

Leadership matrix for senior and middle leaders

Effectively implementing the Disability Standards
for Education 2005



Leadership matrix for senior and middle leaders

School leaders play a vital role in meeting responsibilities and obligations within the [Disability Standards for Education \(DSE\) 2005](#) that cater for diverse educational needs of students with disability. The DSE promotes recognition and acceptance that students with disability must have equal opportunities to access and participate in education on the same basis as students without disability.

The DSE covers the areas of:

- enrolment
- participation
- curriculum development
- accreditation and delivery
- student support services and;
- the eradication of harassment, victimisation and discrimination.

How to use the DSE leadership matrix

The DSE leadership matrix references the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* (Principal Standard) and the five Professional Practices to support school leaders understand their responsibilities in facilitating inclusive practices for students with disability.

To assist with implementation, this resource separates school leaders into 'senior leaders' (e.g., principal, deputy principal or those who oversee whole-school improvement strategies) and 'middle leaders' (e.g., faculty coordinator, program leader) who may often balance both teaching and leadership roles. For schools with a small number of students, a leader or small number of leaders may be required to balance all the responsibilities as outlined in this matrix.

For further guidance on responsibilities at different levels and capacity of leadership within schools, refer to the [Principal Standard elaborations: Effectively Implementing the Disability Standards for Education 2005](#) resource.

Leading teaching and learning

Inclusive leadership practices aligned with the Principal Standard and the DSE	Examples of highly effective inclusive leadership responsibilities	
	Senior leaders	Middle leaders
<p>Senior school leaders establish and promote a positive culture that is inclusive of all in the school community, through modelling inclusive behaviours, and setting high expectations of all staff to be inclusive of students with disability.</p> <p>They consistently collaborate with teaching staff to reflect on the school's approach to curriculum design and pedagogy, ensuring high quality and inclusive teaching practices, so students with disability have the same opportunities to learn as students without disability.</p> <p>Senior school leaders ensure thorough consideration is given to the needs of students with disability with respect to the school's planning, facilities, extra-curricular activities, at-home learning and support services. They ensure that teachers establish regular discussions with the student, their guardian/s and associates¹, and service provider/s (where relevant) to determine a range of reasonable adjustments to assist in the student's education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster a school community that is inclusive and supportive of students with disability through modelling positive interactions with all staff and students in the school and wider community. • Regularly review the school's teaching and learning strategy to incorporate differentiated, personalised pedagogy that support equitable education in all aspects of the curriculum. • Partner with students, their guardian/s and associates to assess the accessibility and flexibility of the school's learning programs and onsite facilities, to identify opportunities for a variety of reasonable adjustments to be made. • Engage in consultation with students with disability, their guardian/s and associates, and service provider/s (where relevant) to determine a range of reasonable adjustments and implement them where relevant throughout the school. • Ensure that across the school, where a program must include an activity in which a student with disability cannot participate, the student is offered a substitute activity within appropriate timeframes and access to curriculum entitlements in line with the learning areas of students without disability (this includes both learning activities and extra-curricular activities). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model positive and inclusive interactions with all staff, students and the wider school community. • Provide leadership and support for all (or faculty/program) teaching staff to ensure that curriculum design and pedagogical approaches support equitable educational practices. • Provide leadership and support for all (or faculty/program) teaching staff to engage in student (and/or guardian/s and associates) consultation when or if required. • Support teachers to incorporate reasonable adjustments in their lesson planning, teaching instruction and pedagogical approach (as required) to accommodate the needs of students with disability by providing feedback and expert advice.

¹ An associate of the student includes a relative; carer; spouse; another person who is living with the person on a genuine domestic basis; and another person who is in a business, sporting, or recreational relationship with the person (DSE 1.4).

Inclusive leadership practices aligned with the Principal Standard and the DSE	Examples of highly effective inclusive leadership responsibilities	
	Senior leaders	Middle leaders
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange for service provider/s to be provided to students with disability where required (either by the school or through another agency) to ensure access and participation to learning. • Provide leadership coaching to middle leaders to help facilitate the implementation of reasonable adjustments and lead the uptake of equitable education practices within their faculty/program/area of leadership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with service provider/s (where provided) to maintain an understanding about the support needs of students with disability and facilitate collaboration with teachers and specialist support, ensuring access and participation to learning. • Support whole-school improvement plans that focus on inclusion so that all staff are aware of their responsibilities and the key structures and processes in the school to support this.

Developing self and others

Inclusive leadership practices aligned with the Principal Standard and the DSE	Examples of highly effective inclusive leadership responsibilities	
	Senior leaders	Middle leaders
<p>Senior school leaders model fair, equitable and respectful treatment of all in the schooling community, leading by example to follow ethical values and behaviours.</p> <p>Senior school leaders seek coaching and professional learning opportunities for themselves and all staff to build their knowledge about inclusive practices and the skills required to implement them. They build the capacity of all staff in understanding how to best support the diverse needs of students with disability from a whole-school perspective (including specialist services) as well as implementing strategies that effectively respond to harassment, victimisation and discrimination.</p> <p>Teachers are regularly encouraged by senior school leaders to collaborate with colleagues in evaluating their practice and engage in learning opportunities that help them to provide individualised teaching and learning and assist in the implementation of reasonable adjustments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role model ethical values and inclusive leadership to support all staff, students, guardian/s and associates, and the broader community to create an inclusive school culture. • Seek professional learning related to the DSE and inclusive school management or improvement practices. • Ensure inclusive practice strategies are embedded amongst internal professional learning within the school. • Make available professional learning opportunities to all teaching staff to enhance their practice and pedagogy that will support students with disability and implement a range of reasonable adjustments. • Make available professional learning opportunities to all staff to enhance their understanding and ability to address any grievances relating to harassment, victimisation and discrimination of students with disability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role model ethical values and inclusive leadership to support all teaching staff, support staff, students, guardian/s and associates, and the broader community to create an inclusive school culture. Seek out professional learning related to equitable education practices and inclusive leadership to develop expertise. • Maintain an understanding of all legislative responsibilities, and school-level policies, procedures and codes of conduct, related to inclusive education; ensuring teaching staff remain aware of their ongoing responsibilities. • Lead the implementation of the school's bullying and discrimination policy, and support staff to address grievances related to bullying; for example, through professional learning and one-on-one coaching. • Provide coaching and feedback to teaching and support staff to enhance their curriculum design and pedagogical approaches to support students with disability. • Empower teaching and support staff to evaluate their practice and take up professional learning to improve inclusive teaching and learning as well as implementing a variety of reasonable adjustment strategies.

Inclusive leadership practices aligned with the Principal Standard and the DSE	Examples of highly effective inclusive leadership responsibilities	
	Senior leaders	Middle leaders
<p>Senior school leaders ensure that all staff are informed of their obligations as outlined in the policies, procedures and codes of conduct related to inclusive education. Senior school leaders implement inclusive strategies that effectively respond to harassment, victimisation, and discrimination for all learners.</p> <p>Senior school leaders empower teachers to collaborate with colleagues to evaluate and reflect on practice and seek opportunities to improve equitable educational experiences within their classroom.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all staff understand their responsibilities as outlined in the policies, procedures and codes of conduct related to inclusive education, e.g., that consultations must take place before any reasonable adjustments are implemented for a particular student. • Provide leadership coaching and feedback to middle leaders to assist in the development of inclusive, equitable leadership capabilities and behaviours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the induction of new staff to understand the school's vision and commitment to inclusivity, and how this is implemented from a whole-school perspective. • Support and provide guidance in how best to manage issues around harassment and victimisation for all staff.

Leading improvement, innovation and change

Inclusive leadership practices aligned with the Principal Standard and the DSE	Examples of highly effective inclusive leadership responsibilities	
	Senior leaders	Middle leaders
<p>Senior school leaders work with all staff, guardian/s and associates, and service provider/s to develop and implement plans to enhance the inclusion of all students. This can form part of whole-school improvement planning, including the modification and maintenance of school facilities.</p> <p>Senior school leaders regularly collaborate with their leadership team, all staff and service provider/s to innovate better ways of providing a positive and equitable school experience for all students.</p> <p>Senior school leaders keep themselves and all staff accountable to any improvement efforts. They establish clear communication channels to gather feedback from all in their school community. They leverage school boards, governing bodies, parent/carer groups and student representative councils to regularly incorporate their perspectives and considerations for more inclusive school experiences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure there is an equity focus when undertaking whole-school improvement planning. • Commit to constant reflection and evaluation to identify any modifications to whole-school improvement planning to ensure equity for all students. • Facilitate regular forums with all staff to reflect and share ideas on school innovation and improvement – with a focus on equity. • Leverage local colleagues, networks and supporting practitioners (e.g. psychologists, speech therapists) to share insights and contribute to whole-school improvement. • Liaise with families and associates and the wider community to seek feedback on inclusivity efforts at a whole-school level. • Facilitate communication channels, making them available and accessible for students, guardian/s and associates to share their ideas to be incorporated into whole-school improvement. • Leverage student representative councils and parent/carer groups to contribute to school equity innovation. • Have clear success criteria to determine, and keep accountable, to any equity efforts; empower middle leaders and teaching staff to contribute to the measurement of efforts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek the perspectives, experiences and ideas of students to inform whole-school improvement planning and innovation. • Facilitate regular forums with teaching staff to collaborate and share ideas on teaching and classroom innovation – with a focus on equity and improvement. • Liaise with guardian/s and associates, and the wider community to seek feedback on the school's inclusivity efforts, in particular areas of the middle leader's responsibilities (e.g., department/program). • Empower teaching and support staff to regularly contribute ideas for whole-school improvement, to both middle and senior leaders. • Work with teaching staff and senior leaders to measure and keep accountable to inclusivity efforts. Middle leaders work with students in reflecting on inclusive strategies and their experiences relevant to the classroom or learning area which could inform whole-school improvement objectives.

Leading the management of the school

Inclusive leadership practices aligned with the Principal Standard and the DSE	Examples of highly effective inclusive leadership responsibilities	
	Senior leaders	Middle leaders
<p>Senior school leaders contribute to implementing legislative and system-wide requirements to support the safety and wellbeing of all students. They inform all staff, students, guardian/s and associates of their obligations to support the inclusion of students with disability under the DSE. They work consultatively with other senior school leaders and staff to set up clear monitoring processes to ensure requirements are met.</p> <p>Senior school leaders and their teaching staff use student data to determine school improvements. They empower all staff to take responsibility and creativity in all aspects of the school's commitment to equitability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take responsibility for legislative and system-wide requirements to support the safety and wellbeing of all students. • Develop school policies, procedures and codes of conduct aligned to a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and discrimination; in-line with the DDA. • Develop and implement reporting mechanisms to provide prompt action and support to students (and their guardian/s and associates) experiencing discrimination due to disability; in-line with the DDA. • Have evidence-based intervention policies in place to support students with disability and ensure they are able to progress in their learning. • Initiate and take the lead in seeking feedback from guardian/s and associates of students with disability, and relevant school governance groups, on the school's approach to supporting the inclusion of all students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure up-to-date knowledge of all legislation, codes of conduct and policies relating to students with disability. • Lead the implementation of the school's mechanisms to provide prompt action and support to students (and their guardian/s and associates) experiencing discrimination due to disability; in-line with the DDA. • Work with teaching staff to research and determine school approaches to supporting wellbeing of students with disability, and their guardian/s and associates. • Ensure staff are given high-quality professional learning and access to resources in relation to legislation, codes of conduct and policies connected to students with disability. • Regularly review school policies to support the engagement of students with disability and ensure legislative compliance and adherence to system policies. • Engage in consultation with students with disability, their guardian/s and associates, and service provider/s (where relevant) to ensure they are feeling supported and included within the school, and that reasonable adjustments are re-evaluated for ongoing educational support.

Inclusive leadership practices aligned with the Principal Standard and the DSE	Examples of highly effective inclusive leadership responsibilities	
	Senior leaders	Middle leaders
<p>Senior school leaders ensure mechanisms are accessible and available to report grievances, and appropriate action is taken to respond to bullying and discrimination of students with disability, in-line with the <i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)</i> (DDA²). Senior school leaders will provide communication and support to victimised students and their guardian/s and associates.</p> <p>Senior school leaders work with their school boards, governing bodies, parent/carer groups and student representative councils to regularly incorporate their perspectives, experiences and suggestions for more inclusive school operations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve any required service provider/s or supports through the school to assist students with disability; where reasonable and available, in accordance with the DSE. • Ensure consultation protocols and reporting procedures are in place to regularly seek feedback from students with disability and their guardian/s and associates to ensure that the school is offering suitable support and reasonable adjustments. Provide access, where possible, to suitably trained support services (e.g., careers advice, academic learning support, pastoral care) for all students. • Regularly review the school's bullying and discrimination policy and seek to make improvements where possible. • Mentor middle leaders to work with teachers to determine school equity improvement. • Find opportunities to share leadership responsibilities with middle leaders in implementing any code-of-conduct and legislation relating to students with disability. • Collaborate with middle leaders to determine improvement areas in the school's approach to equity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all staff are aware of the evidence-based intervention policies in place to support students with disability and ensure they can progress in their learning; seek professional learning opportunities if available and required. • Inform students regularly about their rights and responsibilities in maintaining a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and discrimination. • Work with senior leaders to develop, implement and reflect on whole-school improvement planning. • Find opportunities to share leadership responsibilities with teachers in implementing any code-of-conduct and legislation relating to students with disability.

² The Standards provide further detail on the obligations of education and training providers, and the rights of people with disability, under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA). The Standards are subordinate legislation made under the DDA.

Engaging and working with the community

Inclusive leadership practices aligned with the Principal Standard and the DSE	Examples of highly effective inclusive leadership responsibilities	
	Senior leaders	Middle leaders
<p>Senior school leaders, together with all staff consistently promote an inclusive school culture that connects to the wider school community. All staff do so by recognising and celebrating the diversity of the school's students, exhibiting exemplary behaviour and building positive relationships with all students, and their guardian/s and associates.</p> <p>Senior school leaders are responsible for implementing the school's admissions and enrolment procedures with a focus on ensuring equitable opportunities for all students to participate in the school. During transition into the school, senior school leaders work with all staff to ensure students with disability feel welcomed, understood, valued and safe.</p> <p>They work closely with the student's guardian/s, associates, and service providers in maintaining consistent communication, consultation and support to provide a positive learning journey for the student.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take responsibility for promoting a culture of inclusion within the school community by modelling exemplary ethical behaviour. • Develop and maintain positive relationships with students with disability and their guardian/s and associates. • Recognise and support the diverse needs of students with disability and build relationships with their guardian/s and associates, including during and beyond consultation discussions. • Ensure that information is provided to both prospective and current students, and their guardian/s and associates about the school's commitment and policies to support the inclusion of students with disability. • Develop and implement admissions and enrolment procedures that ensure students with disability have the same opportunity to apply and be selected to attend the school as a prospective student without a disability. • Have procedures/approaches in place to give newly enrolled students with disability, and their guardian/s and associates, opportunities to form relationships with their teachers, support services and students prior to attending their first day of school. • Ensure the school community is informed of their obligation to support the inclusion of all students, with no tolerance of bullying, harassment or discrimination. • Lead and promote opportunities to educate, celebrate or advocate diversity within the school and wider community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote a culture of inclusion within the school community, by modelling and leading exemplary ethical behaviour. • Work with teachers to help in the transition of newly enrolled students with disability and welcome their guardian/s and associates. • Equip teachers with resources to educate students to understand the need to support the inclusion of all students and prevent bullying and discrimination. • Aid teachers in keeping open communication and engagement with students with disability and their guardian/s and associates. • Look for opportunities to educate, celebrate or showcase diversity advocacy with teachers in the classroom and local community.

References

- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. 2018. *The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*. AITSL. Melbourne, Australia.

Accompanying DSE resources

- [A school leader's guide for inclusive practices within schools: Effectively implementing the Disability Standards for Education 2005](#)
- [Principal Standard elaborations: Effectively implementing the Disability Standards for Education 2005](#)

AITSL resources

- [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#)
- [Australian Professional Standard for Principals](#)
- [The Leadership Profiles](#)
- [AITSL Spotlight – Inclusive education: teaching students with disability](#)

Where can I find out more?

- [Disability Standards for Education 2005 \(legislation.gov.au\)](#)
- [The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 \(Cth\) \(DDA\)](#)
- [Disability Standards for Education Fact Sheet](#)
- [Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005](#)
- [The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability: 2023 Guidelines](#)
- [NCCD Disability Standards for Education resources](#)

The logo for the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) features the lowercase letters 'aitsl' in a sans-serif font. The letters are colored with a gradient, transitioning from a light green at the top to a darker green at the bottom.

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AITSL is funded by the Australian Government