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| Student diversity  Planning adjustments for the environment |

# Adjusting environment

When planning teaching, learning and assessment, it is important that the functional impact of a student’s disability is considered. Many barriers for accessing age-equivalent curriculum and demonstrating knowledge and understanding can be designed out of learning and assessment tasks using universal approaches. There will however, always be some barriers that can’t be anticipated or require more significant adjustments.

Environmental adjustments enable access to content and can be proactively planned in conjunction with specialist teachers, parents/carers and therapists. These strategies can help:

* reduce anxiety and frustration, e.g. allowing frequent breaks in a specified place
* ensure literacy demands are not a barrier to learning, e.g. using text-to-speech software
* maximise engagement by reducing distractions and potential sensory stimuli, e.g. seating placement and lighting
* increase communication of what a student knows and can do, e.g. assistive technology.

Examples of adjusting instruction

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| Adjustments for learning experiences and assessment may include: | |
| Equipment and visual supports | * ensuring equipment is available to address sensory needs during learning breaks   + sensory seeking — movement breaks, e.g. jumping on a trampoline, swinging on a swing, heavy work activities, bouncing on a therapy ball   + sensory reduction, e.g. time in a dark, quiet space   + using fidget toys, resistance bands, sensory blankets or headphones to cancel noise * providing visual supports that allow the student to request a break as needed, e.g. using a specified number of ‘I need a break’ cards * using visuals to assist with focus and predictability, e.g. clocks, timers or a timetable |
| Specialised equipment and resources | * using specialised equipment and resources, e.g. print and electronic graphic organisers * using equipment with auditory output * listing the equipment and resources (low and high technology) that are appropriate to support learning and enhance individual student responses * documenting the training and support required when students and staff learn to use new equipment and resources, e.g. augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems * allowing students to respond using concrete materials/objects * considering the format of responses to enable students to use their communication system, e.g. to answer yes/no questions or give a multiple-choice response |
| Support staff | * ensuring that support staff are scheduled to assist the student * ensuring that support staff are familiar with the types of cues and prompts appropriate for each student, e.g. visual, gestural, sign, AUSLAN, auditory * ensuring clear instructions are consistently used by all teachers and support staff * checking with the student or support staff about whether additional time to complete a task is required * ensuring collaboration occurs with internal and external stakeholders who support the student, e.g. special education staff, school leaders, medical practitioners, therapists and parents/carers * ensuring that the recommendations of these stakeholders are actioned |
| Location | * ensuring appropriate locations are available for the implementation of teaching, learning experiences and assessment * considering environmental adjustments, e.g. noise levels, lighting, visual stimulus * considering simulated or real-life/community settings to assist with learning, e.g. a class shop for reinforcing money concepts * ensuring sufficient technology is used to support the student’s needs, e.g. additional power points, access to wi-fi * considering the supervision that the student requires during learning experiences and assessment |
| Furniture and resources | * identifying furniture to address sensory or individual physical needs, e.g. standing frames, standing desks, bean bags, gym balls, drive-in wheelchair tables * purposefully placing seating to maximise visibility, audibility and physical access to resources, learning experiences and assessment, and support (adults or peers). |

## References

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2021, ‘Meeting the needs of students with a disability’, *Australian Curriculum*, <https://australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/student-diversity/meeting-the-needs-of-students-with-a-disability/>.

Graham, L 2020, *Inclusive Education for the 21st Century: Theory, policy and practice*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest.

## More information

If you would like more information, please visit the QCAA website [www.qcaa.qld.edu.au](http://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/) and search for ‘Student diversity’. Alternatively, phone (07) 3120 6102 or email the K–10 Resources branch at [australiancurriculum@qcaa.qld.edu.au](mailto:australiancurriculum@qcaa.qld.edu.au).

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