



# Submission in response to the 2021 Review of the Australian Curriculum

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Genuine inclusive education requires that students with disability can access the curriculum, make use of their teachers' pedagogical practices, and demonstrate their learning through assessment, on the same basis as their peers. An accessible curriculum is one that affords flexibility for educators to uphold their obligation to provide reasonable adjustments under the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (DSE; Australian Government [Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations], 2012), enabling students with disability to access education and training opportunities on the same basis as students who do not have a disability. In this submission, researchers from QUT's Centre for Inclusive Education (C4IE) provide evidence-informed consultation on the 2021 Review of the Australian Curriculum.

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## General principles

The standards-based design and three-dimensional structure of the Australian Curriculum offers opportunities for educators to plan inclusively for students with disability (Swancutt et al., 2020). However, teachers must understand the three-dimensional nature and the intent of the standards-based design of the Australian Curriculum to have confidence and the ability to plan equitable learning and assessment experiences for students with disability (Price & Slee, 2021). Without this understanding, teachers can inadvertently create barriers to students with disability accessing the curriculum, if educators unknowingly impose conditions and contexts in teaching/learning and assessment that are not in fact dictated by the curriculum. The emergence of resources (such as work samples, illustrations of practice and examples of personalised planning) to support teachers to embed universal design principles in their teaching and design and implement reasonable adjustments are commended, but there is scope for a broader conceptual shift, to ensure an inclusive curriculum for all students across Australian schools (Price & Slee, 2021). For example, additional examples of curriculum adjustments for students with disability in inclusive, regular schools are warranted, as the current examples are largely based on special school contexts.

The explicit foregrounding of the fundamental concepts of inclusive education is also lacking within the Australian Curriculum (Graham et al., 2020; Price & Slee, 2021). Defining and positioning the Australian Curriculum so that concepts such as the social model of disability, equity and inclusive language are prioritised, well-defined and represented within the design of the Australian Curriculum would provide opportunity for educators to enact universally accessible curriculum, as well as aligned teaching and assessment pedagogies. For example, a Year 4 English content description requires students to use a "range of vocal effects, such as tone, pace, pitch and volume to speak clearly and coherently." Although the curriculum acknowledges diverse ways that students may engage in speaking activities (eg. using communication systems and assistive technology), the articulated demands of this content description are not accessible to all students in all contexts. This is because some communication systems/devices do not allow students to vary the tone, pitch and pace of the voice output, therefore teachers may believe that they cannot assess students on this aspect of achievement and may therefore deny them access to grade-level content. In addition, there is opportunity in the Australian Curriculum to address the above-mentioned fundamental concepts of inclusive education within the content that is taught to all students. In specific, knowledge and understanding of these fundamental concepts can be embedded in the Achievement Standards in learning areas and general capabilities (i.e., Personal and Social Capability) to help students build awareness and deep knowledge of barriers (physical, social, linguistic) for the access, participation and success of their peers with disability in school and in society.



## **F–10 Australian Curriculum: English**

The proposed English revisions in Foundation, Year 1 and Year 2 have maintained the requirement for teachers to utilise decodable and/or predictable texts. Recent Australian research has pointed to the potential confusion teachers can experience about the role of decodable and predictable texts in early reading instruction and the implications for instructional strategies (Pogorzelski et al., 2021).

This is concerning, given that research has shown that for students to master the alphabetic decoding skills required to engage with all curriculum areas, sound-letter correspondences need to be systematically and explicitly taught (Ehri et al., 2001). At the text level, students can practice these skills using decodable but not predictable texts (Castles et al., 2018).

## **General capability: Personal and Social capability**

The proposed revisions in Personal and Social Capability have maintained a focus on skills and behaviors, thereby disregarding the cognitive foundation of personal and social capabilities for all students across the developmental sequences for self and social awareness. These omissions can lead to fragmented personal and social development for students with disability, who require systematic instruction to understand the cognitive basis of behaviors (Lecheler et al., 2020). Research has shown that all students can achieve learning gains in their personal and social awareness, when they are taught, through direct instruction or guided conversations, that cognitive states (that is, thoughts, beliefs, intentions, knowledge) lead to actions (Lecce, 2021).



What is proposed	Response
Personal and Social capability (PSC)	<p>The current name does not capture the essential cognitive component of the personal and social capabilities students are expected to develop across the learning continuum. The use of the word “capability” in the current name describes the behaviours or skills students are expected to learn and overlooks the knowledge and understanding as the cognitive prerequisites for developing personal and social capabilities.</p> <p>To accurately represent the knowledge, understanding and skills students are expected to achieve in PSC and to guide responsive teaching for all students, the proposal is for the name to be changed to “Personal and Social <u>Understanding</u> and Capability” (PSUC).</p>
Description of the importance of PSC	<p>The description can be enriched with explicit connections with the social model of disability and the impact of PSC.</p> <p>A description of how peers’ personal and social attitudes and behaviors can create or remove barriers for students with disabilities in social and learning environments will help teachers understand the importance of teaching PSC for achieving genuine inclusive education.</p>
Self-awareness and sub-elements	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “Personal awareness: Foundation (Levels 1a &amp; 1b): students should be expected to identify their <u>difficulties</u> too as part of a holistic awareness of their personal qualities and as a stepping stone for the development of meta-cognition and self-regulation.</li> <li>2. “Personal cognition”: to be added as a new sub-element with a learning continuum as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Level 1a: Students show awareness of their thoughts, desires, intentions and knowledge.</li> <li>Level 1b: Students describe their desires, thoughts, intentions and knowledge.</li> <li>Level 2 (Yrs 1-2): Students describe the desires (wants), thoughts, intentions and knowledge of themselves and others in familiar social and learning contexts.</li> <li>Level 3 (Years 3-4): Students explain how their thoughts, desires, intentions and knowledge influence the actions of others in a range of learning and social contexts.</li> <li>Level 4 (Years 5-6): Students analyse how different factors and situations influence their thoughts, desires, intentions and knowledge in a range of contexts..</li> <li>Level 5 (Years 7-8): Students evaluate how their thoughts, desires, intentions and knowledge influence behaviors in a range of contexts in order to select strategies for managing their thoughts (negative thinking/mindset), desires and intentions.</li> <li>Level 6 (Years 9-10): Students reflect on their thoughts, intentions, desires, and knowledge in relation to situations in a range of contexts to formulate appropriate strategies for managing their thoughts, their intentions and desires.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
Social awareness	<p>This element can be extended to include <b>social cognition (or understanding)</b> as a sub-element with the following learning continuum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Levels 1a &amp; 1b (Foundation): Students show awareness of the thoughts, desires, intentions and knowledge of others.</li> <li>Level 2 (Years 1-2): Students describe similarities and differences between their own and others’ thoughts, desires, intentions and knowledge.</li> <li>Level 3 (Years 3-4): Students compare others’ thoughts, desires, intentions and knowledge with their own, based on different values, cultures, backgrounds.</li> <li>Level 4 (Years 5-6): Students explain how the ability to appreciate others’ thoughts, desires, intentions and knowledge assists in the development of social understanding and social interaction.</li> <li>Level 5 (Years 7-8): Students analyse their own and others’ thoughts, desires, intentions and knowledge to develop social understanding.</li> <li>Level 6 (Years 9-10): Students evaluate their responses to others’ thoughts, desires, intentions and knowledge and acknowledge the influence of social understanding on establishing and maintaining social interaction.</li> </ul>
Communication	<p>Level 3 (Years 3-4): Revise as follows: apply verbal and non-verbal communication skills (including <b>assistive</b> communication) when responding in a range of contexts.</p>



## Recommendations

1. Provision of extended clarity to teachers through curriculum support materials to enable teachers to understand both the three-dimensional structure of the Australian Curriculum *and* the intent of standards-based curriculum design. This will reduce the potential of students experiencing barriers through inadvertent curricular barriers, where conditions and contexts are imposed in teaching/learning and assessment that are not in fact dictated by the curriculum.
2. Removing reference to “and/or predictable texts” from the Foundation, Year 1 and Year 2 English curriculum. This will enable clear and consistent guidance to teachers of students in Foundation, Year 1 and Year 2 about the need to utilise decodable texts in early reading instruction, to support the implementation of systematic early reading instruction.
3. Incorporation of cognitive abilities (such as understanding) in the name of Personal and Social Capability. This will enable teachers to teach social understanding alongside personal and social capabilities to all students (Peterson & Wellman, 2019), including students with disabilities who can acquire capabilities in this area without attaining genuine personal and social understanding. Students with disability can learn behaviours or demonstrate skills aligned with the achievement standards in PSC but their knowledge and understanding of PSC can remain limited or reversely, they may acquire social knowledge but may not enact social behaviors. Systematic instruction in both social knowledge and social capabilities is required to help achieve genuine social and cognitive learning outcomes.
4. Specific reference to the significance of developing students’ PSC for the removal of barriers for students with disabilities in schools and in society. This will contribute to raising teachers’ understanding of their role in fostering students’ positive attitudes and nurturing respectful behaviors as facilitators for the social inclusion of all students (Woodgate et al, 2019).
5. Integration of personal and social cognition as sub-elements in self- and social awareness respectively. Their role as critical precursors of vocabulary development (Ebert, 2020), reading comprehension (Dore et al, 2018) and peer relationships in early/middle childhood and early adolescence (Slaughter et al, 2015) has been well established.

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Members of The Centre for Inclusive Education (C4IE) at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) conduct high-quality research across four interlocking programs: (i) Engagement and Learning, (ii) Inclusion and Exclusion, (iii) Indigenous Education Research, and (iv) Voice and Wellbeing.

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