



SUBMISSION

**Inquiry into foundational and disability supports
available for children and young people in NSW
Submission of the Public Service Association of NSW**



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Public Service Association NSW Submission to the inquiry into foundational and disability supports available for children and young people in NSW

Executive Summary

The Public Service Association of NSW (PSA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into foundational and disability supports available for children and young people in NSW. PSA members work directly with children and families in public schools and have first-hand knowledge of the support needs of students with autism, disability and developmental delay. Their evidence raises significant concerns about the capacity of the new Thriving Kids program to meet growing demand without placing additional pressure on children, families and school staff. School administrative and support staff are the backbone of NSW public schools. They are quiet achievers who work in the background to provide essential support for children to learn, for teachers to teach and for schools to run effectively.

The replacement of demand-driven National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) supports for many children with autism and developmental delay with a capped funding model creates a risk that some children will miss out on the support they need. Public schools already support increasing numbers of students with autism and disability, often without sufficient staffing and disability support places. NSW and Australian data show that the prevalence of autism and the proportion of students with disability in public schools has continued to increase.

The PSA's survey of more than 1,040 public school support and administrative staff found that most frontline school administrative and support staff have received little or no information about Thriving Kids, no training on its implementation. Most expect it to increase their workloads. Almost all respondents believe additional staff will be required to deliver the program, while many schools lack sufficient space and resources to accommodate additional supports.

The PSA is concerned that the current funding envelope for Thriving Kids will be insufficient to meet demand and that public schools will be expected to absorb additional responsibilities without guaranteed funding, staffing and infrastructure support. The Commonwealth and NSW Governments must ensure that no child misses out on necessary supports because of these changes and that schools are adequately resourced to deliver them. The PSA also notes continued inequity in the distribution of government funding to public schools, which will not receive full funding to 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard until 2034.

The PSA recommends that:

- 1. No children experience a reduction in access to supports in the transition from the NDIS to Thriving Kids.**
- 2. Governments commit enough funding to meet actual demand for foundational and disability supports.**

- 3. Additional staffing be guaranteed for public schools implementing Thriving Kids, including School Learning Support Officers, School Administrative Staff, Student Support Officers and School Psychologists.**
- 4. The Commonwealth provide capital funding to public schools including for infrastructure and facilities required to deliver Thriving Kids.**
- 5. Clear implementation plans, guidance and training be provided to school staff before program commencement, in line with current role statements and industrial frameworks.**
- 6. Provide clear information and transition arrangements for children exiting the Thriving Kids program at age 9, including how their support needs will be met within public schools and any additional staffing, funding and resources that will be provided to ensure these responsibilities do not place further workload pressures on school staff.**

THE PUBLIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION OF NSW

The Public Service Association of NSW represents 42,000 public sector workers who provide essential support to students, teachers and families in schools and protect the safety of the state's most vulnerable children at risk of neglect and abuse. These workers also support the delivery of disability services, manage the prevention and response to natural disasters, including fires and floods. They staff our courts, prisons, police, national parks, museums and art galleries. They run the essential water and energy infrastructure services on which communities rely.

While the PSA represents a broad range of occupations, it is united in its commitment to serving the community, including the most vulnerable people in NSW.

PSA members are particularly well placed to speak about the impact of foundational and disability supports available for children and young people in NSW because they work closely with those children in public schools.

The Public Service Association of New South Wales is the primary union that covers more than 25,000 administrative and support staff (SASS) and wellbeing staff in public schools across NSW. Our members include School Learning Support Officers working with children with disabilities and behaviours that require their support, Aboriginal Education Officers, School Psychologists, Student Support Officers (youth workers) and Community Liaison Officers. They work in a range of administrative roles and as business managers. They also work in a variety of other staff roles in school libraries, science laboratories and as farm assistants. Our members are also responsible for routine maintenance and upkeep of school grounds. PSA members also work for the regulator of early childhood education and care services, the Early Learning Commission, ensuring compliance with child safety and educational outcome legislation and standards, as well as in more corporate roles in the Early Childhood Outcomes and Inclusion and Wellbeing directorates at the Department of Education.

THE NDIS CHANGES

The Public Service Association understands that Thriving Kids is a new national program that will provide foundational supports for children between the ages of zero to eight with mild to moderate developmental delays and autism. The PSA understands that the Thriving Kids program will be delivered through schools, early childhood education and care and broader community settings from October 2026.¹

Children with mild to moderate autism who already receive support from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) will continue to do so until 1 January 2028. These children will then receive support from the Thriving Kids program.

Unlike NDIS funding, which is driven by demand, funding for the Thriving Kids program will be capped.² States will be required to manage demand, and children will no longer require a diagnosis of autism to qualify for support.

The new criteria and budget limit suggest that some children will miss out on support under the new program. Schools already struggle within tighter budgets³ to find enough disability support places to meet increasing demand. The new policy setting under the Thriving Kids program raises the PSA's concerns about whether children will receive adequate support to meet their needs and whether the public-school workforce will be required to do more with less.

NSW and other states are required to jointly fund the Thriving Kids program to support children with low-level autism and disability, who until now, had been fully funded by the Commonwealth through the NDIS. Those who are currently in the NDIS will remain under the NDIS until 1 January 2028, according to Family and Community Services Minister Kate Washington, who said she has received assurances from the Commonwealth that children who are currently on the NDIS receiving supports and services will be "grandfathered in the scheme". Children who have significant and permanent disability will continue to have access to the NDIS beyond 1 January 2028.⁴

¹ [National Agreement on Foundational Supports – Thriving Kids Bilateral Agreement. p3](#)

² [National Agreement on Foundational Supports – Thriving Kids Bilateral Agreement. pp1-3](#)

³ [Lucy Carroll, School budgets slashed by \\$148 million as deputies forced back to classroom. April 9, 2024. Sydney Morning Herald.](#)

⁴ [NSW Minister for Families and Communities and Disability Inclusion, Kate Washington told a Budget Estimates hearing of the Portfolio Committee No. 5 – Justice and Communities on Tuesday 25 August 2026 that the Commonwealth Government has provided "assurances" that the NDIS funding will be "grandfathered" for children currently in the NDIS until 1 January 2028. See Hansard transcript page 30.](#)

NDIS FUNDING

The 2026-27 NSW Budget included \$631.9 million⁵ over five years for the Thriving Kids program which will be jointly funded by the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth contribution of \$442.4 million⁶ over five years will take the total funding for NSW to \$1.07 billion over five years for delivery of the Thriving Kids program.

The national agreement states that the total national funding package for all states and territories to deliver Thriving Kids will be capped at \$4 billion for five financial years from 2026-27 to 2030-31.

Under the NDIS, about \$5.5 billion was provided nationally in 2026 for 350,000 children with autism who received average payments of \$15,710 each. Almost a quarter (24 per cent) of these children have high-level disability (which the NDIS will continue to cover). Those with low-level autism represent 15 per cent of the total, while those with medium-level autism represent 56 per cent (Appendix 1). While these figures do not provide a direct comparison, the annual level of funding for all children in one year under the NDIS exceeds the total amount to be spent across five years on all children across Australia under the Thriving Kids program. The \$5.5 billion to be spent on children with autism under the NDIS this year is around seven times the \$800 million that will be spent on Thriving Kids each year.

Total NDIS payments for children aged zero to eight increased by 29 per cent between 30 June 25 and 30 June 2026, reflecting increased demand for support for this age group.⁷

The National Agreement on Foundational Supports states that activities under the agreement “are to be managed within the agreed funding envelope and are not demand-driven entitlements. New South Wales is responsible for managing service volume, prioritisation and delivery settings to operate within available funding”.⁸ The bilateral agreement also says that supports “will be delivered within a capped funding envelope with parties putting systems in place to monitor and manage demand through proactive approaches that operate to ensure community expectations are being met”.⁹

Asked in a Budget Estimates committee hearing whether she thought there was enough funding to make Thriving Kids a success, the NSW Minister for Families and Communities and Disability Inclusion, Kate Washington said: “We are confident that the design of the system will be able to deliver services in a capped funding model to provide that early intervention, early advice and early support for families”.¹⁰

⁵ [NSW Government Budget Caring for Communities page 23 June 2026](#)

⁶ [National Agreement on Foundational Supports – Thriving Kids Bilateral Agreement. p12](#)

⁷ [NDIS Autism data to 30 June 2026. Quarterly data sets. Table 17: Total payments for supports by age group for the year ending 30 June 2026 and 30 June 2025 - Autism \(\\$m\)](#)

⁸ [National Agreement on Foundational Supports – Thriving Kids Bilateral Agreement. p2](#)

⁹ [National Agreement on Foundational Supports – Thriving Kids Bilateral Agreement. p3](#)

¹⁰ [Budget Estimates hearing of the Portfolio Committee No. 5 – Justice and Communities on Tuesday 25 August 2026. Hansard transcript page 27.](#)

The PSA remains sceptical and is concerned that the level of funding to be provided through Thriving Kids will not be enough to support all children who need it. The PSA is also concerned that adequate resources and staffing will not be provided for schools to cover any gaps in support.

NATIONAL SCHOOLS FUNDING AGREEMENT

The requirement for NSW to find an extra \$631.9 million in its budget this year closely follows the Federal Government's decision last year to defer its commitment to fully fund NSW public schools until 2034. The bulk of the promised five-per cent increase in Commonwealth funding for public schools is not scheduled for delivery until the final two years of the new 10-year Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025-2034.

This timeline is of particular concern in the context of the Gillard government's unrealised promise of full funding for public schools. The bulk of additional funding promised in response to the national schools funding review by businessman David Gonski was scheduled to flow in the final two years of a six-year agreement. However, the final two years of funding were not delivered after Labor lost the 2013 federal election and the Turnbull/Morrison Government took power.¹¹

Similarly, the Albanese government would need to stay in power until 2034 to ensure the uninterrupted delivery of its promised 5 per cent increase to bring public schools to an equivalent level of funding received by independent and Catholic schools which are funded above 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard.¹² The Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) is an estimate of how much total public funding a school needs to meet its students' educational needs.¹³

ENTRENCHED INEQUITY

Commonwealth funding for non-government schools is almost double the amount provided to public schools. In 2026, recurrent funding for schools from the Commonwealth Government is estimated at \$12.7 billion for government schools and \$20.6 billion for non-government schools.¹⁴ As a leading education policy expert, Lyndsay Connors, observes, the growing inequity in government funding for public schools "sits awkwardly with a government that will rein in spending on the National Disability Insurance Scheme".¹⁵ The Federal Government has also significantly reduced NSW's share of GST revenue.¹⁶

The PSA is concerned that the Commonwealth, with its deeper pockets, has continued to shortchange the children in NSW who attend public schools and who under the Australian

¹¹ [Matthew Knott, Simon Birmingham: Don't expect schools election cash splash. December 29, 2015. Sydney Morning Herald.; ABC News. Gonski 2.0: A businessman, a billion-dollar funding fight and four prime ministers later. 3 May 2017.](#)

¹² [Adam Rorris, How School Funding Fails Public Schools. How to Change for the Better. November 2023. See Figure 2. p10](#)

¹³ [Australian Government. Department of Education. Schooling Resource Standard fact sheet.](#)

¹⁴ [Australian Government Department of Education. Recurrent funding for schools. 2026.](#)

¹⁵ [Lyndsay Connors, Why are we still funding Australia's wealthiest schools? September 18, 2026. Pearls and Irritations.](#)

¹⁶ [Matt Wade and James Hall, Biggest winners and losers in \\$103 billion GST carve-up. March 13, 2026. Sydney Morning Herald.](#)

Education Act have the right to a quality education, regardless of where they live or which school they attend. While the Australian Education Act states that schools funding is to be fairly and transparently distributed and allocated according to need, political history demonstrates that this has not been honoured, particularly since 2001.

The ratio of Commonwealth funding for government schools to non-government schools has gradually decreased over the decades from 65:35 under the Whitlam government, to 48:52 under the Fraser Government, 44:56 under the Hawke Government, 35:65 under the Howard Government and 20:80 under the Turnbull/Morrison government.¹⁷ The Albanese government last year promised to increase its share from 20 per cent to 25 per cent for public schools, but this will not be fully delivered until 2034.¹⁸

The gradual increase in Commonwealth funding for NSW public schools will be relatively negligible before it increases from 20.6 per cent in 2028 to 22.82 per cent in 2031, 23.13 per cent in 2032, 23.75 per cent in 2033 before finally reaching 25 per cent in 2034.¹⁹ States have struggled to meet the 80 per cent threshold and the Morrison Government allowed them to use what have been called “accounting tricks” including capital depreciation towards their 80 per cent target.

The NSW Government increased its share of funding for government schools from 72.65 per cent in 2024 to 75 per cent of the Schools Resource Standard.²⁰ (Note: This includes 4 per cent for non-standard inclusions such as capital depreciation and the NSW Education Standards Authority. This 4 per cent is scheduled to be reduced to zero by 2034, meaning that 75 per cent of NSW funding for the Schools Resources Standard will be dedicated to education costs by 2034.)

Unlike non-government schools, which receive Commonwealth Government funding for capital works to improve their grounds, public schools receive no capital funding from the federal government to create new spaces or other infrastructure needed for the provision of disability supports. Federal government funding to improve and maintain public school buildings would also help boost enrolments, which in turn would make them eligible for more government funding.

This background on schools funding arrangements provides relevant context for consideration of the Federal Government’s decision to discontinue funding for children with low level autism and disability through the National Disability Insurance Scheme. The requirement for the states to provide half the funding for the new Thriving Kids program which will be delivered in part on school grounds imposes an additional cost burden on public schools. The Commonwealth should therefore contribute to any costs for the

¹⁷ Jane Caro and Lyndsay Connors, ‘When 80 and 20 don’t add up’, EdMediaWatch (online) April 2018.

¹⁸ Caitlin Cassidy, NSW public schools to be fully funded by 2034, leaving Queensland as only state outside deal. 4 March 2025. [The Guardian](#).

¹⁹ [New South Wales Bilateral Agreement \(Better and Fairer Schools Agreement – Full and Fair Funding 2025-2034\) pp6-7](#) See Appendix 3 of this submission.

²⁰ [Parliament of NSW Answer to Question on Notice 4080 - SCHOOLING RESOURCE STANDARD FUNDING 2025](#). 17 December 2024.

infrastructure the NSW Department of Education is required to provide to support delivery of the Thriving Kids program.

INCREASED PRESSURE ON SCHOOL STAFF

One PSA member who works in regional NSW as a School Learning Support Officer said her government school had been repeatedly promised additional funding to properly equip its support unit ***“and then just as work is due to start, the funds vanish”***.

Another PSA member who works as a School Administrative Officer at a government primary school in metropolitan NSW said: ***“Make the funding reflect the needs in schools. School administration workload is beyond reasonable. At the end of this year our Principal will no longer support extra admin staff being financed from the school budget. This means we will only have two [School Administrative Officers] SAOs and a [School Administrative Manager] SAM. We are currently struggling with the workload with three SAOs each day. It will be impossible to manage the workload. I already work beyond my paid work hours of 6.25 hours per day and take work home over the weekends and after work.”***

Public schools should not be expected to take on increasingly higher concentrations of children with disability without a fairer funding contribution for NSW public schools from the Commonwealth.

NSW has the highest concentration of NDIS participants with Autism compared to all states and territories (as of 30 June 2026), accounting for 28 per cent of the total distribution.²¹

The PSA is concerned that the lack of adequate funding and resources to support increasing numbers of children with additional needs in public schools will further disadvantage children who need support, including those who may miss out on rationed funding through Thriving Kids. The PSA is also concerned that this may also increase already heavy workloads for administration and support staff and teachers.

The PSA shares concerns expressed in other submissions to this inquiry about a lack of detailed information about how the Thriving Kids program will be delivered in public schools and what its impact will be on the children who most need support.

INCREASING NEED FOR AUTISM AND DISABILITY SUPPORT

National data shows that public schools do most of the heavy lifting when it comes to supporting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in the state. Figures from the Australian Productivity Commission show that Government schools have the highest proportion of students with disability compared with Catholic and Independent schools.

The proportion of students with disability in public schools has increased from 20.8 per cent in 2020 to 28.6 per cent in 2025. Government schools also have the highest proportion of

²¹ See Appendix 2 of this submission

children from a low socioeconomic background – 31.5 per cent compared to 13.7 per cent for non-government schools.²²

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data shows the number of Australians with autism overall increased by 41.8 per cent between 2018 and 2022 from 205,200 to 290,900 individuals.²³ NDIS data suggests that autism is the largest disability cohort in the scheme and accounts for a large proportion of new entrants.

A NSW study published in the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders in 2023 showed the prevalence of autism spectrum disorder in children at the age of six increased an average of 4.1 per cent per year.²⁴ The prevalence of autism in Australia has been increasing since 2015 in those aged 0-4, 5-9 and 10-14.²⁵

Autism prevalence by age in Australia

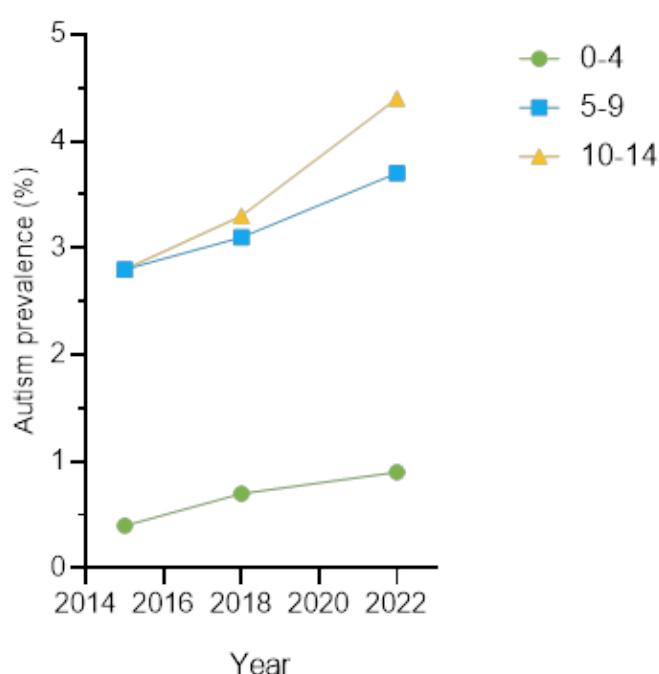


Figure 1. The prevalence of autism in Australians aged 0-4, 5-9 and 10-14 from 2015 to 2022 by per cent. [ABS. Autism in Australia, 2022](#). Released 11/10/2024.

²² See graph in Appendix 4a. (Ref - RoGS 2026 Part B, Section 4 School Education, Table 4A.12)

²³ [Australian Bureau of Statistics. Autism in Australia, 2022. Released 11 October 2024.](#)

²⁴ [Nielsen, Timothy C.; Nassar, Natasha; Boulton, Kelsie A.; Guastella, Adam J.; Lain, Samantha J.; Estimating the Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder in New South Wales, Australia: A Data Linkage Study of Three Routinely Collected Datasets. Accepted 21 December 2022/Published online 18 January 2023.](#)

²⁵ See Appendix 4c and Appendix 5 of this submission. (Ref - [Autism in Australia, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#) - Released 11/10/2024)

The NSW Department of Education commissioned research from the Department of Paediatrics at Monash University which found the prevalence of autism was predicted to increase from 2 per cent in 2019 to 3.5 per cent of students in 2028. The Department of Education had reported a 14.5 per cent increase in enrolments of students with autism between 2013 and 2017.²⁶

PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS AND FOUNDATIONAL AND DISABILITY SUPPORTS

Less than two months before the Thriving Kids program is due to start, most school support staff at the frontline of its delivery in NSW public schools have not even heard of the program.

Under the Thriving Kids bilateral agreement, New South Wales is required to provide information to the Commonwealth about its approach to functional needs identification and triage prior to 1 October 2026.²⁷

The Public Service Association surveyed its members between late August and early September and received responses from more than 1040 members who work in public education. The vast majority of respondents work in schools as Student Learning Support Officers (SLSOs) and in school administration (Figure 2). Nearly all respondents, 97.7 per cent (1022), work in schools and a little more than half (56.3 per cent) worked in regional areas (Figure 3). The remaining 43.7 per cent work in metropolitan areas of NSW (Figure 4).

²⁶ [NSW Department of Education. Report summary: understanding increased enrolments of autism and mental health needs in NSW government schools. February 2020.](#)

²⁷ [National Agreement on Foundational Supports – Thriving Kids Bilateral Agreement. p4](#)

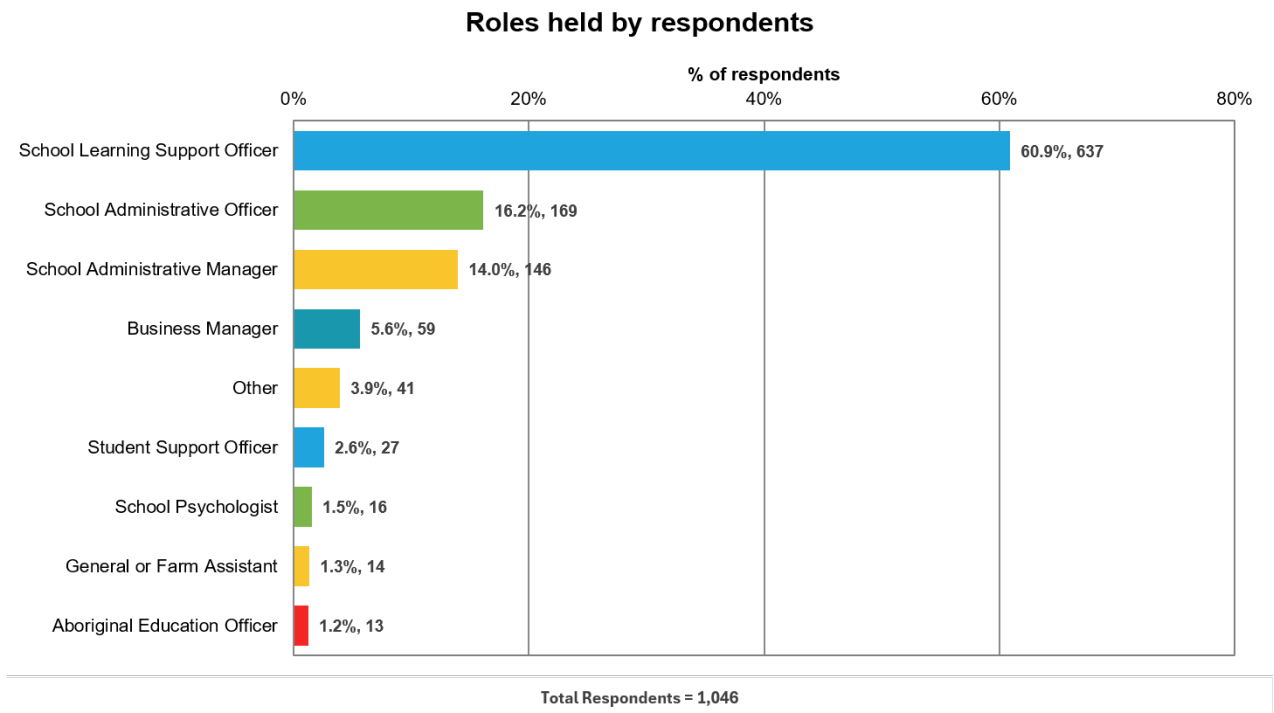


Figure 2. Employment roles in NSW public schools held by respondents to the PSA survey.

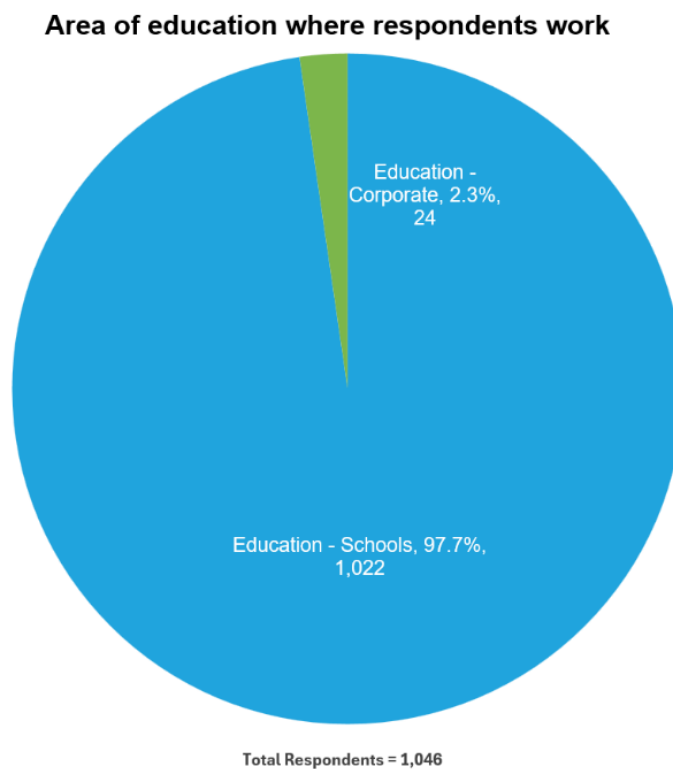


Figure 3. The area of education that PSA survey respondents work

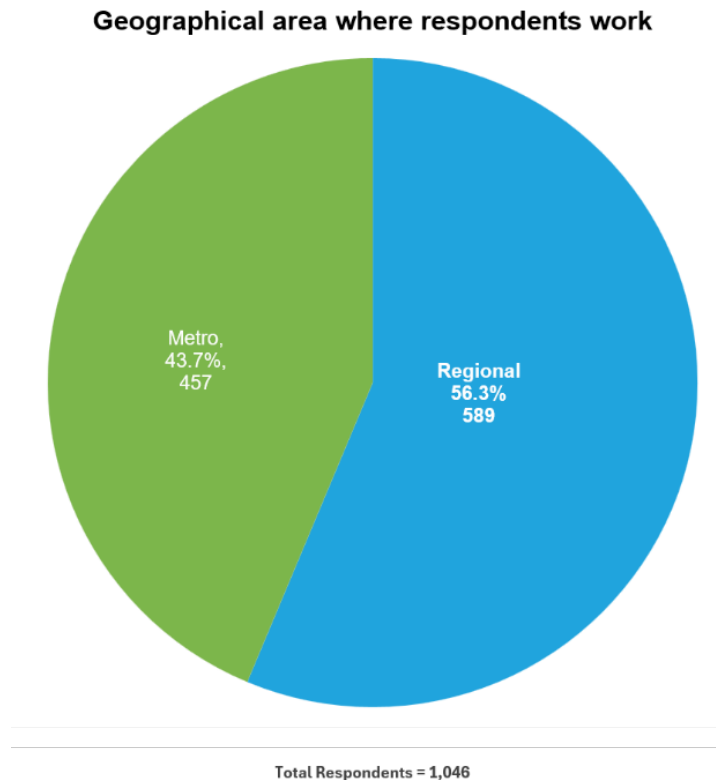


Figure 4. Geographical distribution of where the PSA survey respondents work, classed as either Metro or Regional classifications.

WHAT IS THRIVING KIDS?

The PSA survey found that slightly more than half (52 per cent) of respondents said they had no understanding of changes to the NDIS and the new Thriving Kids program. Asked how well they understood the changes, 52 per cent said, “not at all”, 34 per cent said, “not well” and 14 per cent said “somewhat”. Less than one per cent said, “very well” (Figure 5).

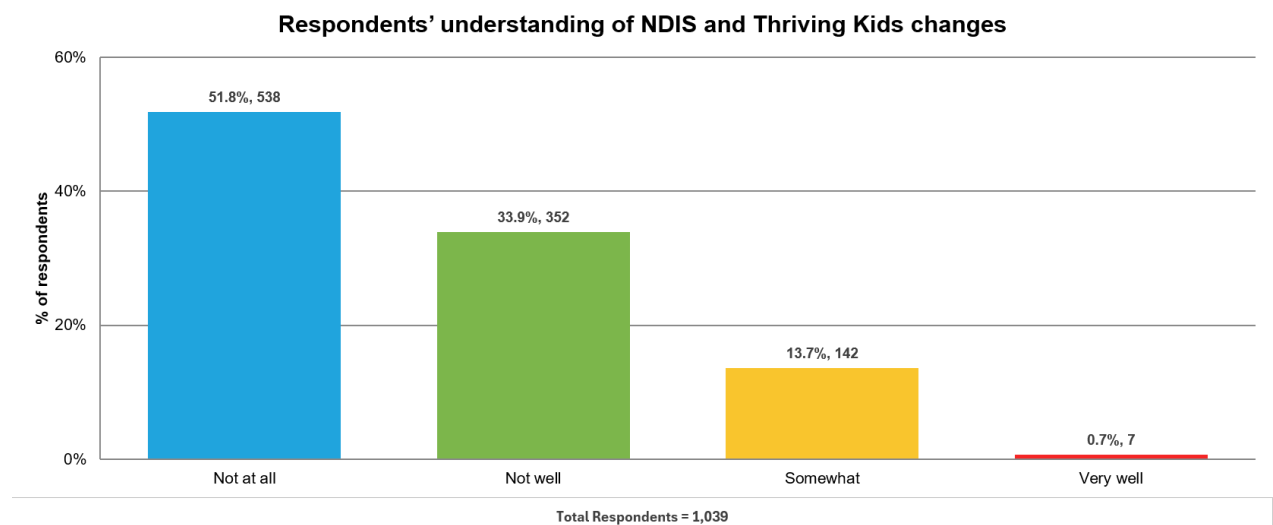


Figure 5. PSA survey respondents self-reported understanding of changes to the NDIS and Thriving Kids program.

When asked what they understood of the changes to the NDIS, responses included the following:

“Less support”

- Student Support Officer with between five and 10 years’ experience in public education who works in a government primary school in metropolitan NSW.

“More work for SLSOs”

- School Administrative Manager with 20 years’ experience in public education who works in a government primary school in regional NSW.

“An uneducated attempt to save money and take it from those who really need it because some people and business rorted the system”

- School Learning Support Officer with between five and 10 years’ experience in public education who works in a government secondary school in metropolitan NSW.

“I’m not aware of any changes”

- A School Learning Support Officer with more than 20 years’ experience in public education who works in a government primary school in metropolitan NSW.

“A greater workload for SASS [Schools Administrative and Support Staff]”

- A School Administrative Manager with between 16 and 20 years’ experience in public education who works in a government primary school in metropolitan NSW.

“I believe that funding for children will be cut for a lot of them, therefore not allowing parents to get the help that these children need to support their learning”

- A School Administrative Manager with more than 20 years’ experience in public education who works at a government primary school in regional NSW.

“There will be children who do not qualify for the new system even though they are on NDIS now. There will and has been huge reductions for children etc who need this help badly. It will [affect] families ... being able to afford a psychologist etc who desperately need help.”

- A School Administrative Manager with more than 20 years’ experience in public education who works for a government primary school in metropolitan NSW.

“NDIS is being altered and a lot of children taken off and being moved to thriving kids program, other than that, not much else and no idea financial or budget wise [how] this will impact schools or how the program itself will impact schools. I have seen no notice that we will be getting a budget adjustment to support anything if schools are expected to be a part of this program.”

- A School Administrative Manager with 11 to 15 years’ experience in public education who works at a primary school in metropolitan NSW.

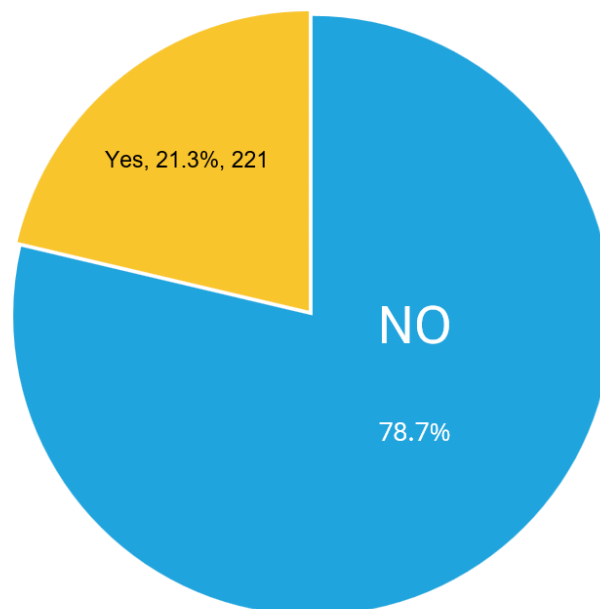
One response provided a succinct summary of the changes:

“Children aged 0 - 8 with a diagnosis of Autism will no longer be covered by NDIS. Their care will fall to Thriving Kids, which is managed by DCJ. The funding for this care will be capped, but does not require a formal diagnosis.”

- School Administrative Manager with more than 20 years’ experience in public education who works at a Central School in regional NSW.

Asked if they had heard of Thriving Kids or Foundational Supports before receiving the PSA survey, the majority 78.7 per cent (816) of respondents said no (Figure 6). Of those who had heard of Thriving Kids, this had mainly been through media reporting.

Before this survey, had you heard of Thriving Kids or Foundational Supports?



Total Respondents = 1,037

Figure 6. PSA survey respondents were asked if they had heard of the Thriving Kids program prior to this survey in late August to early September, 2026.

Asked if their school or their colleagues had provided them with any information about Thriving Kids, nearly all respondents (99.2 per cent) said no. Not one respondent said they had received any training or instructions relating to the changes.

The PSA respectfully suggests that it is unlikely that this inquiry would otherwise hear views expressed by the staff who will be charged with helping deliver the Thriving Kids program in public schools across NSW. This is because most of the staff have not heard of the changes.

When asked if they had received any instructions or training related to Thriving Kids changes to begin in October 2026, all PSA respondents said no (Figure 7).

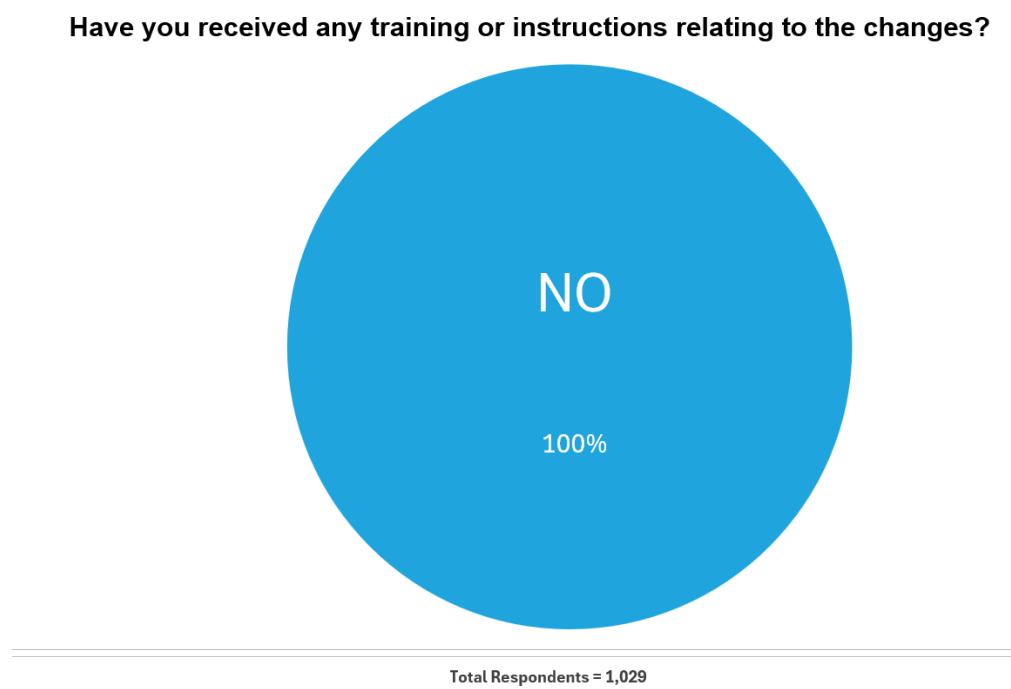


Figure 7. PSA survey respondents were asked if they had received any training relating to the changes to the NDIS scheme and delivery of the Thriving Kids program

WORKLOAD PRESSURE

When asked what impact they expected the introduction of Thriving Kids to have on their workload, more than three quarters said they thought it would increase their workload. Of these, 47.8 per cent said it would significantly increase their workload and 28.3 per cent said they expected it would somewhat increase their workload. Another 23 per cent said they expected no change to their workload under Thriving Kids and less than one per cent (4 people) said they expected the changes would reduce their workload (Figure 8).

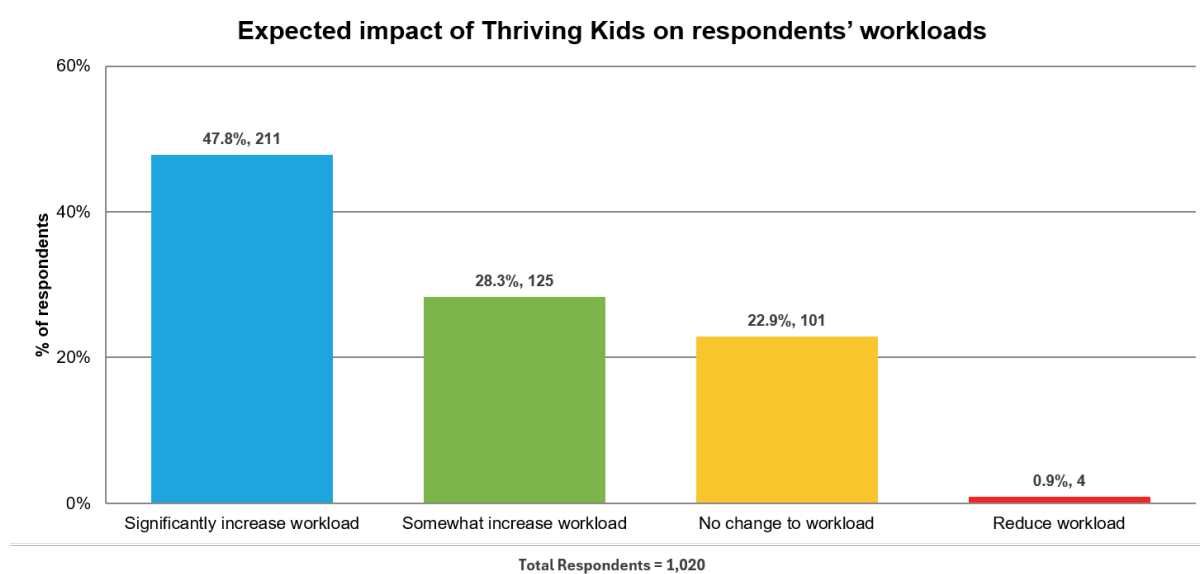


Figure 8. PSA survey respondents perceived impact to their workload as a result of Thriving Kids program.

Asked which activities they expected would increase, responses included the following (Figure 9):

“Student supervision, behaviour support, personal care support, learning support, record keeping, reporting”

- School Learning Support Officer with five to 10 years’ experience in public education who works at a government primary school in regional NSW.

“Behaviour support, personal care support, learning support”

- School Learning Support Officer with five to 10 years’ experience who works in a preschool at a government primary school in metropolitan NSW.

“Administration, Time spent on admission of external visitors, Personal care support, Parent liaison, Record keeping.”

- School Administrative Officer with under five years’ experience in public education who works at a government primary school in regional NSW.

“No idea what changes it will bring as I have not heard anything about it”.

- School Learning Support Officer (Student Health Support) with five to 10 years’ experience in public education who works in a School for Specific Purposes in regional NSW.

“Behaviour support, Learning support, Reporting”

- School Learning Support Officer with under five years’ experience in public education who works in a government primary school in regional NSW.

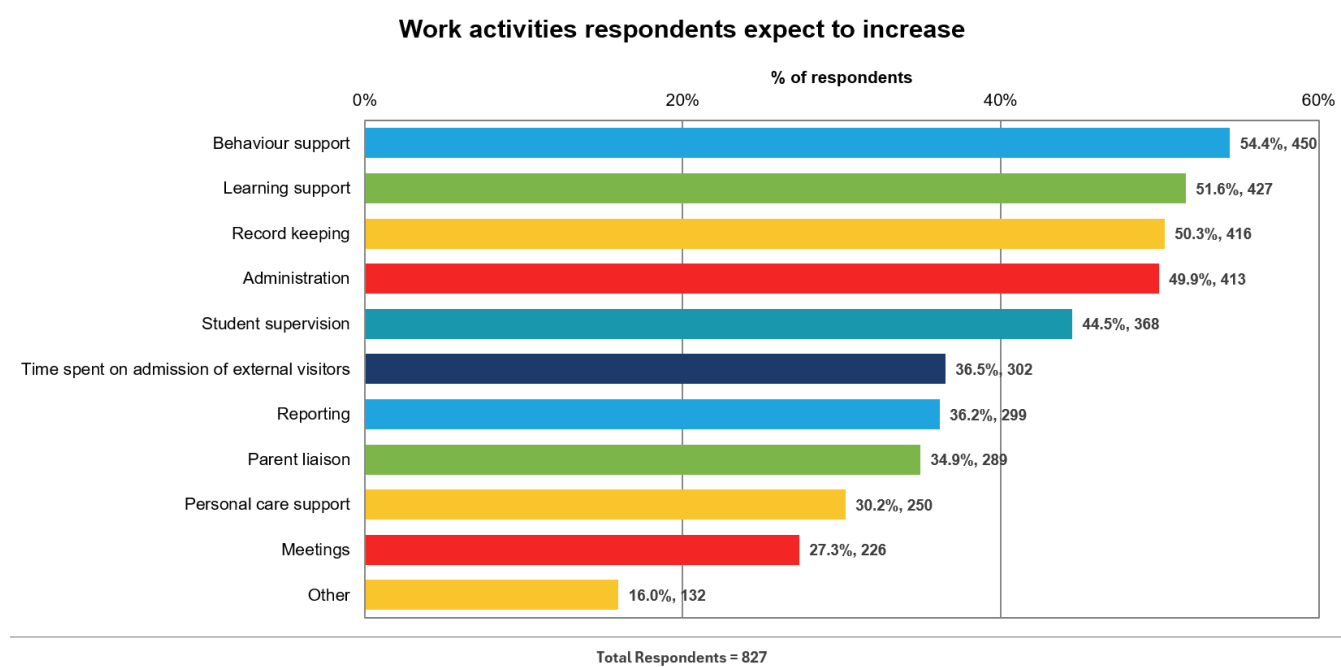
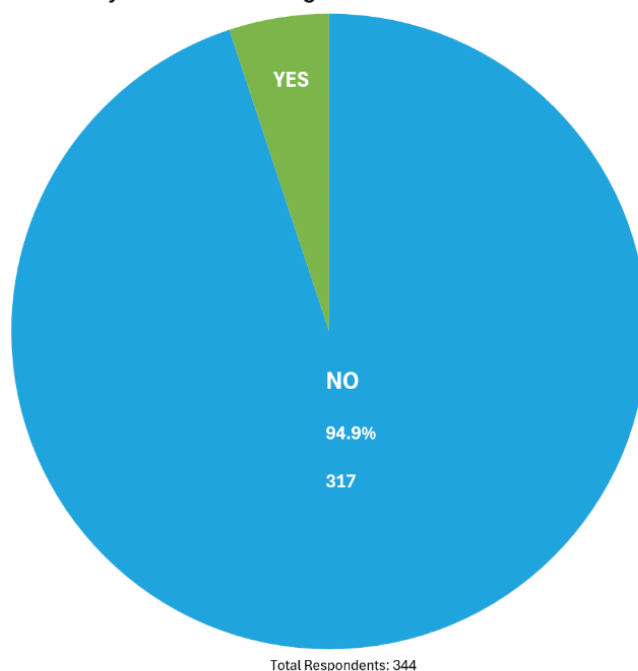


Figure 9. Expected workload increase following implementation of Thriving Kids. Multiple answers could be selected in answer to this question.

Asked if they think that extra staff will be required at their school to deliver Thriving Kids, 95.7 per cent of respondents said yes and 4.3 per cent said no.

Asked if current staffing levels were sufficient to absorb additional work, most respondents said no (Figure 10).

Do you believe your current staffing levels are sufficient to absorb additional work?



Total Respondents: 344

Figure 10. PSA survey respondents were asked if they thought current staffing levels were adequate to absorb additional work as a result of the Thriving Kids program

Asked to choose from multiple choice answers whether they expected school support staff workload to be impacted in a negative or positive way after the introduction of Thriving Kids, 63.5 per cent (471) said they expected it to be negative and 11.7 per cent (87) said they expected it to be positive.

Most respondents (81 per cent) said they thought that additional School Learning Support Officers would likely be needed. Nearly 60 per cent said they thought it was likely that extra School Administrative staff would be needed and 43 per cent said more School Psychologists would likely be required. Between 32 and 40 per cent said more teachers, allied health staff and student support officers would likely be required (Figure 11).

The PSA would urge the NSW Government to respond to these calls and the overwhelming evidence this survey provides of a growing need for more resources to support non-teaching staff in schools, who play a critical role in supporting student learning and the efficient running of our public schools. The NDIS changes suggest that schools will become increasingly reliant on these staff members. The PSA will not tolerate a situation where their workloads are put under further pressure.

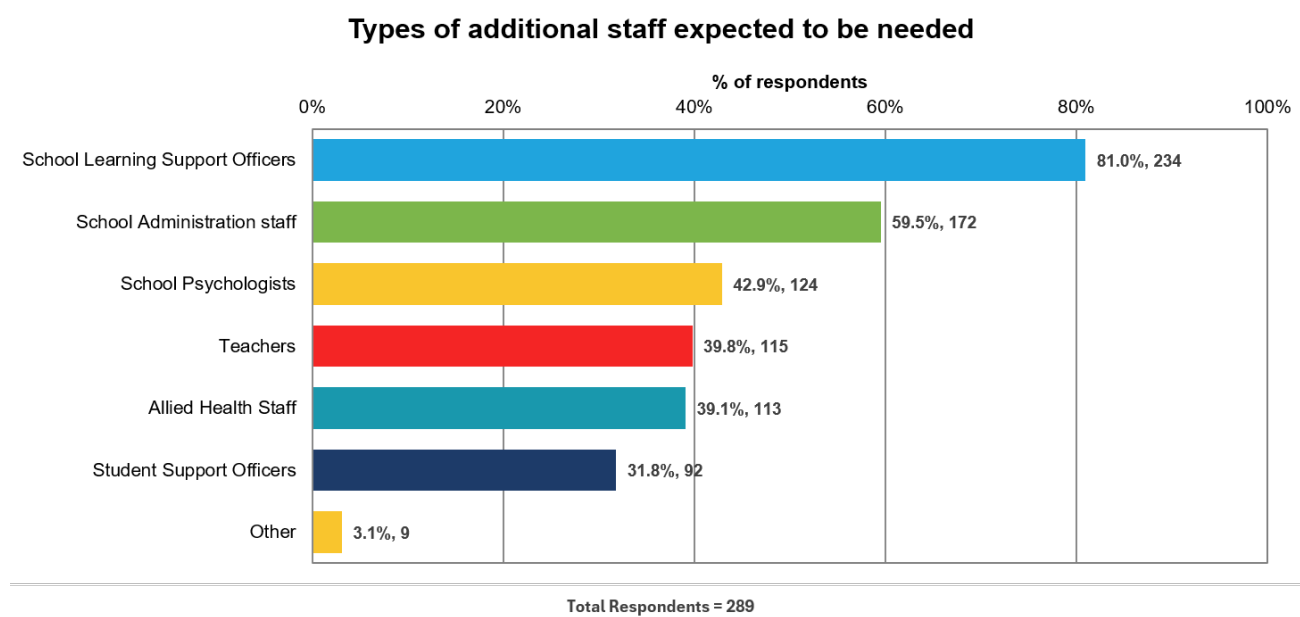


Figure 11. PSA respondents were asked what additional staff may be required to manage NDIS changes and Thriving Kids program.

PSA members were also asked if they can describe a situation where student support needs exceed staffing or resources at their school. More than 650 responses outlined a litany of examples which include the following:

- ***“Every day the external support of therapists arriving and leaving causes extra workload. It’s the worst part of the job.”***
 - A School Administrative Manager with more than 20 years’ experience in public education who works for a government primary school in regional NSW.
- ***“We will be having 2 special needs students next year that both have additional needs that will require staff and that will take away from other students that need support”***
 - A School Learning Support Officer with 11 to 15 years’ experience in public education who works in an infants/primary school in metropolitan NSW.
- ***“Behaviour support exceeds staffing some days”***
 - A School Learning Support Officer with between 11 to 15 years’ experience in public education who works in a government infants/primary school Regional NSW.
- ***“We are having staffing issues. We do not have spare rooms to host extra therapists beyond our current ones.”***
 - A School Administrative Officer with between five to 10 years’ experience in public education who works in an infants/primary school in metropolitan NSW.

- ***“External providers coming into the schools have increased our workload by at least on average 3 hours per week.”***
- A School Administrative Manager with more than 20 years’ experience in public education who works in a government primary school in regional NSW.
- ***“Students are given as much support as we can. Funding is minimal for their needs. It is absolutely heartbreaking seeing students miss out on support when it is absolutely needed.”***
- A School Learning Support Officer with more than 20 years’ experience in public education who works at an infants/primary school in regional NSW.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY RISKS

Respondents were also asked if they thought they would be at greater risk of stress, burnout and other forms of occupational health and safety issues after the Thriving Kids program is rolled out. A majority said they would be at greater risk of stress and burnout. More than half said they would be at risk of psychological injury and aggressive behaviour. Between 40 to 50 per cent of respondents identified physical injuries and occupational violence as risks (Figure 12).

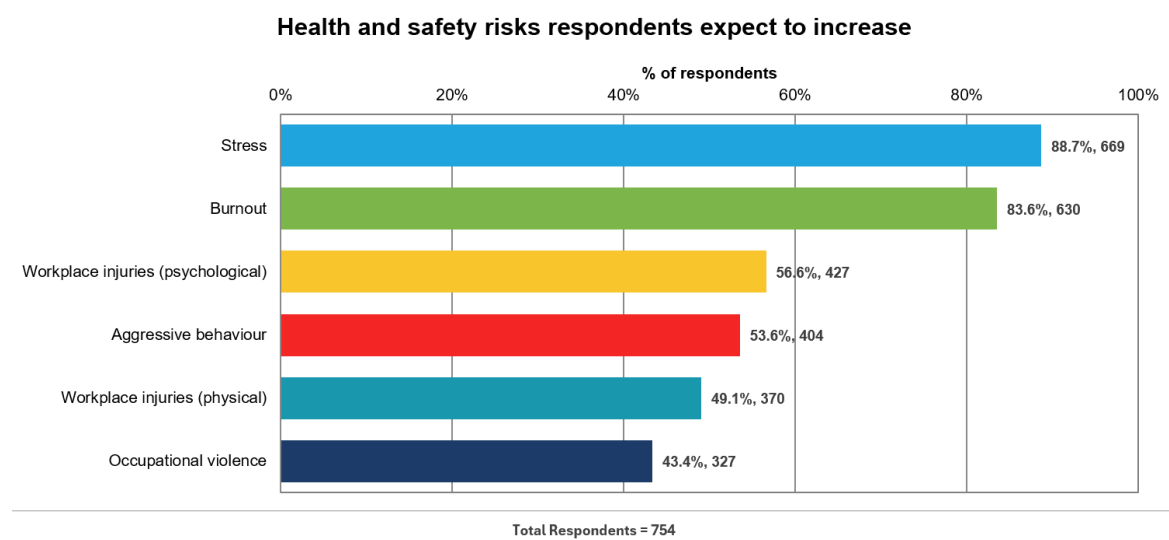


Figure 12. PSA members asked if NDIS changes may increase health and safety risks.

Asked if they have experienced situations where insufficient support for students created a safety risk for students or staff, the responses included the following:

- ***"I have worked with students and a support unit for 21 years. I have on many occasions experienced insufficient support for the staff and students, including physical, mental and emotional with no outcome or no behaviour management plan in place. Staff are just expected to put up with it and then criticised as to why the behaviour happened. To say that SISO's get burnt out in my situation, that is a complete understatement."***
 - School Learning Support Officer with more than 20 years' experience in public education who works in a government infants/primary school in regional NSW.
- ***"Student denied funding thus unable to receive allied health support has repeatedly caused physical harm to students and teachers."***
 - School Learning Support Officer with between five to 10 years' experience who works for a government primary school in regional NSW.
- ***"Numerous SISOs have been injured from students in our support unit"***
 - School Learning Support Officer with between five to 10 years' experience in public education who works in a government primary school in metropolitan NSW.
- ***"Due to workload, safety risk experienced is stress ... and burn out to accommodate lack of staffing or funding"***
 - School Administrative Manager with between 11 to 15 years' experience in public education who works for a government primary school in metropolitan NSW.
- ***"During staff absences we are understaffed. When staff who have experience dealing with particular behaviours from select students are absent, it places a heavy burden on other staff."***
 - School Administrative Manager with between 11 to 15 years' experience in public education who works for a government primary school in regional NSW.
- ***"There have been times when a student is unable to have an SISO in the classroom and the child has absconded."***
 - School Administrative Officer with between 11 to 15 years' experience in public education who works in a government primary school in metropolitan NSW.
- ***"Due to a lack of funding, insufficient staff were available to support a class of higher support needs students with their daily personal needs. SISO was expected to do the work of two people or phone the office to see if anyone was available to help. (They rarely received the help required). Staff member left due to overwork and burnout."***
 - School Learning Support Officer with years' experience in public education who works at a School for Specific Purposes in metropolitan NSW.

AVAILABLE SPACE AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN SCHOOLS FOR DISABILITY SUPPORTS

Asked if their school has enough space and facilities to accommodate additional supports for children with low-level autism, 59.5 per cent said no (Figure 13).

Asked what adjustments were being made at their school to provide the space needed to deliver Thriving Kids, responses included the following:

“What spaces are required? We have been told nothing about this?”

- School Administrative Manager with more than 20 years’ experience in public education who works in a government primary school in metropolitan NSW.

“We have been discussing the need for Health Hubs, admin/hub coordination roles and WHIN [Wellbeing and Health In-reach Nurse] nurses, but no adjustments have been made yet”

- School Psychologist with less than five years’ experience in public education who works in a government preschool, infants, primary school in regional NSW.

“At the moment we have no information regarding the program so can not comment on what will be needed. Can not believe yet another program is being implemented before the people at the front know what’s going on.”

- School Administrative Manager with more than 20 years’ experience in public education who works in a government primary school in regional NSW.

“None that I know of”

- School Learning Support Officer with more than 20 years’ experience in public education who works in a primary school in regional NSW.

“We don’t know what space will be required, but we currently have therapists working outside in all conditions due to no indoor space being available”.

- School Administrative Manager with more than 20 years’ experience who works in a government primary school in regional NSW.

“Unsure ... but it is very disruptive to the other students when therapists are allowed to be in the classroom”

- School Administrative Manager with 11 to 15 years’ experience in public education who works in a government primary school in regional NSW.

School space and facilities available for additional autism supports

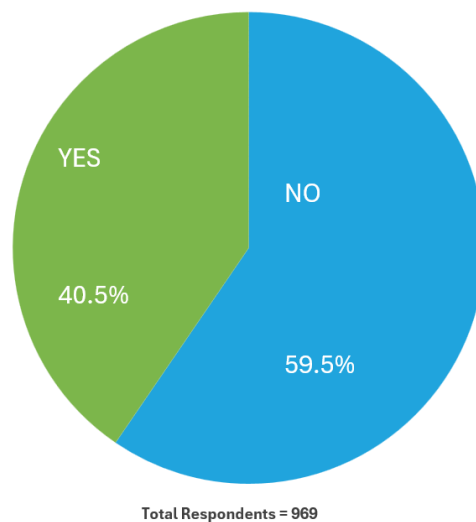


Figure 13. PSA survey respondents were asked if they believe their school has enough space and facilities to accommodate additional supports for children.

SURVEY RESPONSES ON SCHOOLS FUNDING

Almost 84 per cent of respondents (785) said they thought additional funding should be provided to schools.

Asked if the PSA NSW should call for guaranteed additional staffing and funding for public schools to implement Thriving Kids, 98.5 per cent of respondents (915) said yes.

Respondents were also asked about their understanding of the implementation of the 10-year national schools funding agreement, known as The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025-2034.

The majority of respondents (89.3 per cent) said they do not believe that the national funding agreement will ever deliver full funding for public schools.

Asked when they thought the bulk of additional funding would be delivered under the agreement, 41.3 per cent incorrectly said that it would be delivered in the first five years of the new 10-year funding agreement. The remaining 58.7 per cent correctly said the extra funding would not be delivered until the final five years of the 10-year agreement (Figure

14). This suggests some confusion within the public-school community about the timing of the Federal Government's additional funding which is not scheduled to fully flow until the final five years of the agreement.

Expected timing of additional funding under the agreement

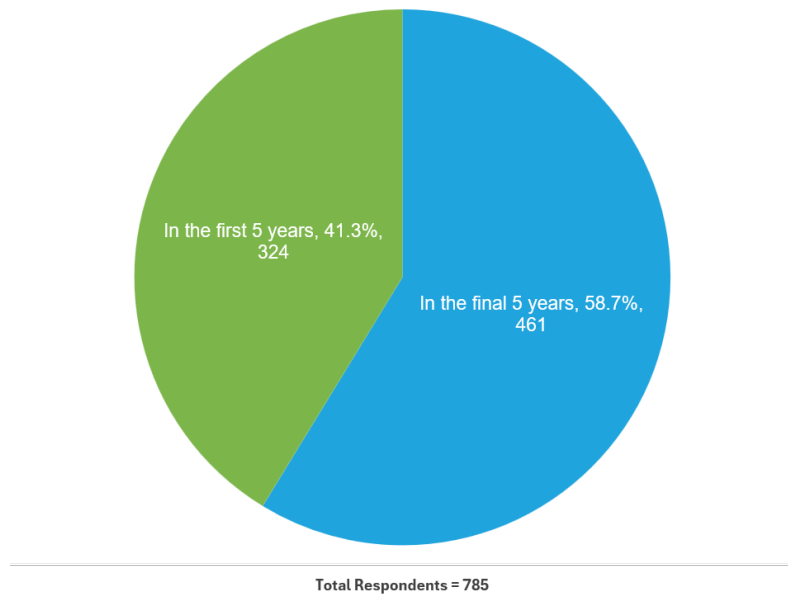


Figure 14. PSA survey respondents were asked when they believe the bulk of additional funding will be delivered under the new 10-year Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025-2034.

Asked if the government timeline was acceptable, 86.9 per cent said no.

Asked if their school receives adequate funding to address student need, 93.5 per cent said no.

When asked if they think the Federal Government should provide capital funding for public schools, 95.7 per cent of respondents said yes.

Asked if the provision of more capital funding for public schools to improve the maintenance and appearance would help increase school enrolments, more than three quarters of respondents (77 per cent) said, yes.

The PSA strongly agrees the Federal Government should take urgent action in response to this call to address growing inequity in the way it funds public schools. While public schools provide high-quality education, their physical appearance may, for some parents, be a deciding factor in whether they enrol their children. This in turn has a direct impact on the level of government funding the school receives.

Asked what the most important action the NSW Government and Commonwealth Government should take to address schools' funding responses included the following:

"Fund more staff to cover the needs of students in NSW"

- General/Farm Assistant with more than 20 years' experience in public education who works in a government primary school in metropolitan NSW.

"Increase significantly. Why do private schools get more funding than public schools?"

- School Administrative Officer who works in a government high school in regional NSW.

"Employ more SLSOs"

- School Learning Support Officer with five to 10 years' experience who works in a government primary school in metropolitan NSW.

"Permanency for workers would be a great start"

- School Learning Support Officer with 11 to 15 years' experience in public education who works for a government primary school in regional NSW.

"More funding for the students who need it"

- School Learning Support Officer (Student Health Support) with 11 to 15 years' experience in public education who works in a government primary school in metropolitan NSW.

"Do not base the funding on student enrolments. That is an archaic system. Needs are so much more now. We are stuck in the same processes of 25 years ago. Admin workload is ridiculous and running an office with an officer and a [Business Manager] BM is ridiculous. All metro schools need to have 2 office staff 5 days plus a [School Administrative Manager] SAM or [Business Manager] BM."

- Business Manager with more than 20 years' experience in public education who works in a government primary school in metropolitan NSW.

“Increase funding to public schools for student support, administrative work loads, maintenance ...increasing the placements for students who need to be in a support unit instead of mainstream.”

- School Administrative Manager with more than 20 years’ experience in public education who works in a in a preschool at a government primary school in metropolitan NSW.

“The most important action the NSW and Commonwealth Governments should take is to ensure that ALL public schools, especially the small schools, are fully funded to meet the needs of every student. Funding should be based on the actual needs of each school and student including additional support for students with disability, learning difficulties and complex needs. Adequate and reliable funding would allow schools to employ more support staff, provide essential resources and give EVERY student the opportunity to receive a quality education regardless of their location or circumstances.... An experienced SLSO is as valuable if not more valuable than a teacher...”

- School Administrative Manager, School Learning Support Officer, Aboriginal Education Officer with more than 20 years’ experience working in public education who works at a government infants and primary school in regional NSW.

Respondents were also asked if they expected the number of students requiring disability support to increase under Thriving Kids. The vast majority 91.4 percent said yes (Figure 15).

Expected increase in students requiring disability support

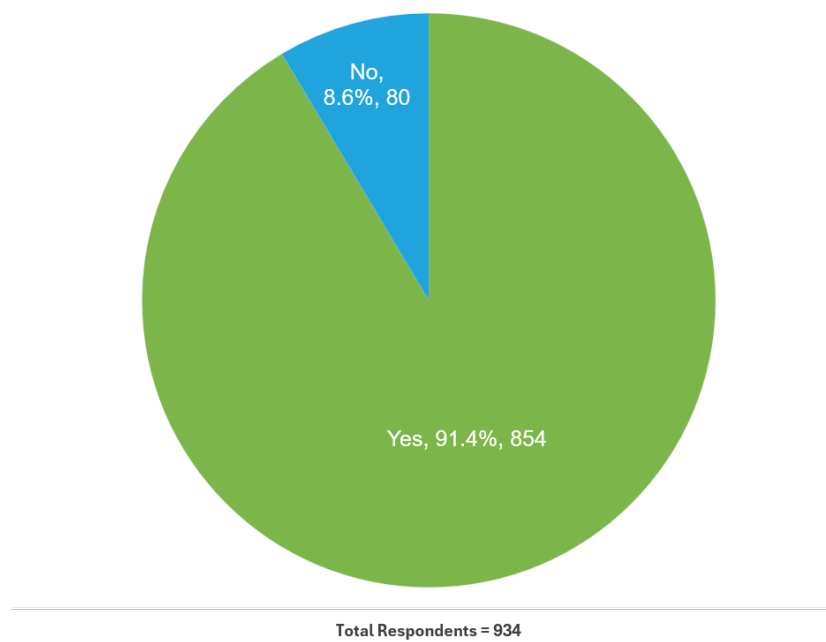


Figure 15. PSA survey respondents asked if they expected an increase in students with disability support needs requiring assistance from October 2026.

PSA members who shared their concerns about already heavy workloads included the following two first-person case studies:

CASE STUDY 1

I am a School Learning Support Officer Student Health Support (SLSO SHS).

This role helps with complex health needs of students at school.

Monday and Tuesday

In my class on Monday and Tuesday we have six students in wheelchairs and in nappies.

We do 15 or more nappy changes a day requiring two staff hoist students to a change bed and then back into their wheelchairs or into therapy equipment which takes at least five minutes per student each time.

We have one student that we have to catheterise and clean their colostomy bag three to four times per day, taking two staff to do this change.

We do 12 tube feeds per day including one that can take up to 10 minutes each feed as we have to prepare the feed first. We do this three times a day.

We have to degas two students before they have their tube feed. This can take up to five minutes each feed on top of doing the feed. We also hand feed two students' morning tea

Therapy

We have four students who use standing frames at school for bone strength and stretching/alternative position.

We do this as often as we can due to time constraints, we aim to get them in three times per week, having to hoist each student into their equipment and ensuring they are in as per their plan, this can take up to 10 minutes per student then after their required time in the standing frame having to then hoist them back into their wheelchair.

We also have a student we put into and out of a therapy bed using a hoist.

The students can also be placed on the floor for some free time to stretch also using a hoist.

To say this all is very time consuming in our day is an understatement, but we do it.

Also going back and forward to the office to pick up our students and dropping them back as with their needs, they come late and leave early.

We have two full-time SLSOH in this class as the needs of the students are very high and time consuming.

Therapists

We have two therapists per student, this can be Speech, Occupational Therapy (OT) or Physiotherapy. This means we work with 12 extra people to get the outcome they want during our workdays.

We have limited the therapy equipment to one piece per student as therapists and parents would like all equipment to be used at school as this makes it easier for parents not to do this at home. This equipment includes standing frames, walkers and therapy beds.

Therapists think that they can come into class and use the SLSO for free in their visits to achieve their programs, but they are charging the parents NDIS to be at school doing the visits. It has to be pointed out that that is not how it works.

We have informed therapists that we cannot do this as we are a school and we also need to achieve the educational outcomes that the department would like us to do.

We have a hydrotherapy pool at our school that we use one day per week.

We have three to four students we have swimming each time each having to be hoisted on to pool bed, changed into swim wear, moved into the pool for them to have a therapy session then after the session, dried, changed then hoisted back into their wheelchairs. We have two students in the water at one time with two staff.

I think this covers most of our day in this class.

Wednesday

I work in our behaviour class on this day we have five male students with mostly autism.

The day can be a volatile day as the daily behaviour of the boys are hitting, kicking screaming, pushing and pinching.

We are aware that the behaviour can escalate very quickly and they need to be given time out in the playground to calm down with a School Learning Support Officer (SLSO) supervising from a safe distance.

We are in and out of the class with different students throughout the day.

We have a class that faces the playground. This helps with the teachers watching us for supervision.

We work on toileting with the students having to do this one at a time, one student is in nappies, and we have to be very careful in his care as his behaviour can escalate without warning and he can attack you by trying to bite your face or arms.

We work on independent feed programs; we have a student that we have to stand with as he will steal other students' food and this will result in the other students reacting.

We also do a swim program with this class we help in the dressing and undressing. We also make sure that each student keeps a safe distance from each other. We also work with behaviour, speech and OT therapists in this class. This can be very interesting as a therapist can give suggestions on behaviour that at no point can we accommodate at school.

Thursday

I work with a more independent class on a cooking program. We cook for the staff and students at the school.

I help with preparing and cooking the food with the students and packing orders.

Also, in this class we have two students with behaviour, so you need to keep an eye on their moods to help regulate their behaviour as they will attack staff and students with time out of the class to calm down.

Later in the day I go out with two classes to the park for community access.

The classes have complex behaviour in most of their students. This involves hitting, kicking, pinching, screaming and attacking staff and students.

You are always watching the students to make sure they are calm or need help to regulate in the community.

We help with toileting and independent feeding program while we are out. We also work with behaviour, speech and OT therapists in these classes.

I move around the school more than most staff as most staff stay in one class all week but due to working for 28 years with the department, I have worked in most areas of the school.

CASE STUDY 2

I have been an SLSO for 14 years. I worked in an SSP setting in the past, however most of my career has been in a support unit setting within a mainstream school.

I transitioned to SLSO SHS (School Learning Support Officer, Student Health Support) in 2017 when the role had been introduced and there was a high need for health care procedures across the five support unit classes.

The class I currently work in has six students, three of them have autism with various learning abilities and behaviours. One of the students is non-verbal so communication can be very difficult especially if he is unfamiliar with the staff or routine. It can be challenging if

the teacher or I am away and a casual is replacing us as behaviours can escalate quickly and unexpectedly. The remaining three students have varied physical needs requiring walking aids and wheelchairs.

Each day I follow a daily health care roster that consists of up to four urinary catheters. Another student requires his airways to be suctioned of fluid which is whenever he is struggling to breathe, sometimes up to six times a day. He needs to be within arm's length of an SLSO SHS at all times in case he requires this procedure. The same student requires a feeding machine to be changed through the day. The feed needs to be prepared, applied to the feeding machine and attached to a catheter which is then attached to the student. He also needs water flushes to be put through his feeding tube manually to stay hydrated.

Other duties that I carry out are nappy changes, bathroom monitoring and assistance as required by certain students that are working on personal independence. Medication administration. General feeding. Maintaining individualised bathroom, HC and feeding registers.

I am on duty four times a day, morning playground or bus duty, recess playground, lunch playground, afternoon bus duty or student monitoring prior to pick up. All these duties are carried out with a teacher.

This is just a general day, and the day's routines and schedules can change at any given time depending on various situations for example students absconding, medical issues such as seizures, helping students with learning equipment along with equipment to support students with physical needs.

All these procedures are being done at all different times of the day sometimes interrupting the lessons that are being delivered by the teacher. When I am in the classroom I am assisting both the teacher and student learning support.

CONCLUSION

Thriving Kids will not successfully meet the needs of the children it aims to support without adequate funding, staffing and infrastructure in NSW public schools.

The Commonwealth and NSW governments must ensure that no child loses access to essential support and that additional responsibilities are not transferred to an already overstretched workforce without the resources, training and consultation required for safe and effective implementation.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1.

- [NDIS Participant dashboards. Quarterly Datasets for Autism](#)

Table 9: Distribution of active participants by reported level of function at 30 June 2026 - Autism and all participants (refer to Note 2)

Reported level of function	Autism	Percentage of all participants with Autism
High	85,626	24%
Medium	197,361	56%
Low	53,421	15%
Missing	14,243	4%
Total	350,651	100%

Appendix 2.

Table 7: Distribution of active participants by State and Territory at 30 June 2026 - Autism and all participants

State/Territory	Autism	Percentage of all participants with Autism
NSW	99,512	28%
VIC	92,677	26%
QLD	76,637	22%
WA	32,341	9%
SA	34,453	10%
TAS	7,209	2%
NT	2,134	1%
ACT	5,635	2%
OT	<50	n/a
Missing	<11	n/a
Total	350,651	100%

Appendix 3.

Reference for 3.1 and 3.2

[BILATERAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN NEW SOUTH WALES AND THE COMMONWEALTH ON SCHOOLS REFORM](#) (2025-2034) p6 and p7.

3.1

Table 2. the Commonwealth's agreed funding shares for NSW's government sector, 2025-2034

Sector	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034
Government	20.00%	20.16%	20.31%	20.63%	21.25%	22.50%	22.81%	23.13%	23.75%	25.00%

3.2

Table 3:

Maximum percentage allowance for non-standard inclusions (share of SRS)										
	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034
Allowable inclusions	4%	3.87%	3.75%	3.5%	3.00%	2%	1.75%	1.5%	1%	0%

Appendix 4.

[Australian Productivity Commission Report on Government Services \(RoGS\) June 2026](#)

4a

NATIONAL DISABILITY BY SCHOOL SECTOR				
Sector	2025	Govt gap	2020	Change since 2020
Government	28.6%	0.0 pp	20.8%	7.8 pp
Catholic	24.3%	4.3 pp	19.1%	5.2 pp
Independent	24.4%	4.2 pp	19.6%	4.8 pp
All schools	27.0%	1.6 pp	20.3%	6.7 pp

[Reference: Table 4A.12, RoGS, Part B, Section 4.](#)

4b**2025 DISABILITY: NSW COMPARED WITH OTHER JURISDICTIONS**

Jurisdiction	All-schools	Difference vs NSW
NSW	27.2%	0.0 pp
Victoria	28.4%	+1.2 pp
Queensland	25.4%	-1.8 pp
Western Australia	24.6%	-2.6 pp
South Australia	30.3%	+3.1 pp
Tasmania	24.3%	-2.9 pp
ACT	25.6%	-1.6 pp
Northern Territory	34.7%	+7.5 pp
Australia	27.0%	-0.2 pp

Reference: Table 4A.12, RoGS, Part B, Section 4.

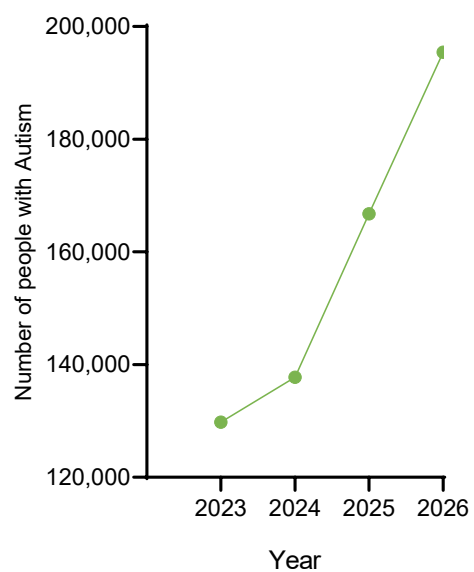
4c**DISABILITY TREND BY SCHOOL SECTOR (NATIONALLY)**

Year	Government	Catholic	Independent	All schools
2020	20.8%	19.1%	19.6%	20.3%
2021	22.6%	20.0%	20.3%	21.8%
2022	23.5%	19.5%	22.4%	22.5%
2023	25.5%	21.8%	21.9%	24.2%
2024	27.2%	23.0%	23.4%	25.7%
2025	28.6%	24.3%	24.4%	27.0%

Reference: Table 4A.12, RoGS, Part B, Section 4.

Appendix 5.

Number of Australian aged 0-14 with Autism



Source: [NDIS Participant dashboards. Quarterly Datasets for Autism](#) including NDIS data from 2022-2026.