

4 June 2021

Re: Students with disability and their families suffering under lockdown 4

As Melbourne goes into another extended lockdown, ACD and Amaze are gravely concerned about the lack of provision for students with disability.

There is strong evidence that school closures have a severe and disproportionate impact on many students with disability (including autistic students) and their families. Over the last year ACD and Amaze have heard from over a thousand families about how their child's learning, well-being and mental health have deteriorated during lock downs and remote learning. We have also heard about damaging impacts on families.

These issues have been well documented by [Amaze](#) and [ACD](#), by the Victorian Parliament ([PAEC](#)), and in reports commissioned by the Victorian Government – all of which acknowledged the need for special measures for students with disability.

Yet despite this, the restrictions currently applying to students with disability are tighter than they were during the toughest lock downs in 2020.

While appreciating the need to limit community circulation to arrest the spread of Covid-19, we note that hundreds of thousands of children are currently able to attend childcare and kindergarten. In contrast, the needs of students with disability - who comprise a *much smaller group* – appear to have been disregarded.

This is having devastating consequences. Over the last week, we are hearing of children becoming destructive and damaging things; children who are regressing (e.g., child stopped talking); parents who cannot work, shop or care for others because of their child's very high supervision needs; and families – often with multiple children or parents with disability - that are not coping.

We call on the Victorian Government to:

1. Enable an immediate option for on-site schooling for:
 - Students at special schools
 - Students receiving support under the PSD or on the NDIS
 - Students with disability whose families are experiencing severe stress – this should be reinstated as an explicit category within vulnerable children as it was in lockdown #3
2. Prioritise all students with disability in the return to on-site schooling.
3. Implement a vaccine blitz for teachers and school staff who work with Students with Disability. They are eligible for priority vaccination as part of the 1b group.



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