

AMAZE

Victorian Autism Education Strategy to make a real difference for every autistic child

Amaze, the peak body for autistic people and their families in Victoria, has welcomed the long-awaited release of Australia's first dedicated Autism Education Strategy unveiled by the Victorian State Government today. Amaze has been calling for a specific targeted strategy for autistic students to improve their education experience and outcomes and has been pleased to work closely with Government to help shape and inform the Victorian Autism Education Strategy (2021-24).

Fiona Sharkie, CEO of Amaze, stated that all eyes are on Victoria with the introduction of this Australian first and its importance.

"Every autistic child has the right to be welcomed, supported, accepted and have the opportunity to thrive at their school," Ms Sharkie said.

"For the past 4 years, Amaze has been advocating for big education reform to deliver a fairer and inclusive education system for autistic students. Today's announcement is a great first step on an important journey to achieve the long-awaited aspiration of true inclusion for autistic students.

"Despite great talents and potential, around one third of autistic students do not make it past Year 10 – with many leaving school even earlier. This can and must change.

"The Victorian Autism Education Strategy and inclusive education reforms should make a significant and meaningful difference for every autistic child and young person in Victoria's government school system.

"The Strategy is both a commitment to autistic students and their families that they won't be left behind, and recognition of the journey ahead to improve their education outcomes."

Amaze recognises the inclusion of many initiatives advocated for by Amaze, including:

- The establishment of a centre of excellence in autism education (the Diverse Learners Hub)
- Autism coaches
- Investment in upskilling school staff
- Expansion of social support for autistic students
- Stronger family-community-school partnerships

Amaze recommends the Victorian Government set clear targets and indicators to track the impact of these reforms. This would ensure there is ongoing commitment to creating inclusive educational environments and transforming the education system for the betterment of all Victorians. There needs to be transparency and accountability.

"Amaze, and the Victorian autistic community, would like to see clear indicators and targets to measure success of this important strategy. By 2024, a key indicator that the Strategy is 'successful' is a substantial



increase in the number of autistic students completing Year 12 and moving into work or further study,” Ms Sharkie added.

“Importantly, families want to see an end to schools discouraging and refusing enrolment of their autistic children, and for unfair suspensions and punitive practices to be a thing of the past.”

The Strategy is underpinned by the Disability Inclusion: Education for All package announced in last week’s Victorian State Budget. Central to the package is the reform of the Program for Students with Disability which provides individual funding for their support at school, plus a new funding allocation for schools build their skills and support for support students with a disability who don’t qualify for individual funding. The majority of autistic students in mainstream government schools fall into this category, and now stand to benefit from new funding for schools to better support them. In total, these new initiatives will double the number of students with disability receiving extra support at school, as well as significant investment in development of school leaders and staff to create a holistic, inclusive education environment.

Amaze looks forward to continuing its work with the Victorian Government and the community in 2020 and beyond, to ensure Education Minister James Merlino’s promise of “education for all, where all means all” is achieved.

-ENDS-

For more information and requests for interviews, please contact:

Alexander Baranikow | M: 0438 838 322 | | E: alexander@royce.com.au

About Amaze

Amaze is the peak body for autistic people and their families in Victoria. Amaze builds understanding, engagement and acceptance of autism, and influences positive systemic change to enable autistic people and their families to participate and contribute to society.