

Diversity of learners

How does the Australian Curriculum recognise the diversity of learners?

The Australian Curriculum promotes excellence and equity in education.

The Australian Curriculum is based on the assumptions that each student can learn and the needs of every student are important. It enables high expectations to be set for each student as teachers account for the current levels of learning of individual students and the different rates at which students develop.

Students in Australian classrooms have multiple, diverse, and changing needs that are shaped by individual learning histories and abilities as well as cultural, language backgrounds and socio-economic factors.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is working with state and territory education authorities to support the implementation of the Australian Curriculum and will produce advice about using the curriculum to address the diversity of student learning.

Students with English as an additional language or dialect

Many students in Australian schools are learners of English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D). Learners of EAL/D are students whose first language is a language other than Standard Australian English and who require additional support to assist them to develop English language proficiency. While many EAL/D learners do well in school, there is a significant number of these learners who leave school without achieving their potential.

EAL/D students come from diverse backgrounds and may include:

- overseas- and Australian-born children whose first language is a language other than English
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students whose first language is an Indigenous language, including traditional languages, creoles and related varieties, or Aboriginal English.

EAL/D learners enter Australian schools at different ages and at different stages of English language learning and have various educational backgrounds in their first languages. For some, school is the only place they use English.

The aims of the Australian Curriculum are ultimately the same for all students. However, EAL/D learners are simultaneously learning a new language and the knowledge, understanding and skills of the curriculum through that new language. They require additional time and support, along with informed teaching that explicitly addresses their language needs, and assessments that take into account their developing language proficiency.

Schools and state and territory education authorities already have in place policy and strategies to support teachers to ensure these students reach their full potential.

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In addition, a national EAL/D document is being produced that will support the Australian Curriculum. It will provide a description of how language proficiency develops, and will be a valuable reference for all teachers. It will allow teachers to identify the language levels of the EAL/D learners in their classrooms and to address their specific learning requirements when teaching, ensuring equity of access to the English learning area for all.

Special education needs

The objectives of the Australian Curriculum are the same for all students. The curriculum offers flexibility for teachers to tailor their teaching in ways that provide rigorous, relevant and engaging learning and assessment activities for students with special education needs.

Most students with special education needs can engage with the curriculum provided the necessary adjustments are made to the learning activities and the way they are organised and presented; to the learning environment; and/or to the assessment strategies and the ways in which students are expected to demonstrate their learning.

For some students, making adjustments to instructional processes and to assessment strategies enables them to achieve and demonstrate educational standards commensurate with their peers.

When teachers plan for students' learning using content descriptions from a year level different to that of their peers, it also follows that assessment should be made against the relevant achievement standard.

For a small percentage of students, particularly those with a significant intellectual disability, the Foundation to Year 10 curriculum content and achievement standards may not be appropriate or meaningful, even with adjustments. During 2011 ACARA will develop curriculum content and achievement standards for this group of students in order to provide an Australian Curriculum that is inclusive of every learner.

Further advice about using the curriculum with students with special education needs is available at <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Curriculum/Special-education-needs>