

# Designing reasonable adjustments to support school inclusion

for children with a disability

## Evidence Review Summary

### Use of Education Support Staff in the Classroom

Who they are	Education Support Staff are paraprofessionals who provide support to teachers in the classroom. Various terms are used to describe this classroom support role; The Department of Education and Training, Victoria uses the term Education Support Staff. Other terms include: Paraprofessional, Support Teachers, Teaching Assistant, Education/ Teacher Assistants, Teacher's Aide, Integration Aide (1, 2, 3).
What training is needed	There is wide variability in the qualifications and hiring practices across Australia (3). Often, there are no essential minimum qualifications, and positions are casual, part-time, or fixed-term (3). In most countries or jurisdictions, no formal qualifications are required (2, 3). An exception is Italy, where Education Support Staff have teaching qualifications and post-graduate training (1).
In what settings have they been used?	Education Support Staff have been used in mainstream schools, at primary and secondary levels.
How are they used?	Education Support Staff may support a classroom teacher by being an extra adult body in the room, or provide more structured support to individual children in a classroom or one-on-one. The international research, including in Australia (1, 3, 4) indicates that Education Support Staff are taking on increasing responsibilities for the direct teaching of students with disability. They may have total responsibility for the students such that the student is excluded if the Education Support Staff is not present (5, 6) and be required to remove the student if s/he is disruptive (5). A number of models were evident in the research, but most appeared to require that the Education Support Staff have responsibility for direct instruction of the student (5, 7). They may be required to make curriculum adaptations without teacher oversight (3, 4) and to implement behaviour support programs (3). An alternative model argued to be best practice was the use of Education Support Staff as a general resource in the classroom, freeing up the teacher to provide the adjustments and supports to students with disability (2, 3).
Evidence of good outcomes	There has been evidence of an increase in on-task behaviour and interaction with adults when a student has an Education Support Staff (i.e., with the Education Support Staff but not the teacher), and Education Support Staff who are trained in evidence-based literacy support can facilitate student outcomes (3). Students feel supported when the Education Support Staff provides discrete support and resources when needed (8). The presence of Education Support Staff can reduce instances of bullying (3).
Barriers to effective use of ESS	Students can become stigmatised and isolated (3, 5, 6, 9, 10), making them vulnerable to bullying when the Education Support Staff is not present (9, 11). The hours of direct Education Support Staff support has been found to be associated with reduced classroom participation and social participation (10). The Education Support Staff can feel devalued, exploited and without support. Students can feel frustrated by lack of Education Support Staff content knowledge (5).
Evidence of poor outcomes	Those identified include lack of training and PD for both teachers and Education Support Staff (12), teachers feeling they lack skills in supporting students with disability (13); Education Support Staff feeling they lack remuneration for their responsibilities or a career pathway, and lack of role delineation (1); lack of supervision and monitoring of Education Support Staff work by teachers (3). Concern has been raised that the least qualified staff are being asked to work with students with the greatest need of expertise (2).

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