

Dispositions to teach

Our School promotes and highly values the dispositions to teach based on Haberman's Star framework as a key element to successful implementation of the Australian Curriculum, PBS, values driven practice, and effective teaching leading to quality learning outcomes for our students, well-being for staff, and a safe culture.

- persistence
- positive values about student learning
- the ability to adapt general theories into pedagogical practices
- an encouraging approach to students classified as at risk
- the ability to navigate school bureaucracy
- a willingness to admit one's shortcomings, and
- a professional versus a personal orientation to learners.

Overview

In a special school setting, teaching **dispositions**—the habits of mind, attitudes, and social-emotional competencies that underpin lifelong learning—is as critical as teaching academic content. Students with disability often require explicit instruction, modelling, and scaffolding of these dispositions to support their wellbeing, social connection, and capacity to engage meaningfully in the world. These essential dispositions promote student **agency, independence, self-worth, and positive identity formation**, particularly in the face of challenges related to communication, regulation, and interaction with others.

1. Resilience

"I can bounce back after challenges."

Why it matters: Students with disabilities frequently face barriers—social, environmental, and internal. Building resilience helps them develop coping strategies for setbacks and change.

How to teach it:

- Model and label persistence during tasks.
- Teach and practice problem-solving strategies.
- Use social stories or visuals about handling "big feelings."
- Celebrate effort, not just outcomes.
- Develop emotional literacy: "I felt frustrated, but I kept trying."

2. Self-Regulation

"I can manage my emotions and body."

Why it matters: Many students in special schools experience difficulties with emotional and sensory regulation, which can impact learning and safety.

How to teach it:

- Integrate co-regulation practices: calming routines, breathing techniques, sensory tools.
- Use regulation zones, visuals, and body cues charts.
- Provide safe 'cool down' spaces.
- Teach students to identify and communicate their emotions.
- Avoid punitive responses—prioritise safety and recovery.

3. Curiosity

"I want to know more."

Why it matters: Curiosity drives engagement. For many students, especially those with complex needs, curiosity must be cultivated through supportive environments.

How to teach it:

- Provide open-ended materials and exploratory play.
- Follow student interests — "teachable moments" are powerful.
- Ask "What do you think?" instead of "What's the answer?"
- Use inquiry-based and sensory-rich learning experiences.

4. Independence

"I can try things by myself."

Why it matters: Developing autonomy builds confidence and prepares students for greater community participation and adult life.

How to teach it:

- Use backward chaining and task analysis to break down skills.
- Provide consistent routines to support initiation.
- Use visuals, prompts, and gradual fading of adult support.
- Reinforce success with authentic feedback, not just praise.

5. Empathy and Care for Others

"I understand how others feel."

Why it matters: Though empathy may look different for neurodivergent learners, fostering understanding and compassion supports respectful peer relationships.

How to teach it:

- Use role-play, puppets, and social narratives.
- Label emotions in real-time interactions.
- Teach turn-taking and active listening skills.
- Celebrate acts of kindness and support peer modelling.

6. Responsibility

"I can take care of myself, others, and my things."

Why it matters: Responsibility contributes to self-esteem and readiness for post-school transitions.

How to teach it:

- Allocate age-appropriate classroom jobs or routines.
- Use checklists and reward systems tailored to individual motivators.
- Teach consequences through natural outcomes (e.g., "If I leave my lunch, I might be hungry.").

7. Confidence

"I believe in myself."

Why it matters: Many students with disability experience low expectations. Confidence helps them take risks and advocate for themselves.

How to teach it:

- Provide opportunities for success and safe failure.
- Use affirmations and strength-based language.
- Involve students in goal setting and celebrating growth.
- Recognise and name strengths daily.

8. Persistence

"I keep going, even when it's hard."

Why it matters: Learning new skills often takes longer or requires more scaffolding for our students. Persistence ensures progress.

How to teach it:

- Break tasks into small steps.
- Use visual cues for "next steps."
- Model perseverance and verbalise your own thinking.
- Provide immediate, specific feedback: "You didn't give up even when it was tricky!"

9. Adaptability

"I can cope with change."

Why it matters: Routines often change in school and life. Teaching flexibility supports transitions and reduces anxiety.

How to teach it:

- Practise small changes in routines with preparation.
- Use visual schedules and warning timers.
- Provide social stories about unexpected events.
- Reinforce positive responses to change.

Embedding Dispositions Across the Day

- **Morning Circles:** Incorporate themes like "trying something new" or "helping a friend."
- **Learning Intentions:** Include a disposition alongside content goals, e.g., "Today we are learning about plants and practising curiosity."
- **Reflective Journals:** Use visuals or simple sentence starters to reflect on personal growth: "Today I felt proud when..."
- **Collaborative Planning:** Align individual support plans (ISPs) with targeted dispositions for each student.
- **Whole-school Language:** Embed consistent language around growth mindsets and dispositions across classrooms.

Final Thoughts

Dispositions are **not just add-ons**—they are the foundation of thriving learners and community members. In a special school setting, teaching these attributes explicitly and compassionately empowers students to become confident, capable, and connected individuals.