

Feedback for Learning

Feedback is a powerful instructional tool that significantly influences student learning outcomes—particularly for students with disability in Queensland special schools. When delivered effectively, feedback supports engagement, understanding, skill development, behaviour regulation, and self-confidence. It provides students with the information they need to improve, adjust, or continue their performance, and helps teachers scaffold learning in a structured and affirming way.

What Is Feedback in Education?

Feedback is information given to students about their performance relative to a learning goal. It helps students understand:

What they did well

Where they need to improve

How to improve it

"Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement—but this impact can be either positive or negative." *John Hattie, 2023* (Effect size: 0.75)

Why Feedback Is Crucial in Special Education

1. Clarifies Expectations

Many students with disability benefit from concrete, direct feedback that reinforces:

What the task was

What they did right

What the next step is

2. Supports Cognitive and Language Processing

For students with intellectual disability, autism, or communication delays, feedback delivered in visual, tactile, or verbal formats helps make abstract concepts more accessible.

3. Reinforces Positive Behaviour and Engagement

Immediate and specific feedback helps:

Increase on-task behaviour

Encourage positive peer interaction

Build motivation through success

4. Builds Self-Efficacy and Independence

When students see that effort leads to improvement, they develop a sense of control over their learning.

5. Facilitates Goal Tracking

Feedback tied to learning intentions and success criteria supports student agency, particularly for those using the GIL framework, ICPs, or QCIA pathways.

Effective Feedback Practices for Special Schools

Strategy	How It Works	Example in a Special School
Immediate	Given right after the task or behaviour	"Nice work zipping your jacket all by yourself!" (Prep)
Specific and Positive	Highlights the behaviour or skill, not just praise	"You used your break card before getting upset. That's great self-control!" (Year 6)
Visual Feedback	Uses icons, smiley faces, tokens, or visual checklists	Use a reward chart that builds toward a chosen reinforcer
Modelling Feedback	Corrective Shows the correct way rather than just saying "no"	"Let me show you how to hold the glue stick—now you try." (Year 3)
Task-Focused, Person-Focused	Not Feedback targets the skill, not personal traits	"You included three describing words in your sentence!" instead of "You're so smart."
Encourages Next Steps	Suggests what to do to improve	"You found the picture of the apple. Next time, can you find the red one?"
Multimodal Delivery	Combines spoken, signed, written, or pictorial feedback	Use key word sign + verbal + visual card: "Good sitting."
Reinforcement-Based	Pairs feedback with positive reinforcement	Token given with verbal praise after a successful request via AAC

Examples by Stage

Prep – Year 2 (GIL or Early Years AC v9)

- Visual thumbs up + “You waited so nicely!”
- Tactile cue (e.g., sticker or sensory reward) paired with verbal praise
- Using first–then visuals to provide feedback about progress

Years 3–6

- Point to a visual rubric and say, “You included all your steps—tick them off.”
- Use of “Wow words” checklist and highlighting student writing
- Audio-recorded or video modelling feedback for students with limited language

Years 7–12 (ICP or QCIA)

- Work experience log: “You followed all 5 job steps—well done.”
- Peer feedback scripts: “I liked how you listened while I was talking.”
- QR codes to video feedback or self-assessment scaffolded with teacher support

Evidence from Research

Hattie (2023): Feedback has an average effect size of 0.75, one of the highest among teaching practices. It is most effective when:

- It is timely
- Students understand it
- It provides a pathway for improvement

Shute (2008): Formative feedback that is

- goal-oriented
- clear and
- actionable

leads to improved performance and motivation, especially in learners with additional needs.

Brookhart (2017): Emphasises differentiated feedback as key to inclusive and equitable education. The mode of delivery matters as much as the content.

Summary: What Makes Feedback Work in Special Schools?

Key Feature	Why It Matters
Timely and clear	Supports working memory and emotional regulation
Multimodal	Matches diverse communication profiles (e.g., AAC, sign)
Positive and instructive	Reinforces success and encourages effort
Specific and visual	Makes abstract concepts concrete
Consistent and repeated	Aids generalisation and long-term learning

EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

IMMEDIATE

Give feedback right after the task or behavior.

"You raised your hand to answer—great job!"

SPECIFIC AND POSITIVE

Focus on what student did well or how to improve.

"You found your seat by yourself. Next time, use a quiet voice."

VISUAL FEEDBACK

Use icons, tokens, or visual checklists

"Put a smiley face on your schedule"

TASK- FOCUSED

Feedback should target the task, not the student

"You matched 4 photos, Let's try for 5 next time."

