

The ISP Guidelines Series

No. 2 Including children with high support needs alongside their typically developing peers

Purpose of IDF Subsidy

The **IDF Subsidy for an Additional Educator** provides funding to centre-based services to subsidise the employment of an Additional Educator to increase the educator-to-child ratio in the care environment. This supports the inclusion of children with ongoing high support needs with typically developing same age peers. Educators work as a team, including the Additional Educator, to meet the needs of all children within the care environment.

Immediate/Time Limited Support provides funding to enable a centre-based service to employ an Additional Educator to address an immediate barrier to the inclusion of a child with high support needs within a care environment, alongside their typically developing same age peers. This support is for a limited period of time and aims to support services to include a child while alternative solutions are determined to support the child's ongoing inclusion.

What this means in practice

Practice 1: Children with high support needs are included in care environments with typically developing same age peers

In most early childhood services children are grouped in care environments based on their chronological age. The Inclusion Support Programme aims to assist services to reduce or remove barriers to inclusion to enable children with additional needs to access and participate in early childhood and child care (ECCC) services alongside their peers.

When deciding which care environment a child will attend, the service considers the child's age and where other children of that age are attending. For instance, if a child with high support needs is aged 3 years and 6 months old, the service places the child in the care environment where the other children of this age are also attending. Where services group children differently, such as family grouping, the service ensures that the child with high support needs is attending a care environment in line with the policy and practice they use for all children.

Children with high support needs should not commence or remain in a care environment based on their current abilities, such as their physical, social, emotional, language or cognitive development. It is not up to the child to further develop or change, in order to be included in a care environment with their peers. It is the role of educators to provide a learning environment to meet the developmental needs, interests and experiences of each child attending the care environment, as per the National Quality Standards.

Practice 2: All children are transitioned to new care environments with their same age peers, regardless of their abilities or barriers to inclusion identified.

The service and/or family may have concerns or fears about a child with high support needs changing care environments. It is important that educators and families have the opportunity to talk through any concerns they have. When children move with their peers into new care environments, there may be new and different barriers to inclusion, such as different equipment and resources, and educator-to-child ratios. Like all transitions, big and small, it can be both challenging and exciting, and requires thought and planning.

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The IP can assist educators, families and other professionals to understand the benefits and importance of children being able to play and learn alongside their same age peers. The IDF Subsidy can provide additional support to help educators to provide a smooth transition for the child and family. The IDF Subsidy may be needed for a short term to help educators make adjustments to their practices and the environment, or longer term to help educators implement the strategies outlined in their Strategic Inclusion Plan (SIP), to remove or reduce the barriers to inclusion.

Questions to ask

To help educators to reflect on the service's practices in relation to inclusion of children with high support needs, consider the following questions:

❖ Service practices

When deciding which care environment a child with high support needs should attend, think about - where are all the other children of this age? If this child did not have a disability or developmental delay, which care environment would they attend?

What is the practice at our service in relation to when children move to an older age group? Is this practice different for children with high support needs?

❖ Educators and families

What may be the concerns of educators and families about children with high support needs changing care environments? What support and advice may assist?

Do educators provide a program which considers the developmental needs, interests and experiences of each child attending, or is the program based on our expectations of what children of this age should be doing, knowing or be interested in?

❖ Children

What might it feel like for the child with high support needs, and what messages might the child receive, when they are not included in a care environment with their same age peers?

What messages do we give to all children if a child with high support needs remains in a care environment with younger children?

Assessment and outcome of applications for IDF Subsidy

The Inclusion Development Fund Manager (IDFM) must assess whether a child with high support needs is being included in a care environment with typically developing same age peers. This is fundamental to the assessment of every application.

The IDFM may return an application to the service, via the IS Portal online system, for further information and clarification. This may relate to the ages of children in the care environment where the IDF Subsidy is currently being requested, and the service's practices regarding the inclusion of children with high support needs with their typically developing same age peers.

If a child included in an application for IDF Subsidy is not in a care environment with their typically developing same age peers, the application for funding cannot be approved.

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Further information and clarification

Outside School Hours Care Services

Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services generally include children who attend primary school and are grouped within one care environment. If children are separated into care environments based on their age, children with high support needs should also be included on this basis. Sometimes a service may be including a child who is older than 13 years of age and meets the requirements for an exemption to be eligible for Child Care Subsidy. In these circumstances where opportunity does not exist within an OSHC service for a child with high support needs to be included alongside their typically developing same age peers, the merits of the application will be considered by the IDFM.

Specialist services

Services specifically designed to meet the needs of children with ongoing high support needs are considered specialist services. By their nature, these services have the inherent capacity and capability to include children with high support needs, and additionally do not provide the opportunity for children to be included with their typically developing peers. Specialist services are therefore not eligible for assistance under the Inclusion Support Programme (ISP).

References

Inclusion Support Programme Guidelines 2016-17 to 2018-19

The Guide to the National Quality Framework (NQF) Operational Requirements (February 2018), Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)