

Build educator knowledge and shared responsibility for supporting neurodivergent learners across all areas of student life

Neurodivergent students whose ability is on par with peers can meet the curriculum — the barrier is too often the way learning and support are delivered. Everyone should be equipped as part of a whole-school responsibility, with teachers and principals the most critical.



Evidence brief for members of parliament



July 2026 · sources verified

WHAT WE'RE ASKING FOR

- ✓ Embed neurodivergence and inclusive practice — including Universal Design for Learning, appropriate accommodations for neurodivergent learners and trauma-informed practice — in pre-service teacher training. Some universities are already doing this, but not consistently.
- ✓ Upskill the current teaching workforce through robust, sustained professional development in all of the above — not one-off training that is merely “made available”.
- ✓ Students interact with the whole school campus and community — they do not leave their neurodivergent brains at the classroom door. Make supporting neurodivergent learners a whole-school, shared responsibility — not a specialist add-on, with ultimate accountability sitting with leadership teams.

■ Why it matters

Helen's Way advocates for neurodivergent learners in mainstream education settings across Australia whose intellectual ability is on par with their peers. These students can meet the curriculum — what holds them back is the way learning and support are delivered. Successive national reviews have found that teacher knowledge and whole-school capability are the missing link.

■ The evidence — who has already called for this

This reform is not a fringe idea. It is documented in government inquiries, audits and royal-commission findings, and championed by peak advocacy bodies. Every quote below links to its original source so you can read it in context.

CTH REVIEW · 2020

"Strengthening the knowledge and capability of educators and providers."

2020 Review of the Disability Standards for Education, Australian Government Department of Education — one of the review's four reform directions.

[Read the review →](#)

INCLUSIVE-ED COALITION · ACIE

"All pre-service teacher training includes universal design for learning and how to differentiate curriculum for students with disability, and there is upskilling of the current teaching workforce."

Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE), *Driving Change* roadmap.

[See the roadmap →](#)

PEAK BODY · CYDA

"Inclusion as a core part of teacher training; professional development for teachers to adapt the curriculum for diverse learners."

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), "Demand Action on Inclusive Education". [See the campaign →](#)

NATIONAL DATA · CYDA 2026

"Only around one in three families (35%) believe teachers and support staff have adequate training to support their child — and just 27% of students with disability feel supported to learn."

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), *Snapshot of children and young people with disability in Australia* (March 2026), drawing on CYDA's national education surveys. Teacher capability is the gap families feel most directly.

[Read the report →](#)

PARENT SURVEY · PAAA 2018

"Parents overwhelmingly (95%) thought teachers and key staff needed professional development and training to better understand and support students with ADHD."

Parents for ADHD Advocacy Australia, *Parent & carer experiences of ADHD in Australian schools: Critical gaps* — a survey of 1,184 parents, endorsed by ADHD Australia. Only 42% of parents thought classroom teachers had good or excellent knowledge of ADHD support strategies. [Read the report →](#)

NSW CHILDREN'S ADVOCATE · ACYP 2024

"Teachers never really understood me, so they ignored me."

A young person, quoted in the ACYP submission, Advocate for Children and Young People (NSW), 2024. In ACYP's consultations, children and young people "strongly supported the introduction of disability awareness training for staff and students"; ACYP recommends increasing disability-awareness education for students, teachers and support staff (p.14). [Read the submission →](#)

EVIDENCE BASE · AUTISM CRC

National Guidance for Best Practice in Inclusive Education for Autistic Students (2026), Autism CRC with the Centre for Inclusive Education (QUT) — practical, evidence-based direction for teacher practice. [See the guidance →](#)

NATIONAL EVIDENCE BODY · AERO 2026

"For Autistic students, the strongest signal of effectiveness is for explicit teaching, with positive effects reported in literacy, numeracy and science."

Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO), *Teaching practices to support Autistic students and students with ADHD* (2026). AERO — Australia's national education evidence body — also found the classroom evidence base is thin: only 3 of the included studies were conducted in Australian classrooms, and cohort-specific evidence for ADHD is very limited (just 6 of the 53 studies included students with ADHD), underlining the need to build teacher capability in evidence-based, neurodiversity-affirming practice. [Read the paper →](#)

NATIONAL EVIDENCE BODY · AERO 2025

Evidence-informed implementation in schools (**AERO, 2025**) — building teacher capability is necessary but not sufficient: schools need a deliberate, structured way to embed evidence-based practice and keep improving. This is exactly why our ask pairs training and PD with whole-school continuous-improvement reporting.

[Read the paper →](#)

NATIONAL EVIDENCE BODY · AERO 2025

"Light-touch, scalable professional learning interventions do not meaningfully enhance teaching practice, either on their own, or after a period of professional learning ... there are no demonstrated shortcuts ... schools and systems should ... [focus] on leveraging the effective mechanisms of professional learning through quality interventions that are sustained in duration."

Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO), *Sustaining professional learning outcomes: Evaluating the effectiveness of 'booster' interventions* (2025), a randomised trial. This is why our ask specifies **robust, sustained** professional development: policy that commits only to "making PD available" will not change classroom practice. The NSW Department of Education's own *Interim Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2026–2029* shows the gap — its teacher-capability action (2.2) commits only to "promote uptake of professional learning on disability, neurodiversity and inclusive education," with the timeframe listed as "TBC." [Read the report →](#)

At a glance — who has already called for this reform

Each ● marks a report, inquiry or body that has called for this reform. The full grid for all four priorities is on the Helen's Way Reform Agenda page.

GOVERNMENT REPORTS & INQUIRIES

● NSW Report 37
(2017)

● NSW Report 52
(2024)

● Auditor-General — Supporting Students
(2024)

● DSE Review
(2020)

● Disability Royal Commission
(2023)

PEAK & ADVOCACY BODIES

● ACIE

● All Means
All

● CYDA

● Family
Advocacy

● Square Peg Round
Whole

● Reframing
Autism

● Aspect

● ADHD
Australia

● AUSPELD

● Code
REaD

● Speech Pathology
Australia

● AASE

● AADPA

● LDA

● Autism
CRC

● Centre for Inclusive Education
(QUT)

● OTARC

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Support embedding neurodivergence, Universal Design for Learning, trauma-informed practice and appropriate accommodations for neurodivergent learners in initial teacher education.

Back robust, sustained professional development to upskill the current workforce — policy that only makes PD “available” will not change practice (AERO, 2025).

Champion whole-school, shared responsibility for inclusive practice in your jurisdiction.

This reform helps both students and teachers: better teacher capability lifts teacher confidence and efficacy, as well as outcomes across the whole classroom, not only for neurodivergent learners.

See the full picture on our [Reform Agenda](#) and [Resources](#) pages.
