

## Autism and Education: What is happening in our schools?

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### Abstract:

Students with autism are enrolling in schools in increasing numbers (2.3% of all students in state schools in one Australian state have a verified autism diagnosis). It is likely that at least in part the growth in numbers of students with autism in Australian schools is a result of the introduction of HCWA funding for early intervention services. With the introduction of the NDIS the trend is unlikely to reverse. The numbers may be influenced by the implementation of the revised diagnostic criteria with DSM5 but the provision of funding and services based on diagnosis is likely to continue to have a positive effect on identification rates.

In addition to growing numbers of students with autism we also examine perspectives of teachers, parents and students themselves in relation to their experiences at school and look at educational and personal outcomes for these students compared to typical students and students from other disability groups. Research done to date on stakeholder perspectives on education for children with autism confirms that many fail to realise their potential, have disproportionately high rates of co-morbid mental health problems and are frequently excluded from school programs. In addition autistic students challenge schools resulting in high reported levels of teacher stress. Finally we discuss the development and implementation of an online program currently being developed in collaboration with the QLD Department of Education designed to increase the capacity of the whole school to improve outcomes for this diverse group. The SSSA model presented here involves the development of an evidence-based framework and on-line tool for implementation in real school communities. The implementation of this program will benefit schools and society more broadly as well as those with autism and their families. Our collaborative vision is to enable autistic students to better fulfill their considerable potential.