategies to teachers and families to help accommodate children with a diagnosis or traits of FASD. Support with the development of personalised learning plans assists teachers to focus on evidence based strategies to cater for academic, behaviour and wellbeing learning needs. Supporting families and schools to plan at key transition points is also critical to enhance learning outcomes for children and young people as they move through the stages of schooling.