

A Bill for an Act relating to Neurodiversity Education in Schools.

To be enacted by the YMCA Victoria Youth Parliament;

Neurodiversity Education in Schools Bill 2021

A Bill for an Act to establish a Victorian Neurodiversity Educational Body to audit primary and secondary schools on whether or not they are adhering to measures established to improve accessibility for neurodiverse students. Furthermore, the Bill shall develop criteria for compulsory educational resources delivered to education providers in order to ensure that neurodiverse students are supported. The Neurodiversity Educational Body shall also create educational resources for schools who aren't able to do so. Standard policies and procedures shall be set within schools to uphold the requirements of the Neurodiversity Education in Schools Act 2021.

This Bill seeks to address the lack of education for both Victorian students and teachers on neurodiversity. This Bill will endeavour to create more inclusive classrooms that recognise and cater to neurodivergent students and staff. Ultimately, the Neurodiversity Education in Schools Bill 2021 will confront current inadequacies within the Victorian education system surrounding the awareness of neurodiversity for both staff and students. Therefore, this Bill aims to create safer, more accessible learning environments for all in Victorian schools.

PART I—Preliminary

Clause 1 Purpose

The main purposes of this Act are—

- (a) to raise awareness of neurodiversity and what it means to be neuro-diverse;
- (b) to prevent any further ableist discrimination and prejudice;
- (c) to educate young students from primary to secondary schools to be more accepting towards the community;
- (d) to ensure members of the neuro-diverse community feel more safe and included.

Clause 2 Commencement

This Bill shall commence upon receiving assent from the Youth Governor of Victoria.

Clause 3 Definitions

In this Bill, we define the following to mean—

- (a) **neurodiversity** means the variation in the human brain regarding sociability, learning, attention, mood and other mental functions in a non-pathological sense;
- (b) **neurotypical** means a person not displaying or characterised by autistic or other neurologically atypical patterns of thought or behaviour;
- (c) **audit** means an official inspection that will ensure a school is adhering to neurodiverse classroom initiatives;
- (d) **the Body** means a group of members and representatives from Government bodies and neurodiverse organisations that form the Victorian Neurodiversity Educational Body;
- (e) **executive dysfunction** means the range of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional difficulties which often occur as a result of another disorder or a traumatic brain injury. Individuals with executive dysfunction struggle with planning, problem-solving, organisation, and time management;
- (f) **fine motor challenges** means when a child is not able to use their hands and fingers to hold, manipulate, and use objects when the child is at the right age to do these things;
- (g) **sensitivity to their environment**, means the ability of an individual to perceive and process information about their surrounding and or environment;
- (h) **ableist** means discrimination and social prejudice against people with disabilities or people who are perceived to be disabled.

Part II—Establishment

Clause 4 Establish a Victorian Neurodiversity Educational Body

- 4.1 The Body shall be established and contain members from each of the following—
- (a) a representative from the Department of Education;
 - (b) the Minister for Education;
 - (c) the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers;
 - (d) a representative from Neurodiversity Hub;
 - (e) a representative from Inclusive Classrooms;
 - (f) a representative from Council of Professional Teaching Associations of Victoria (CPTAV).
- 4.2 The Body shall have the right to create and deliver external educational programs relating to neurodiversities, including professional development programs.
- 4.3 The Body shall reserve the right to implement compulsory inclusivity measures in classrooms relating to neurodiversities.
- 4.4 The Body shall reserve the right to audit schools without notice.

Clause 5 Implementing a student curriculum

- 5.1 Schools shall educate students on the history of neurodiversity, including—
- (a) past methods of discrimination against the community;
 - (b) the contributions of significant neurodiverse individuals in the past;
 - (c) the science behind neurodiversity, bringing down negative stereotypes.
- 5.3 Students shall be informed on how to appropriately behave in relationships and interact with neurodiverse individuals.
- 5.4 Students shall understand that neurotypical students may learn in a varied way from those who are neurodiverse.

Clause 6 Professional development programs on neurodiversity

- 6.1 Professional development programs shall target education providers and facilitators in primary and secondary schools and will consist of five priority actions—
- (a) providing and valuing relationships—
 - (i) neurodiverse students shall be heard and seen by teachers and peers;
 - (ii) teachers shall create meaningful relationships with neurodiverse students by being empathetic, respectful and active listeners;

- (iii) teachers shall actively facilitate relationships between students and intervene in the event of bullying;
- (b) developing agency—
 - (i) teachers shall aim to provide choice and flexibility for neurodivergent students such as choosing their own book to read or choosing between different activities;
 - (ii) teachers shall also create goals with neurodiverse students in order to enable students to identify their own strengths and weaknesses;
 - (iii) teachers shall regularly monitor progress with students;
- (c) supporting students to understand and manage their own behaviour—
 - (i) the appropriate behaviour of all students shall be consistently reinforced;
 - (ii) teachers shall set behaviour goals with students to help allow them to understand and manage their own behaviour;
- (d) creating inclusive environments—
 - (i) teachers shall make adaptations to the learning environment to reduce sensory overstimulation;
 - (ii) the learning environment shall consist of a routine that is predictable and structured;
- (e) embedding inclusive teaching strategies—
 - (i) teachers shall present information to neurodiverse students in multiple ways that align with their strengths and interests;
 - (ii) suitable technology implementation such as speech to text technology and alternative keyboards.

Clause 7 Initiatives to make classrooms more inclusive

- 7.1 Schools shall recognise the abilities of members of the neuro-diverse community.
- 7.2 Schools and teachers shall actively promote and undertake inclusivity measures for students with neurodiversities, executive dysfunction, fine motor challenges, sensitivity to their environment and challenges with social situations.
 - (a) schools shall recognise the privileges of neurotypical individuals compared to those who are neuro-diverse;
 - (b) provide specific, explicit instructions for organising information and completing assignments;

- (c) give clear written plans of assignments;
- (d) provide detailed schedules;
- (e) have a clear and predictable class routine;
- (f) provide printed or online accessible notes;
- (g) allow the use of laptops or other voice-activated technology to take notes;
- (h) provide quieter testing environment;
- (i) allow the use of headphones to block out sounds during an exam;
- (j) allow for sensory or comfort items (e.g., a fidget toy);
- (k) provide explicit instructions on how to work in groups;
- (l) provide additional options for class participation such as using technology.

Clause 8 Regular Audits

- 8.1 Every two years, the Body shall randomly audit primary and secondary schools to ensure that they are adhering to measures established by the Victorian Neurodiversity Educational Body.
- 8.2 The Body shall obtain feedback from students and teachers on initiatives that have been implemented in schools.
- 8.3 The Body shall observe a classroom environment and review a school's Strategic Plan to ensure that initiatives surrounding neurodiversity are being implemented.