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Autism Victoria Professional Advisory Panel

Position Statement on:

Preparing teachers to teach students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Students with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have the right to an education that is appropriate to their needs according to the Disability Standards for Education. Given that the prevalence of ASDs is at least 1:160 it is likely that every school of 200 students will have a minimum of one student with an ASD.

ASD is a complex developmental disorder that seriously affects social functioning, communication and behaviour. Areas involved include the ability to use and understand spoken language, body and facial language, and the ability to 'read' social situations. Behaviours may include unusual sensory responses, repetitive behaviours and inappropriate behaviour in every day events. Thus learning is also affected. The results of such symptoms in a classroom can cause great stress for the student with an ASD, teachers and classmates.

For the child with ASD a multidisciplinary, collaborative approach is needed to develop a comprehensive program and specialised instructional techniques are required to effectively teach students with ASD.¹ Training for general educators in both autism and collaborative consultation should be continuous and can be provided in group and individual formats depending on circumstances.

Autism Victoria, the peak body representing individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder, recommends that all pre-service teacher education programs deliver core units to ensure that graduate teachers are prepared to teach students with ASD. In addition, practising teachers should have access to a range of accredited professional development opportunities to further develop their capacity to effectively meet the educational needs of students with ASD. In Victoria, Western Autistic School has established a Registered Training Organisation, the Autism Teaching Institute (ATI) that delivers accredited vocational training for practising teachers in teaching students with an ASD.

Parent-teacher collaboration is also recommended in order that the best programs are developed for the child with ASD, that progress can be better monitored and that parents can extend what is being learned at school into the home environment. The latter is particularly important given the known difficulty that children with ASD have in generalising their learning to new environments and situations.

References:

1. Koegel RL, Koegel L.K. (1995) Teaching Children with Autism - Strategies for Initiating Positive Interactions and Improving Learning Outcomes.