Designing reasonable adjustments to support school inclusion
for children with a disability

Evidence Review Summary

Peer Supports

Who they are	The research literature has focused on the roles of children without disability in mainstream schools who are in the same classrooms as children with disability.
How peers respond to students with disability	Younger children (primary school) especially have been found to be positive about students with disability in their classes (1-3), and to be ready to assist them (1). There is evidence that having students with a disability included in their class does not result in negative academic or social impacts on children without disability (3, 4). There is evidence, however, of children with disability being bullied or socially isolated in mainstream classes (5, 6). Peers may react negatively to students with ASD and challenging behaviours (7).
Fostering peer relationships	Placing children with disability amongst their peers does not guarantee social inclusion or development of positive relationships with peers (3, 6, 8, 9). Barriers include physically isolating students from their peers through use of physical space (5) or the constant presence of education support staff (5, 6, 10), which impede opportunities for interactions. Enhancing peer relationships requires development of a positive school culture through adults (teachers) modelling high expectations of students with disability, acknowledging their achievements, modelling pro-social behaviour (3, 5, 6), actively creating opportunities for contact (6, 8), providing education to peers (7), and advocating for students with disability if bullying occurs (3, 6).
Peers as tutors	The effects of teaching peers to provide direct assistance and tutoring to students with disabilities have tended to be studied in the context of physical education (4, 8), but also included academic work (11). Outcomes indicate that these opportunities can build friendships (4), support students with disability to complete tasks (11), increase interactions with peers and help to build a positive class climate (8).
Benefits of strengthening peer relations	Students with disability require positive interactions and relationships with peers (and adults) in order to feel connected to their school community and valued at school, which mitigate against their vulnerability to bullying, abuse and being stigmatised (5).

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