Decision-Making Regarding Adjustments for Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Classrooms

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Abstract

The aim of the current study was to examine how decisions are made and who is involved in decision-making regarding provision of adjustments for students with special educational needs in Australian mainstream schools. A total of 107 stakeholders were interviewed across 22 schools. Participation in decision-making varied, with students the least likely to be involved. There was variation in the degree and nature of collaboration and the degree to which decisions were subject to review. The focus of decision-making processes also varied, with some schools focusing on funding and resource allocation and others on broader support considerations. Schools used a range of formal and informal levels of decision-making but the degree to which they agreed on factors that underpinned decisions (values, legal considerations, etc.) was variable and sometimes limited. Possible explanations for the observed patterns of decision-making are offered, practical implications considered and directions for future research outlined.

Keywords: special educational needs; decision-making; adjustments; mainstream schools
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Inclusion has been defined as “successfully meeting students learning needs regardless of culture, language, cognition, gender, gifts and talents, ability or background” (Carter and Abawi 2018, p. 50). Fulfilling this ideal requires schools and staff to both re-envision the way they utilise resources, enact pedagogies and remove factors that exclude or marginalise students including those with special educational needs. Internationally, school systems have increasingly focused on the provision of appropriate supports to facilitate inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms (Amor et al. 2019). For example, in Australia schools are required to make reasonable adjustments to educational programs so that students with disabilities may access education on the same basis as other students (Australian Government Department of Education n.d.a).

Internationally, a variety of terminology (e.g., differentiation, adjustments, adaptations, accommodations) is used to describe changes made and supports implemented to meet student’s specific needs (Harrison et al. 2013). In Australia, the term “adjustments” is used generically to refer to changes to curriculum, instruction and other forms of support (e.g., personal care assistance, behaviour support) that is used to facilitate access to mainstream education for students with special educational needs.

To promote equity of access for students with special education needs, governments provide schools with additional funds. In Australia, the Commonwealth Government provides individual states, including the state of New South Wales (NSW), with funding based on the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD). To be eligible to receive NCCD needs-based funding, students must meet a broad legislative definition of disability and be receiving adjustments at school (Education Services Australia n.d.). However, a diagnosis is not required. In NSW, this funding is pooled with the state
contribution, which is then distributed to government schools through the Resource Allocation Model (NSW Department of Education 2019). In addition, there are two main funding programs for students with disability in mainstream classes. The Low Level Adjustment for Disability (NSW Department of Education n.d.) is an equity loading allocated to all mainstream schools to provide adjustment for students with disability, without the need for a formal diagnosis. This includes a specialist teacher allocation and flexible funding allocation. Integration Funding Support (NSW Department of Education 2020a) is targeted for students with a confirmed disability diagnosis who demonstrate additional learning and support needs.

While the funding formula is complex, schools in NSW have a high degree of autonomy in how they utilise funds to support students (NSW Department of Education 2019). Principals are ultimately responsible for decisions regarding resourcing of adjustments, but they are assisted by staff within the school, including the school learning and support team. School leaders can decide to use these funds for a variety of purposes including providing additional teacher time, resources or release time so that teachers may engage in training, development or coordination activities (NSW Department of Education and Training 2018; NSW Department of Education and Training n.d.). Despite this, research suggests that school leaders choose to use the bulk of funding to employ teaching assistants (see Graham and Spandagou 2011; Shaddock, Smyth King, and Giorcelli 2007; Stephenson and Carter 2014). This is concerning given the limited evidence for the effectiveness of teaching assistants in supporting desired outcomes (Giangreco, Suter, and Doyle 2010) and the suggestion that reliance on teaching assistants may discourage the use of alternative adjustments (Shaddock, Smyth King, and Giorcelli 2007).

There is little research about how school-based decision-making processes occur regarding adjustments for students with disabilities (Giangreco et al. 2004). While some
interventions have been trialled to improve school decision-making or planning for students with disabilities (e.g., Carter et al. 2009), investigation of extant decision-making processes has been limited. Sulek, Trembath, Paynter, and Keen (2019) conducted a small and narrowly focussed qualitative study of factors considered in decisions regarding instructional strategies for children with ASD in their first year in Australian schools. Other researchers interested in pedagogy have focussed on the moment by moment decision-making used by teachers in classrooms, by observing individual lessons and then conducting debriefing interviews with the educators (e.g., Ho and Liu 2015; Lawson and Jones 2018; Stough and Palmer 2003). Williamson and McLeskey (2011) examined the use of problem-solving teams to assist mainstream teachers in decision-making in the USA. However, rather than focusing on decision-making per se, they examined benefits, barriers and features of meetings that contributed to productivity. Todd et al. (2019) also examined problem solving in team meetings but focussed primarily on behavioural support strategies used in schools, rather than broader adjustments implemented for specific students. Other researchers have also focused on narrow and specific aspects of decision-making, such as determining testing accommodations (e.g., Destefano, Shriner, and Lloyd 2001; Pasternak 2017); use of data to inform decision-making (e.g., Espin et al. 2017); teacher perspectives on evidence-based practices in decision-making (e.g., Greenway et al. 2013); family and student involvement in decisions (e.g., Hess, Molina, and Kozleski 2006; McKay 2014; Miller et al. 2019); decision-making regarding educational placement (e.g., Becker, Paternite, and Evans 2014) and decision-making of school-based therapists (Clough 2019). Others have examined the extent to which teachers were or desired to be involved in broader decisions such as those related to academic affairs, student affairs and faculty personnel (Wu and Tseng 2000). Thus, while researchers have examined very specific aspects of decision-making regarding adjustments, often from the view of a single stakeholder, very little research has examined school level
decisions from the perspective of multiple stakeholders involved in the process. More specifically, there appears to be no research in the Australian context that substantively examines who is involved in school decisions regarding accommodations for students with special educational needs, how they are involved, the range of factors considered in decision-making or the processes involved.

There are a number of conceptual approaches that could be used to examine school decision-making processes. Classical decision-making theory has tended to focus on choice processes, based on the assumption that individuals will tend to act rationally and evaluate all available options (Robinson and Donald 2015; Zsambok 1997). This approach has been criticized on a number of grounds, specifically, that it focuses on simplified laboratory-based decision-making, is based on unrealistic assumptions, and does not match decision-making processes in real-life contexts, where ambiguity, uncertainty and time pressures often complicate the process (Cook and Cook 2004; Klein 2008; Robinson and Donald 2015). The natural decision-making approach (NDM; Klein 2008) provides an alternative framework for considering how schools make decisions regarding the amount and type of support provided to students with disabilities. It is important to note that NDM is an approach to examining decision-making in natural contexts rather than a specific theory per se. Research on NDM has often focused on analysis of high stakes decision-making of experts where response time is limited and rapid action is required (e.g., medicine, emergency responders). This research has provided considerable insights into processes that underpin decisions (see Shan and Yang 2017). Although time pressure may not always be an issue in decision-making regarding students with special educational needs, it seems probable that these decisions are complicated by other factors such as ill-defined goals, ambiguous or incomplete information, conflicting expectations from parents and teachers, and the likelihood of changing conditions. More importantly, the NDM approach has been successfully applied to explain better
decision-making by experts in contexts that did not involve time-sensitive decisions (Ramiah and Banks 2015).

Robinson and Donald (2015) and Robinson (1998) present Nickles’s (1981) constraint inclusion theory as an approach to examining school decision-making. They argue that problem solving is framed by the problem to be solved, goals to be achieved, and the constraints that define an acceptable solution. Robinson and Donald (2015) provide an example of the potential utility of a NDM methodological approach and constraint inclusion theory to the examination of implementation of curriculum innovation in a New Zealand school. They provide insights into a number of constraints that affect school decision-making, including the need to avoid possible conflict, which limit opportunities to openly discuss the proposed change.

In the context of decision-making regarding the allocation of school resources, goals may be multifaceted and include considerations such as meeting the educational needs of the student with special educational needs while also maintaining classroom functionality. Problems may occur if goals to be achieved are based on differing perceptions of the “problem” to be solved. Alternatively, it is possible that specific goals may lack definition, compete with each other, or shift. Constraints impacting decision-making for students with special educational needs may include such factors as values and beliefs of parents, school leaders and staff regarding acceptable options; availability of resources; and the expertise available, which may affect which options are considered. Although both goals and constraints provide a starting point for decision-making, it is also important to consider the actual process undertaken to make a decision, including who is involved, the degree to which responsibility for decisions is shared, the range of factors considered and the weighting given to each of these factors.
One study (Carter et al. 2020) has provided insight into the types of goals and adjustments selected for students with special educational needs by school teams. In a study of 22 schools across NSW, they reported that approximately one-third of schools focused exclusively, or near exclusively, on care, safety, social participation in school life, behaviour and risk management, task-related behaviour or happiness. Correspondingly, these schools often utilized adjustments with a narrow focus. This contrasted with the remaining schools, which had a broader focus on a number of areas including academic skills and social skills as well as education and care. Additionally, in the majority of schools, stated educational goals for students tended to be unclear or non-specific and one-to-one teaching assistant time was used extensively. While this study did provide information on the types of adjustments employed, it did not offer any insight into the processes by which decisions were made.

There are significant reasons to consider that adjustments, in particular over-reliance on teaching assistants, used in mainstream classrooms may not always be optimal (Blatchford et al. 2009; Giangreco 2010; Giangreco and Broer 2007; Giangreco 2013; Giangreco, Suter, and Doyle 2010; Webster and Blatchford 2015; Webster and De Boer 2019) and this suggests that stake-holders may not consider all possible options. Understanding the processes by which decisions are made and evaluated, as well as the constraints on decision-making, is important to determining whether the decisions made are resulting in the most effective use of supports. Without information about how decisions are currently being made, it is difficult to develop the necessary processes to support school communities in making more judicious decisions for students with special educational needs. A greater understanding of the decision-making process, and the options considered when planning adjustments for students with disabilities, has the potential to lead to more efficient use of school resources, improved student outcomes and increased independence for students with special educational needs.
There has been limited application of NDM to educational contexts, with exceptions being the work of Robinson and Donald (2015) and Cook and Cook (2004). Further, there is limited research on how schools make decisions for students with special educational needs with regard to instruction and resource allocation as well as examining who is involved in these decisions. The data presented in the current paper are based on a larger research project addressing types of adjustments provided (Carter et al. 2020) and decision-making in NSW schools. The present paper focuses specifically on decision-making within schools. The broad research questions were:

1. Who is involved in decision-making with regard to providing adjustments for students?
2. How are decisions made in schools with regard to providing adjustments for students?

Method

Ethics

The research was approved by the research committees of the universities involved as well as the NSW Department of Education. All participants gave informed consent to participate in the research and had the option to withdraw at any point without consequence. Pseudonyms are used to refer to individuals who took part.

Research Design

A primarily qualitative design was employed with semi-structured interviews conducted with multiple participants from each school.

Theoretical Approach

The study drew on the methodological approach of NDM and constraint inclusion theory (Nickles 1981) to develop detailed descriptions of the factors considered in decision-making and the reasoning of participants in a naturalistic context. Analysis-related constraints
(those things participants see as the conditions determining acceptable resource provision),
actions (the actual practices around resource provision), and consequences (both intended and
unintended) were examined in order to establish an understanding of the processes involved.

**Recruitment**

Principals of 800 randomly selected schools in NSW, Australia were approached by
e-mail via the NSW Department of Education. All schools had at least one child who was
receiving the highest levels of support (substantial or extensive adjustments) under the
Australian Government National Collection of Consistent Data (NCCD) process (Australian
Government Department of Education 2019), but did not have a designated special education
class. Schools with special education classes were excluded to ensure that participants
specifically focused on students being supported in mainstream classes. Principals of the 22
schools who agreed to participate were asked to identify a student with a special educational
needs who received substantial or extensive adjustments and was enrolled in mainstream
classes (focus student). Under the NCCD, substantial adjustments occur for students on most
days and at most times, may involve extra support across multiple areas of the curriculum and
regular specialist advice (Australian Government Department of Education 2019). The
highest level of support involves extensive adjustments, including targeted support at all
times and extensive specialist staff involvement (Australian Government Department of
Education 2019). Principals were asked to nominate key stakeholders (i.e., school staff,
parents and students) involved in decision-making around this focus student. Following a
school’s expression of willingness to participate, all participants were provided with an
informed consent form explaining that their participation was voluntary and they could
withdraw from the research at any point without consequence.

**Participants**
Eighteen primary schools and four secondary schools participated with 15 classified as metropolitan and the remaining classified as inner regional (n=3) or outer regional (n=5). The proportion of primary and secondary schools and geographic distribution approximated that of the state as a whole. Schools varied in size from less than 50 students to more than 1000 students.

A total of 107 stakeholders consented to participate in interviews with the number of participants varying from three to six ($M = 5$) per school. This included a parent or carer for the focus student at each school, 20 mainstream teachers, 18 principals (including two teaching principals), 16 learning support teachers, 14 school counsellors, eight teacher assistants, seven other executive staff members, one itinerant teacher vision, and one student.

Focus students were enrolled in grades 1-11 (mean grade = 4). Students ranged from those with typical intellectual ability to students who were non-verbal. For reasons of confidentiality, participants provided information regarding the level of NCCD adjustment afforded to the student with 13 receiving substantial adjustments and eight receiving extensive adjustments. The level of adjustment for one student was unclear as participants provided contradictory information. In addition, parents provided information on diagnosis. Many students had multiple diagnoses (range 1-3) with autism spectrum disorder being the most common (n=11), followed by ADHD (n=6), visual impairment (n=5) and Down syndrome (n=3). The proportion of children with cognitive, physical and social/emotional disabilities was similar to the state average (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2018), but the proportion with sensory disability was higher (16% compared to 3% as the main diagnosis for the state).

**Interview Development and Pilot Testing**
The interview schedule was piloted with three volunteer participants (parent, teacher and principal) and refined based on their feedback. The sections of the interview relevant to the present paper included three focus areas:

- Who was involved in decision-making?
- Factors considered in making decisions for the specific student.
- The process of decision-making.

Slightly different versions of the interview were developed for teaching staff, executive staff and families. For example, the demographic background for school staff included a question about whether they had received any training on the Disability Discrimination Act and this was not asked of the family or student. However, each protocol covered the same basic elements. A simplified version of the interview was developed for students given that individuals with a potentially wide range of ages and abilities would take part.

At the commencement of the interview it was stated that the researchers were interested in learning about how decisions were made with regard to adjustments/supports for the student this year as well as the specific adjustments and supports that were provided. Participants were informed that there might be some repetition and there were no right or wrong answers. In order to minimize the risk of leading, participants were asked general questions around each focus area, followed by more detailed probe questions if needed. The part of the interview relevant to the current analysis was a general question about the decision-making process “Can you describe how the decisions about the specific supports and adjustments provided for [NAME] were made?” This was followed by a series of more directive probe questions that, where appropriate, were used to fill in any gaps.

The probe questions included questions about whether meetings were held and what happened at these meetings, who was involved and how they were involved in the decision-making process, whether participants had equal input or if not, who had the greatest input to
decisions, and what information was used in decision-making. Broad questions were then asked regarding options for supports/adjustments that were considered, options that were accepted and why, and options that were considered but rejected and why they were rejected. Probe questions were used to prompt participants to fill in any gaps. For both accepted and rejected adjustments, respondents were asked whether specific factors were considered in making adjustments (e.g., existing school practices, school values, funding issues, preferences of school staff, preferences of the family, etc.). Interviewers had the discretion to clarify or explore relevant issues raised by participants in greater depth as appropriate. At the end of the interview, stakeholders were asked if they had any further comments and to provide relevant demographic information. In addition, the interviews addressed the nature of specific adjustments, goals for students and monitoring of adjustments, and these results are presented elsewhere (Carter et al. 2020). Copies of the interview protocol are available from the first author on request.

**Procedures**

Interviews were conducted by trained research assistants. Two of the assistants had doctorates in psychology and the third had a Masters in Cross-Cultural Communication. All had extensive research experience, particularly interviewing research participants. Approximately 52% of the interviews were conducted in person with the remaining interviews conducted by phone. The mean length of interviews was 41 minutes. Interviews were transcribed and sent to interviewees to be checked for accuracy and to enable corrections, clarifications or additional comments to be added.

**Data Analysis**

Due to the complexity and quantity of data, analysis was conducted in three phases. Coding in the first round was guided by the main research questions and a semantic approach was taken with a focus on explicit or surface meaning (Braun and Clarke 2006). In the latter
two rounds, the focus shifted to synthesis and development of broader interpretive themes. The approach taken was primarily qualitative in that we were principally interested in exploring and gaining a detailed understanding of decision-making processes. Nevertheless, there were some consistent patterns across schools and participants (as well as some inconsistencies) and these broad patterns were summarised numerically where relevant. The coding process took approximately 15 months.

**Stage one: Preliminary coding.** All transcripts were placed in NVivo 11 (QSR International 2015) and, guided by the research questions, a preliminary coding framework was developed. This framework was trialled with three schools by the research assistant working on the project and each of these transcripts was then double coded by one of the investigators. Agreement was calculated on a sentence-by-sentence basis and was 91%. Several adjustments were made to the coding structure based on this initial examination and the research assistant then proceeded to code all schools.

**Stage two: General theme codebook development.** Each of the first three investigators examined one school per week to assist in the identification of general themes for the codebook. The developing codebook was reviewed between all investigators on a weekly basis with general themes discussed and progressively refined.

**Stage three: Final coding.** In the final stage of coding, the general theme framework was applied to all schools. Initially, three schools were separately coded by each of the first three named investigators to assist in clarifying and further refining codes. The investigators then met to discuss coding and present supporting evidence with regard to the key themes. The researchers then independently coded remaining schools, approximately one per week. All investigators met each week to discuss coding, present supporting evidence for their codes where appropriate and discuss any issues that arose.

**Credibility**
A number of approaches were taken to enhance credibility. During the collection of interviews, participants were presented with broad general questions prior to more specific questions. This approach was taken to minimize the risk of leading. In addition, where appropriate, a distinction was made between "volunteered" answers to general questions and "elicited" responses to more specific probe questions. For example, general questions about what adjustment options were selected and why they were accepted was coded as “volunteered” while more specific follow-up probe questions (e.g., were specific factors such as funding issues and school values considered in the decision) were coded as “elicited”. In the analysis stage, researchers actively sought disconfirming evidence in the form of alternative explanations or counterexamples, in an attempt to minimize the risk of confirmation bias (Robinson and Donald 2015). For example, in the final coding, codes were developed to include alternative options (e.g., agreement on joint decision-making, disagreement on joint decision-making) and coders actively looked for examples of both options. Codes and themes were discussed between researchers to ensure consistent definitions and interpretation. In addition, participants were asked to check the accuracy of transcripts and provide clarification if appropriate.

**Consistency of Factual Information**

Factual information was cross checked between participants within each school (Robinson and Donald 2015) to evaluate the degree of agreement. Consistency of views of participants was examined using the matrix function in NVivo. Relevant information provided by participants (i.e., who was involved in decision-making, factors considered in decision-making) was cross referenced. Percentage agreement is descriptive and directly interpretable (McHugh 2012) so was preferred to Cohen’s Kappa. Percentage agreement was calculated by dividing the actual agreements across participants by the total possible
agreements. When a stakeholder was not available for a given student (e.g., no teacher assistant was included) these data were excluded from this calculation.

Results

Stakeholders in Decision-Making

Based on the total sample, the number of stakeholders involved in decision-making is provided in Table 1. More than 90% of participants reported all relevant team members were involved with decision-making with the exception of the learning support teacher (68% participants reporting involvement) and student (60%). Agreement matrices generated from NVivo indicated that across participants at each school, the mean level of agreement regarding stakeholders who were involved in decision-making was 88% (range 78% - 100%).

Factors Considered in Decision-Making

When asked, respondents spontaneously nominated only a limited number of factors that influenced decision-making. On average, only four factors were mentioned spontaneously (range 0-12) per participant. Factors most frequently mentioned related to matching the student’s needs and abilities (76% of respondents), funding issues (52%), advice from external professionals (39%) and family preferences (34%). Funding issues were often mentioned in relation to perceived limitations in available teacher assistant time.

In follow-up probe questions, interviewees were presented with a list of possible factors and asked whether these influenced decision-making for the focus student. These data are presented in Table 2. This elicited a much larger range of responses with over 80% of participants confirming that child data, matching student needs and abilities, family preferences, teacher knowledge, and existing school practices all influenced their decisions. It was noted that the “child data” discussed by participants primarily referred to external professional reports (e.g., medical, diagnostic), and IQ assessments (usually conducted by the school counsellor). Some participants also reported they referred to observational data
collected by school staff in decision-making. On average, participants each reported that 12 factors (range 0 – 20) influenced their decisions. The mean level of agreement across participants at each school, as calculated in the agreement matrices in NVivo, was 63% (range 50% - 84%).

Probes about influencing factors did not specifically include a question regarding commitment to inclusion. However, when asked about influencing factors, participants in one-third of schools did discuss a belief in inclusion or inclusive practice, indicating this acted as a motivating factor in their decision. Moreover, where a commitment to inclusion was discussed, it was typically mentioned by multiple respondents. For example, the support teacher in school 17 commented that “the best thing you want in the world is an all inclusive school. That’s my ideal school …”. This comment was echoed by the principal and classroom teacher. In School 19, the principal stated, “… we’re committed to making this a school for everyone and regardless of where they come from or disabilities, abilities that they have”. This view was reiterated by the classroom teacher.

In contrast, respondents in other schools commented that focus students may not have been appropriately placed in a regular classroom and offered their belief that these students would benefit from more restrictive placement. For example, the learning support teacher from school 9 commented “I'm really, really concerned. I'm concerned that, if she isn't placed in a more suitable educational setting, if there is one, because we're doing our best here, but I'm not sure.” The support teacher at school 15 noted:

My opinion, looking at his case, is that this mainstream environment is particularly difficult for him and in the future I would love to start gathering data and information to support him maybe accessing a more appropriate environment, where he can be a little more settled and start to succeed.

The parent also noted her concerns:
Well I know that they want to put him into a class for children like him – a special education class because in the mainstream he struggles a lot because there are so many children and they can’t spend all their time with him.

**Thematic Analysis of Decision-Making Processes**

Data analysis revealed a number of themes related to decision-making processes undertaken by schools. These included a combination of formal and informal processes in decision-making, the extent to which decision-making was collaborative, the focus of decisions, fluid and static processes, and rejected options. These will now be addressed in turn.

**Combination of formal and informal processes.** Almost all respondents described decision-making as involving both formal processes (e.g., planning meetings) and informal processes (e.g., opportunistic discussions between parents and teachers at pick-up). Respondents in approximately half of the schools provided clear and agreed descriptions of making decisions regarding adjustments in a dedicated meeting or meetings. For example, the principal from school 2 noted “So at the beginning of the year, we held meetings between the school counsellor, the parents and myself, and also with [learning support teachers] contributing. We had an assessment completed by the school counsellor.” The use of formal decision-making meetings was confirmed by other school staff members and the parent. Respondents also described undertaking decision-making in other types of formal school meetings where limited stakeholders were involved and which were not specifically held to make decisions about adjustments and support for the focus student. Almost all schools reported decisions made in these types of formal meetings. For example, in school 5 the learning and support team meeting coordinator noted:

So our learning support team meets every Tuesday morning and Gary would regularly be brought up maybe two to three times in the year and discussed at that level. So
basically we invite Janene [CLASS TEACHER] along to report on how he is going and then that gets minuted through our teams.

Participants also described using less formal decision-making processes, which included informal meetings between limited stakeholders (e.g., parent and teacher at pick-up, teacher assistants and teacher in staff room). For example, the head teacher at school 20 noted, “… we are also seeing one of Rose’s parents every morning when they bring her to school. And often there’s conversations around Rose’s programs at that time as well.” The classroom teacher from school 11 offered a similar comment explaining:

Also, in terms of meeting, I meet with the SLSO [teacher assistant] who works with Owen in the morning before I start school, and we talk about what he’ll be doing in literacy and maths, and throughout the day, and any changes in behaviour.

Another form of limited stakeholder decision-making was “on the fly” decisions. These were decisions typically made by one or two stakeholders during an activity. Often these types of decisions were made by teachers and teaching assistants as exemplified by the classroom teacher in school 17 who noted, “Then I guess on a day-to-day level, the majority of the decision-making is really up to me and to the support person in my room.”

**Extent of collaborative decision-making.** Differences were evident in the degree to which decision-making involved collaboration between team members or was undertaken by individuals or subgroups. In around two-thirds of the schools, there was generally a consensus among participants that decision-making involved joint or equal input from a group of stakeholders. For example, the counsellor at school 5 commented:

“… so my impression of those meetings is that opportunities for each person to give feedback on their part of the role and for any further things that they need to follow up, for that to be given direction to. So my impression is roles are fairly clear at that
meeting and not one person is dominating saying, “This all needs to be done and I’m the boss,” sort of thing.

In some cases, it was noted that some stakeholders had greater input based on their skills, roles or experience. For example, the teacher assistant in school 20 noted:

I guess the people that worked more closely with Rose probably have more say or input, because we're sort of with her and spend probably more time with her. So there are probably a couple of us at that meeting that probably have more input”

Likewise, the parent from school 17 noted that all participants had equal input “where it’s appropriate for what their role is.” When asked about who had the greater input, she added, “Probably the teacher because she spends more time with him and probably us as well, so we feel the need to add extra commentary to what’s going on.” In a small number of cases, parents were regarded as the experts and procured and/or advised schools on resources. For example, the parent at school 8 reported “… he uses the Reading Our Way program … and I actually instigated that at school.” Later she stated “In terms of the day-to-day he has the Reading Our Way program and he also has the Numicon program which I organized as well…”

While there was agreement that broader decision-making involved collaboration of stakeholders at the school level, it was clear that in many cases, much practical decision-making occurred at the classroom level. For example, the classroom teacher in school 16 commented:

Apart from that initial liaising with parents I think all the other kind of higher up people don't really get involved as much…So it's more a classroom level after that initial broader application and everything. That's still in consultation with the parents but it's very much happening down here, not so much that the principal and that
would be aware of all that day-to-day stuff that goes on. So I guess it's sort of that trickle down.

This comment also highlights that decision-making often occurred across multiple levels. In a minority of schools, participants did not agree as to the amount of collaboration between stakeholders in decision-making. For example, after she was asked whether her input and concerns were considered in decision-making, the classroom teacher in one school responded, “Not totally no, because yeah, when SLSOs [teacher assistants] were changed, there was no - I wasn't involved in that decision-making at all.” The support teacher from the same school noted, “I think a lot of the ideas have come from me. In terms of the decision-making, I haven’t really implemented it unless everyone has wanted it” implying that the class teacher had been involved in the decisions made. At another school (School 17), the class teacher initially agreed that participants had equal input but then qualified her statement noting:

I think when it comes to the key decisions about funding and not just let’s tick boxes so that we’re given more funding for this specific child but also looking at the school’s funding and whether supporting a child like this is important or if the school’s funding is put towards other things

She further added that

… perception of inclusion doesn’t necessarily match the attitudes of those people because ultimately it’s left up to the classroom teacher to include the child and support them and all of that stuff.

There was variation in the level of involvement of some key stakeholders. In approximately two-thirds of schools, participants indicated that families were substantively involved in decision-making. For example, a parent from school 16 commented:
We’re always involved in, if there’s something that we don’t agree with then we’re within our rights to say no, we don’t think that’s appropriate, or whatever, and then we’ll come up with a different solution. We’re definitely involved in it as far as the school’s concerned. They don’t do anything without us knowing.

Nevertheless, in approximately one-third of schools, family involvement was more limited. For example, in school 2, a classroom teacher commented, “So this year, generally decisions about support for Fred have been made, up until this point, without a lot of parental input.” In some cases, participants noted a variety of stressors, which limited a family’s involvement in decision-making. These included financial pressure and difficulty coming to terms with a diagnosis. While other stakeholders discussed the limited involvement of some families, the families themselves related they were generally satisfied with their level of involvement.

Of all potential stakeholders, students were reported to be the least involved in decision-making, with only 60% of respondents indicating that the student was engaged in the process. High school students were more likely to be viewed by stakeholders as involved in decision-making. Some stakeholders gave the student’s age as a reason for lack of involvement (“Too young”, parent, school 9) while others described the student as lacking capacity (e.g., “We haven’t involved him in the conversations about his learning goals or anything like that, but I think that’s because of the nature of his disability and his lack of communication skills …”, teacher, school 8). When students were reported to be involved, participants often described their involvement as limited to informal discussions of strategies or goals. For example, the classroom teacher from school 7 commented “So, part of the plan itself has got George’s goals for himself, and so he’s asked, ‘What do you want to get better at this year? What do you want to work on?’”

Stakeholders were also asked to discuss the role of the learning support team. In NSW this team is typically comprised of a group of school leaders and has been designated as
playing a key role in “ensuring that the specific needs of students with disability and additional learning and support needs are met” (NSW Department of Education 2020b).

Many stakeholders viewed the learning and support team as undertaking more administrative decision-making regarding resource allocation or prioritization. For example, the principal from school 17 commented:

Well the learning support team, they make all of the decisions regarding support for each of the children in the school. We have a prioritization kind of process of who needs what and then we use that bucket of money that we’re given and go, “Right, this child needs this, this child needs this” and then we keep some in reserve so that if teachers throw their hands in the air and go, “Help me please”, we can support them a little bit.

These comments were also supported by the parent and classroom teacher. Some stakeholders did report that the learning and support team provided expertise to facilitate programming-related decisions. For example, the executive from school 9 stated:

We meet once a fortnight, the school learning support team, and teachers refer students … we discuss different strategies that we can use, so there’s about six of us in the room, all very experienced teachers, executive, things like that. We basically bounce ideas off each other about how we can help Adalie and then we go back to the class teacher and say, we think this might work or that might work or things like that.

Limited collaboration with some key stakeholders was noted in high schools. Although only two of the four high schools in the study nominated a classroom teacher for interview, both indicated they had limited involvement in decision-making related to the focus student. When asked about meetings to discuss adjustments, one classroom teacher (School 18) noted:
This is informal chit chats, this is me going down and grabbing someone. We do have our learning support folder, that actually will give you an outline of Archie’s learning needs, and so from there I can then adjust programming and classroom resources.

Similarly, the classroom teacher from school 3 responded:

They would have meetings all the time, and they do get communicated – sometimes it gets communicated out to us. And there have, like – I think if major incidents have occurred and then individuals – like his individual teachers might have had a quick meeting, just like a briefing sort of to go over anything that they might need to know.

But I haven’t really been in any sort – involved in any like formal meetings, really.

It was reported that decision-making was primarily enacted by support teachers who then coordinated these across a number of subject area staff. This was illustrated by the following exchange:

Teacher: “… the learning support teacher… would generally come up with more formal sort of decision-making pathways, and then he would communicate that out to people and then they would just follow that and maybe they would seek further clarification from him if they required it. Or if they felt it wasn’t working, they might report back to him and maybe a modification would be made.

Interviewer: Okay, so it sounds like he is quite the mediator and he’s the person in the middle that everyone kind of communicates with?

Teacher: Oh yeah. Definitely

**Focus of decisions.** Another aspect of decision-making that arose from the data was the variation in the focus of decision-making processes between schools. Some schools focused extensively on funding issues, which were often linked to provision of teacher assistant time. For example, the counsellor from school 16 noted, “If you apply for funding
you get a teacher’s assistant. Everyone knows that’s the process”. Similarly, the counsellor from school 17 commented:

Well I guess in terms of schools are very limited in terms of time and resources, so when there is - one assumes it does come with additional funding … I guess in practicality some of those accommodations and adjustments do you need more manpower, whether it's having an extra pair of eyes over a certain period of time, so it’s definitely something that we consider as to whether it's achievable or not.

In other schools, the focus of decision-making was broader, and entailed decisions related to a wide range of concerns and specific adjustments for the student. For example, staff at school 2 described decisions relating to wide ranging systematic adjustments that addressed various social skills, behaviour supports, self-help skills, and task completion skills. Adjustments included systematic modifications to classroom teaching practices (e.g., use of a visual timetable, social stories, short, clear instructions, repetition of instructions, checking understanding) and antecedent strategies to prevent problems arising (e.g., increasing predictability of routines, carefully managing transitions, redirecting behaviour before escalation).

**Fluid and static processes.** Another theme involved the degree to which decision-making processes were viewed as fluid or static by participants. Static decision-making involved decisions that tended to be carried forward without review. In contrast, some respondents described a fluid and reiterative process, where decisions were subject to regular review. For example, the head teacher learning and support in school 20 noted:

… every second week we have a learning and support meeting of our team, which is attended by the school learning support officers and they also bring in information about how Rose’s travelling, what we may need to change and suggestions … Do we
need to change this? Do we need to increase that activity? Will she attend her community-based program this week? So the learning support team is crucial in this.

This statement indicates that decision-making at this school was both fluid and involved a clearly understood and reflective process. The continuous nature and responsiveness of decision-making processes were also stressed by the principal from school 20 who stated:

So we certainly don’t have decisions made at the beginning of the year that are cast in stone. It’s responsive. It’s responsive to what her needs are and it’s that frequent cycle of communication within the school and with the family and occasionally with the external services that are working with her.

Some schools appeared to utilize more static decision-making processes. For example, the principal from school 22 noted that for a student (currently in year 4), “The decisions were made basically before she even started school”. The parent added that there had been no planning meetings in the current year, while the principal noted the decision-making was highly influenced by decisions made the previous year.

Rejected options. As part of the interview process, stakeholders were asked about options that were considered, but rejected through the decision-making process. The majority of respondents flatly stated that no options were rejected or that they could not remember any options that were rejected. A typical response was offered by the principal from school 5: “I can’t think of any specific options that were rejected for Gary.” In instances in which participants identified options that were rejected, these options were typically not confirmed by other stakeholders at the school. In other cases, participants referred to options that were implemented, but were unsuccessful. For example, the other executive from school 9 noted they initially selected the option of using a peer to take a student to the toilet, but later clarified that, “We tried it for a while and it didn't work, so that was something we didn’t continue with.” There were a small number of exceptions. For example, both the head of
learning and support and principal in school 21 noted that a behaviour intervention had been considered as a possibility and rejected.

In some instances, participant responses suggested they viewed rejecting possible options as negative and something to be avoided. For example, the support teacher from school 18 responded “No, look, we’ll give anything a go” and the vision support teacher from the same school stated “Anything we rejected? I don’t think so. We’ve always made it happen.” The principal from school 15 commented that “I think we've just about tried everything for him. I don't know that we've rejected anything”. The principal from school 14 noted “We tend to try everything, I think.” The parent from the same school responded, “I don't think so, nothing that we've thought about and then not tried.”

**Discussion**

The current study has provided insight into decision-making regarding adjustments for students with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Specifically, we examined who was reported as involved in decision-making, and the decision-making process, including factors that underpinned decisions.

**Who is involved in decision-making?**

A range of individuals were typically involved in decision-making at each school. Broadly consistent with government provisions in other countries (e.g., Department of Education 2015 UK; Individuals with Disability Education Act 2004 US), the Australian *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Australian Government Department of Education n.d.) requires schools to consult the family and/or the student before deciding on adjustments. Nevertheless, based on the evidence in this study it could be argued that this is still proving to be a challenge in some situations. From the descriptions provided, some school learning and support teams were primarily involved in decisions regarding resource allocation but some acted as an active source of programming support and advice to classroom teachers. Given
the range of skills and backgrounds in these teams and the advantages of combining this expertise and experience, there may be more potential for them to fulfil the latter role

While parents were reported by almost all stakeholders as being involved in the process, there was considerable variation in their level of involvement. In some cases, it was apparent that this was related to family circumstances and stressors, which in turn limited their degree of involvement. This is congruent with the findings of Hess Molina and Kozleski (2006) who found considerable variation in the experiences of parents or caregivers in the United States in regards to special education decision-making. Some families “told stories that reflected their advocacy and sense of empowerment as they found ways to support their children’s educational needs” (Hess, Molina, and Kozleski 2006, p. 152) but others reported having little input in the decision-making process. Other researchers have reported similar variation in the degree and quality of parental engagement in decision-making processes (Miller et al. 2019; Defur, Todd-Allen, and Getzel 2001; Love et al. 2017). This was reflected in the current study, where in a small number of cases, parents took on the role of “experts” advising schools on programs and resources, a phenomena also reported by parents in the study of Love et al. (2017).

Students were much less likely to be involved in the decision-making process, with age or cognitive limitations cited as influencing factors. High school students were more likely to be involved in decision-making. These findings are consistent with the prior research of Nowak, Broberg, and Starke (2020). In a survey of Swedish parents and professionals, they found that opportunities for students with special educational needs to participate in decision-making and evaluation of support were limited and younger children were less likely to be involved. The finding in the current study that students with special educational needs often had restricted involvement in decision-making is consistent with the findings of previous research in education (Cavendish and Connor 2018; McKay 2014) as well as
broader decision-making regarding medical and/or social services (Franklin and Sloper 2006; McNeilly, Macdonald, and Kelly 2015; Department of Education 2015).

**Decision-Making Processes**

A key feature of the described decision-making processes was the amount of variation between schools. In some cases, the decision-making process was very clearly described and in other cases it was more opaque, with a level of disagreement between participants. In general terms, schools used some combination of formal and informal processes to make decisions such that decisions were undertaken at different levels. Dedicated formal planning meetings or other formal meetings were often used in conjunction with meetings where limited stakeholders were involved. This latter group included learning support team meetings within the school, informal meetings between stakeholders (e.g., decisions made between teachers and parents at school pick up) and on-the-fly decisions in the classroom, where one or two stakeholders made decisions about adjustments. While most schools did have a reasonably clear and agreed process, there were a minority in which the process was unclear, at least for the school year under examination. While a reiterative and adaptive process was described in some schools, other participants described a more static process where adjustments were put in place and subject to limited review. These included examples where decisions made in previous years were carried forward and only reviewed through informal means.

The nature and extent of collaboration in decision-making also varied across schools. Participants from many schools described a collaborative approach, where all participants participated and contributed. Such an approach allows the potential for the knowledge and skills of multiple stakeholders to be synthesized in decision-making (Mulholland and O’Connor 2016). On the other end of the spectrum, some participants viewed themselves as the primary decision-maker and others, often classroom teachers, reported feeling
disenfranchised from the decision-making process. While the number of high schools included in the research was small, there was evidence that this was a particular problem for them. This is not surprising given that several subject teachers are involved with each student, which would present challenges for communication and collaboration.

When asked about the basis for decisions, participants did not often spontaneously identify a great number of factors, beyond matching the needs of the student. Sulek et al. (2019) also found that matching the characteristics and needs was an important factor in teachers’ selection of intervention strategies for children with ASD. Further, Lawson and Jones (2018) reported that knowledge of the student was the most commonly mentioned factor in the pedagogical decision-making of teachers of students with severe intellectual disabilities in special schools and classes. When asked to respond to specific factors that may have influenced decisions, participants were able to identify a larger range of influences but there was only limited agreement between stakeholders on these factors. This suggests that decision-making teams may not always be operating from a shared set of philosophies, goals and expectations. In examining educator perceptions of collaborative planning processes for students with disabilities, Carter, Prater, Jackson, and Marchant (2009) found that sharing common philosophies was an important aspect of success. Carter and Abawi (2018) have supported this perspective, arguing that clarity of vision is critical to successful inclusion.

Funding issues were among the six most commonly nominated considerations in decision-making. Funding limitations were also mentioned as a key constraint in decision-making by parents in the research of Love et al. (2017). Lack of adequate resourcing has consistently been raised as an important perceived barrier to inclusion across multiple countries (e.g., Stephenson et al. 2020; Sharma, Moore, and Sonawane 2009; Sharma and Desai 2002; Woodcock and Woolfson 2019). While the importance of adequate resourcing should not be dismissed, it should be viewed in the context that existing resources are not
always employed optimally, particularly with the way teaching assistants are used (Carter et al. 2020; Webster and De Boer 2019).

A commitment to inclusion was mentioned in some schools in the current study, often by multiple participants within the school, but was not raised as a factor in decision-making in the majority of schools, either spontaneously or in follow-up probe questions. It should be noted that, while there was opportunity to raise inclusion as an issue (e.g., when considering school values), it was not specifically probed in the interviews and this may account for the fact it was not raised in the majority of instances. Alternatively, it is possible that more pragmatic considerations were more salient for many respondents.

Within constraint inclusion theory, problem solving is framed by both the problem to be solved and the constraints that define an acceptable solution (Robinson and Donald 2015). As previously noted, decision-making teams may not always be operating from a shared set of philosophies, goals and expectations. Thus, it is possible that there may have been disagreement in framing of the problem to be solved. This may also account for the differences among schools in the focus of decision-making processes. A number of possible constraints were identified by participants in the present study including funding limitations and staff skill. In a related study, Carter et al. (2020) reported that many schools in the present sample appeared to use a limited palette of options with regard to adjustments. It was also notable that stakeholders had difficulty identifying adjustments that were considered during the decision-making process and then rejected. In fact, some participants appeared to consider rejecting options as undesirable, insisting that they tried everything that had been considered. Thus, another possible constraint on decision-making may have been the limited range of options that were considered in the decision-making process itself and reflected in the limited range of adjustments employed. While funding was frequently mentioned as a constraining factor, this was often in relation to the perceived need for additional teacher
assistant time. Giangreco and Broer (2007) have indicated that teacher assistant time may be the primary support employed when less restrictive options are not explored. Thus, identified funding constraints in the current study may, to some degree, be a reflection of the limited options considered and employed.

Klein (2008), operating within the NDM paradigm, describes the recognition-primed decision model. In contrast to a more classical approach where all options would be considered, within the recognition-primed model, expert decision-makers develop a repertoire of discriminated patterns that highlight cues, expectancies and possible goals. Decision-makers can match a given situation to patterns they have discriminated and "If they find a clear match, they can carry out the most typical course of action" (Klein 2008 p. 457). Smith and Marshall (1997) note, critically, that within a NDM framework, such decision-making relies on a pre-existing template to provide a point of comparison with the current situation. By extension, limitations in templates may create boundary conditions for decision-making options. While Cook and Cook (2004) have noted that acting without considering a wide range of options can be a feature of expert decision-makers, this is dependent on having adequate and appropriate templates on which to match to the current situation. In examining the pedagogical decision-making of teachers in Taiwanese special schools and classes, Ho and Liu (2015) noted that expert teachers were distinguished by their ability to better represent complex problems and their access to a larger repertoire of possible solutions. Thus, a differentiating feature between expert and novice decision-makers (or decision-making teams) may be the number of problem templates to which they have access and the corresponding range of possible solutions.

The limited palette of adjustments employed and the difficulty identifying rejected options in many schools suggest the possibility that decision-making teams were, at least in part, pattern matching current context to previous situations and defaulting to employing the
same relatively limited range of solutions. Thus, they were perpetuating the same practices, even if they were not optimal. This bears resemblance to “satisficing” (Simon 1956), where decision-makers only expend resources to a point where a satisfactory, but not necessarily optimal, solution is identified. Experience with a wider range of solutions over time may allow teams to develop broader templates and enable more flexible decision-making options.

In investigating the use of problem-solving teams to support mainstream teachers in inclusive environments, Williamson and McLeskey (2011) have offered another possible explanation for the limited range of options both considered and implemented in schools in the current research. They argue that, where time is limited, there may be a tension between making decisions (“getting things done”) and fully understanding the nature of problems and developing optimal solutions (“figuring things out”). A focus on “getting things done” might contribute to the limited range of options apparently considered by some teams in the current research. Nevertheless, it should be noted that a lack of adequate planning time was not identified as a major barrier by participants in the current study, suggesting this explanation may not be a good fit for the current data.

**Implications for Practice and Directions for Future Research**

Several key implications for practice arise from the current study. The first relates to the values and goals that underlie decision-making. Stakeholders had difficulty in spontaneously identifying many factors underlying decision-making and there was limited agreement when probed about specific factors. Taken together, this suggests it may be valuable for schools to explicitly consider developing a clear statement regarding the goals, values, philosophies, legal responsibilities and pragmatic considerations that should underpin their decision-making. It seems reasonable to assert that a general vision, and more specific goals, should guide decision-making, consistent with the recommendations of Carter et al. (2009) and Carter and Abawi (2018). Further, underlying philosophies can define and
constrain acceptable solutions and outcomes in decision-making. For example, a commitment to inclusion as a philosophy or a management and care focus in an educational program, will influence the acceptability of specific solutions and the corresponding outcomes. It would be valuable to conduct further research on a larger sample to determine the extent to which decision-making teams in schools share values and goals for students with special education needs. Further, it may be appropriate to evaluate strategies that might assist schools to reflect upon and establish shared and explicit values and goals.

For a minority of students, family engagement was limited in the present study. Engaging some families may be difficult due to their individual circumstances. However, schools can maximize the probability of meaningful family engagement by clearly informing families of their legal right to consultation and taking practical measures, such as negotiating meeting times that are convenient for families to attend or examining alternative strategies for communication, such as video conferencing (Cavendish and Connor 2018). Students were the least likely to be involved in decision-making in the current study. Rather than excluding students from the decision-making process due to perceived limitations, schools need to consider alternative strategies, that would enable students to provide their perspective and offer input as part of the decision-making process (Nowak, Broberg, and Starke 2020). For students with complex communication needs, alternative and augmentative communication systems can be considered to assist students to express views in decision-making (Mitchell et al. 2009; McNeilly, Macdonald, and Kelly 2015). It should be noted that student attendance at decision-making meetings does not necessarily result in active participation in the process and training for staff may be needed to enhance self-advocacy (Martin et al. 2006). Further research on strategies to facilitate family and student involvement stands as a priority. While the number of participating high schools was small, there were indications that meaningful involvement of classroom teachers in decision-making was problematic given that several
subject teachers worked with each student. Strategies for effectively involving high school subject area teachers in decision-making should be further investigated.

A wide variety of decision-making approaches were apparent in the current study. In some instances, there was strong focus on funding and resource allocation, typically teacher assistant time. In other cases, the focus was more granular with consideration of more specific adjustments. While most schools already had a reasonably clear process for decision-making, this was not always the case. Thus, it would be appropriate for schools to review procedures and ensure that there was a clear and agreed upon process for making decisions regarding adjustments. As part of this process, the demarcation point should be considered between local decisions involving limited stakeholders, such as classroom pedagogical decisions made by classroom staff (e.g., Ho and Liu 2015; Lawson and Jones 2018; Stough and Palmer 2003) and decisions that necessarily involve the broader educational team, such as those relating to individual education plans (IEP) and transition plans. While multi-level decision-making is almost certainly appropriate and pragmatically necessary, schools need to ensure that decisions are being made at the appropriate level.

In the schools examined, the range of adjustments both considered and implemented was somewhat limited with substantial reliance on teacher assistants. Consequently, it may be appropriate for schools to explicitly and systematically look at a wider range of options and alternative solutions. That is, before a final adjustment option is adopted, teams could be challenged to consider if there are any possible alternatives and, if so, which option is likely to be the best. For example, before defaulting to using a teacher assistant as an adjustment, schools might systematically consider the purpose for which the adjustment is needed, what natural supports are available, how independence can be furthered and support faded over time (Mueller and Murphy 2001) as well as adjustments to classroom pedagogy and management strategies. Schools may benefit from examining their existing decision-making
processes with a mind to exploring a broader palette of possible options. Strategies for systematically facilitating such examination of options represents an appropriate direction for future research.

**Limitations**

A number of limitations of the present study need to be acknowledged. The study revolved around only 22 students who were very diverse in terms of their abilities. While we did attempt to recruit students into the research, only a single student was nominated to be interviewed by their school. Thus, we have limited insight into student perspectives on the decision-making process. Also, while the number of secondary schools in the sample was proportionate to the number in New South Wales, only four schools were included. It is important to note that schools participating in the research volunteered and only a small proportion of schools who were approached responded. This may be explained in part by the demands of the study, which included the time of the principal in approaching all potential participants and the time of the participants in interviews. Thus, the participating schools may not be typical of all schools in NSW or other jurisdictions. Nevertheless, the schools examined were certainly not heterogeneous and a wide range of practices and processes were on display.

**Conclusion**

In the schools participating in this research considerable variation was evidence in the degree and nature of collaboration, degree to which decisions were subject to review and the focus of decision-making. In addition, many schools appeared to consider a limited range of options for adjustments and did not necessarily have a well-developed and agreed view on factors that underpinned decisions. Moving forward, schools may benefit from formalizing the principles and values that underpin their decisions and systematically exploring a wider range of adjustment options in their decision-making.
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Decision-Making Regarding Adjustments


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Decision-Making Regarding Adjustments

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doi:10.1007/BF01064267

doi:10.1177/1744629518756227


Table 1. *Stakeholders Involved in Decision-Making*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<td>Parent/guardian</td>
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<td>96</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principal or executive</td>
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<td>93</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>School counsellor</td>
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<td>Support teacher</td>
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<td>Learning support team*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student</td>
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<td>Other*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher assistants*</td>
<td>91</td>
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</table>

* Not all stakeholders were available for the involved student. In these instances percentages are of the relevant stakeholders.
Table 2
*Influences on Decision-Making – Responses Elicited by Probe Questions*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Total (n = 107)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
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<td>Child data</td>
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<td>Preference of family</td>
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<td>Knowledge of teacher</td>
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<td>Funding issues</td>
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<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff skills</td>
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<td>69</td>
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<td>Staff time or availability</td>
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<tr>
<td>School values</td>
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<td>Availability of support</td>
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<td>PD re this support or adjustment</td>
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<td>Advice from external professionals</td>
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<td>Previous experience with similar student</td>
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<td>59</td>
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<td>External information</td>
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<td>Student's previous adjustments</td>
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<td>Student's previous plans</td>
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