



Review of the Disability Standards for Education (DSE)

Young people and their families must be at the centre of inclusive education policy and practice. The Disability Standards for Education (DSE) exist to ensure that every student can access and participate in learning on the same basis as their peers, yet too many young people still face systemic barriers. These barriers are amplified for young people with mental health challenges, neurodiversity or complex family backgrounds.

Raise Foundation partners with schools and communities to provide mentoring that builds school belonging, social and emotional wellbeing and help seeking for young people in early high school. We support the need for stronger implementation of the Standards, inclusive decision making, and portable adjustments across school transitions and highlight the importance of recognising access, inclusion and tailored support as essential components of an equitable and safe education system.

About Raise Foundation

Founded in 2008 Raise Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation that exists to mentor young people in need.

Raise is a registered charity and receives funding from corporate partners and philanthropic donors as well as the Federal Department of Health.

Delivering mentoring programs in 7 states/territories and more than 180 high schools across Australia, Raise recruits, trains and screens volunteers to become mentors.

These mentors are then matched with young people who would benefit from having a caring, trusted adult who shows up for them each week of the 20- or 10-week programs. Operating to a detailed youth safety framework, the Raise youth mentoring program provides a safe, proven and reliable solution for schools and families.

Our program can be delivered in person – on school premises within a school timetable – or can be delivered online to a young person in their school, home, or in their community.

Our early intervention model is focused on years 8 and 9 students who are most at risk of poor wellbeing and disengagement. Since 2008, we have supported more than 18,000 young people and trained more than 10,000 volunteer mentors.

Each year we rigorously evaluate our programs, collecting data on outcomes for thousands

youth mentoring that changes lives



of young people, mentors, schools, caregivers and families.

In 2023 the University of Melbourne undertook an outcome evaluation of Raise Youth Mentoring, using a **matched control group** to measure impact.

The evaluation found that after two school terms of mentoring a young person improved their:

- Ability to ask for help
- Engagement with and attendance at school
- Resilience
- Hope for the Future

You can find the detailed evaluation reports here: <https://raise.org.au/about/independent-evaluation/>

Our mentors are also equipped with the skills to support the mental health outcomes of other young people and other adults, including their colleagues after training as a Raise mentor. We know that on average Raise mentors use their skills to support at least one additional young person in their community as well as at least one adult in their lives. Raise mentoring creates thriving communities right across the country.

This year alone Raise supported more than 2,500 young people in school. Of those:

- 37% identified as neurodiverse
- 72% had experience anxiety and 45% had experienced depression
- 26% identified as having a mental health condition

Mentoring as an adjustment

Mentoring is a proven protective factor for student engagement and retention. Through structured, evidence-based programs, Raise mentors help young people:

- Build confidence and belonging in education settings
- Navigate challenges related to mental health, neurodivergence and systemic barriers
- Access information and resources and referrals to professional support as needed.

We know that Raise youth mentoring impacts young people's engagement with education and belonging at school. At the end of the Raise mentoring program students, including those with a mental health condition and as being neurodivergent improve their:

- belonging at school,
- attendance at school
- school retention.

Including and adjusting for neurodivergence

Many young people in Raise programs identify as neurodiverse. Yet, neurodiversity is inconsistently recognised under the DSE, and schools and educators lack training to provide appropriate adjustments.

We recommend:

- Explicitly include neurodiversity in DSE guidance and examples
- Mandate and provide training for educators on neurodiverse learning needs
- Encourage co-designed adjustments with students and families, including mentoring as a support strategy.

DSE Topic 1 – Knowing about and using the Standards (effective implementation)

Raise acknowledges the low awareness of the Standards among students and families, confusion between DSE and NDIS obligations and inconsistent application of reasonable adjustments for mental health and neurodiversity.

We recommend::

- Develop youth-friendly resources explaining rights under the DSE
- Embed training for educators on mental health and neurodivergence
- Recognise mentoring as an adjustment that supports engagement and continuity.

A student identifying as having mental health condition has stated “[Mentoring] has made coming to school less hard because I’m able to have time to myself where I can talk about anything to my mentor which makes school less stressful”.

DSE Topic 2 – Inclusive decision-making and complaints handling

Raise supports Option 3: Require education providers to follow inclusive decision-making principles when consulting, resolving issues or handling complaints.

We recommend::

- Include inclusive decision-making principles in the Standards
- Ensure consultation processes are culturally responsive and inclusive of every young person
- Provide accessible complaints pathways for young people and families.

Why engage with young people?

Decisions about young people should never be made without them. We know at Raise that their insights make our programs relevant, impactful and responsive to real needs rather than assumptions.

Listening to young people builds trust, empowers them with advocacy skills and ensures our purpose, supporting and empowering young people, aligns with their realities and aspirations.

"We are the experts in being young in 2025. The voices and opinions of each generation will change and we are the future" Raise Junior Youth Advisory Council 2025.

DSE Topic 3 – Clear responsibilities for assessment authorities and course developers

Neurodiverse students and those with mental health conditions face challenges in maintaining adjustments during exams, placements, and transitions (for example from primary to secondary learning).

We recommend:

- Clarify responsibilities for portable adjustments across all settings (school, assessments, placements)
- Require collaboration between schools, assessment authorities, and placement providers
- Recognise mentoring as a support during transitions to higher education and work-integrated learning.

"[My son's] mood changed. His older brother is facing a lot of school refusal due to anxiety which I saw affecting [my son's] attitude towards his new school as a year 7. His mentor 'treated him like an adult' and was able to converse with him in a way he was heard and valued" Parent of Raise student, 2025.

Alignment with Missing School's Position

Raise strongly supports Missing School's recommendations, particularly:



- Explicit recognition of students with complex medical and mental health conditions under the DSE.
- Recognition of learning from home, hospital, or other care settings as an eligible adjustment, including videoconferencing for classroom access.
- Requirement for education providers to follow inclusive decision-making principles in consultation and complaints handling.
- Portable adjustments across transitions (school years, places of learning, placements).

Summary

Raise calls for systemic change to ensure every student is supported through inclusive, flexible and portable adjustments. We encourage the Review to strengthen implementation of the Standards, embed inclusive decision-making principles, clarify responsibilities for continuity of adjustments and recognise mentoring as a reasonable adjustment that promotes wellbeing, belonging, and school engagement.

Raise would value the opportunity to support the Review further through sharing our expertise in youth engagement and youth mentoring in schools and in the community.