



# Differentiation, disability, and diversity

All students in the classroom will possess different strengths and experience different challenges. In Australia, teachers are required to teach students at their individual level of need.

## Differentiation

Differentiation is the process of tailoring instruction to meet individual student needs. Teachers in Australia are required to use evidence-based strategies for differentiating teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities. This includes students classified as gifted and talented, and those working below the standard expected at their year level. Effective differentiation takes place when teachers adjust aspects of content, process and product in direct response to a student's readiness, interests and learning profile. Teachers may also modify the learning environment in direct response to a student's learning profile.

Teachers must demonstrate knowledge and understanding of physical, social, and intellectual development alongside the individual characteristics of students to understand how learning may be affected. No matter where a student's achievements are in the range of capabilities within the classroom, teachers are required to set learning goals that provide achievable challenges.



## Multi-tiered system of support

The multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework is an expansion on the response to intervention model and supports educators in implementing evidence-based instructional practices across all learning environments and identifying students requiring more targeted supports, while monitoring the impact of instruction and intervention.

The Australian Education Research Organisation provides more information about MTSS [here](#).



## Disability

For students with disability to participate and thrive in their learning environment, it is essential that they feel safe and that their education setting is inclusive and welcoming. Inclusive learning values prioritise respect, empathy, openness, curiosity, trust, fairness, and accountability. Alongside teaching strategies to support participation, Australian teachers must have knowledge of the legislative requirements surrounding students with disability and utilise strategies to support the full participation of students with disability.

The Australian [Disability Standards for Education](#) clarify the obligations of education and training providers under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. The Disability Standards for Education require that all Australian schools ensure that students with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as students without disabilities. Schools and teachers are required to make or provide '[reasonable adjustments](#)' for students where necessary to enable their access and participation. Furthermore, schools must provide reasonable adjustments in consultation with the student and/or their parents, carers and associates; for most students, this means their parents, guardians, or carers.



### The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability

The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) is an annual collection of information about Australian school students with disability. The NCCD enables schools, education authorities and governments to better understand the needs of students with disability and how they can be best supported at school.

To access the extensive collection of resources, tools and professional learning provided by the NCCD click on the link [here](#).

## Reflection questions

Use these reflection questions as a checklist to ensure you know everything about meeting the range of abilities and rich diversity of students within Australian classrooms:

- What are your go-to strategies for differentiating each lesson to meet your students' abilities? How do you challenge students or assist students who need something extra?
- What is your school's approach to documenting student adjustments and individual learning plans?
- Who is available to support you with meeting the needs of all students in your classroom?
- Are you aware of all the language backgrounds and cultures within your classroom?
- How do you form meaningful relationships with students and their families in order to provide consultation and collaboration within adjustments?

## Diversity

Australia is a diverse and multicultural country; therefore, there are students with different learning strengths and needs which arise from the range of linguistic, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. It is common for students who are recent arrivals to Australia to have limited English language or have never experienced Australian schooling. Furthermore, there may be planned activities and lessons that not all students can attend for financial or religious reasons, such as sports days or excursions. As a teacher in Australia, you will need to identify strategies to support inclusive student participation and engagement in all activities, regardless of students' diverse characteristics and set learning goals that provide achievable challenges.



In addition, a broad knowledge and understanding of the culture, cultural identity, and linguistic background of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are needed by Australian teachers regardless of their school or setting. It is important that teachers in Australia support inclusive participation in all elements of the culture and history where appropriate and respect the local language or [Aboriginal English](#) which may be spoken by your students.



## Resources

For further information take the time to review these online teaching and learning resources that incorporate cultural and linguistic diversity in the Australia curriculum located [here](#).

The Australian Department of Education's Student Wellbeing Hub has a free guide for teachers and educators that provides tips and strategies for working with parents and families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds located [here](#).

## Reflection questions

Use this as a checklist to ensure you understand the rich diversity of students within Australian classrooms and how to meet their needs:

- What is your knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and languages?
- How do culture, cultural identity, and linguistic background influence students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds?
- How can you show respect within your classroom and in your words for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, regardless of whether you have students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds in your classroom?
- Who is available to support you with meeting the needs of all students in your classroom?
- What do I know about the history of the area where I work?
- Who are the Traditional Owners of the land where I work?
- Are there existing relationships between the school and local Elders or community groups? How might I forge these relationships?
- What are the cultural identity and linguistic backgrounds of my students?
- How can I learn more about and recognise what my students already know?
- Are there cultural differences that influence the way my students act or relate to others?