

# Media Release

The Hon James Merlino MP

Deputy Premier

Minister for Education

Minister for Mental Health



Thursday, 3 December 2020

## NEW STRATEGY TO BETTER SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH AUTISM

Autistic students will get more support in schools and more tailored assistance with their education through an Australian-first strategy launched by the Andrews Labor Government.

Minister for Education James Merlino launched the Autism Education Strategy today as part of the Labor Government's nearly \$1.6 billion Disability Inclusion investment to transform funding and support for students with a disability in Victorian government schools.

More than \$19 million will be provided through the Strategy to better meet the educational needs and aspirations of autistic students in Victorian government schools, while supporting their families and teachers.

The flagship initiative of the strategy is the establishment of a new Diverse Learners Hub. The hub will deliver expert coaching and professional learning for department and school staff, to drive cultural change in how schools support children with autism and create learning environments that help them thrive.

In addition to the hub, there will be a range of new and expanded resources and initiatives to support autistic students rolling out from the 2021 school year, including:

- increased professional development opportunities for school staff, including support for school staff to undertake postgraduate studies in inclusive education with an autism focus
- mentoring for autistic students through the I CAN Schools program to provide targeted emotional and social support
- resources to promote a supportive and inclusive approach at schools and prevent bullying of students with disabilities, including autistic students
- partnerships with key autism advocacy organisations to develop resources and tools for autistic students and their families to work in partnership with their school.

The strategy was developed in close collaboration with key stakeholders, including experts, researchers, autism advocacy organisations, and autistic students and their families.

The strategy delivers on a Labor Government commitment to develop an education strategy for autistic students in response to a recommendation of the 2017 Parliamentary Inquiry into Services for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

The Labor Government also released the Victorian Autism Plan last year, which sets out actions to provide autistic Victorians greater opportunities for choice and community participation, backed by \$7.1 million in funding.

### Quote attributable to Minister for Education James Merlino

*"This strategy will deliver the individual attention and support students with autism need to succeed at school. The strategy – together with the new Disability Inclusion reforms – will guide our work to develop more inclusive schools where all students get a great education."*

### Quote attributable to Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers Luke Donnellan

*"It's so important that our education system is able to build greater understanding and inclusion for Victorian autistic students and this strategy will support this."*

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