# 5 Promoting equity and inclusion through school-level interventions

This chapter explores how different interventions at the school level can be leveraged to advance equity and inclusion in education, and support all students in the classroom. The Strength through Diversity project has identified five broad categories of school-level interventions: (i) matching resources within schools to students' learning needs; (ii) school climate; (iii) learning strategies to address diversity; (iv) non-instructional support and services; and (v) engagement with parents and the community. This chapter discusses each of these categories in turn, before concluding by setting out some pointers for policy development.

## Introduction

Education systems' policies can create an equitable and inclusive framework for education settings (Chapter 2), but their implementation at the school level is what determines students' daily experiences in classrooms. It is in schools where policies take the form of specific resources, teaching practices and instructional and non-instructional support mechanisms.

Numerous interventions at the school level are needed to promote equity among and the inclusion of all students, and in particular students from diverse backgrounds or embodying particular dimensions of diversity. Without explicit attention by schools to the needs of and challenges experienced by these students, their ability to reach their full potential may be hindered. Conversely, careful, targeted approaches are important to help all students feel that they belong at school, can improve their well-being and sense of motivation, and provide increased opportunities for academic success.

The Strength through Diversity project has identified the following five categories of school-level interventions that can be leveraged to foster equity among and the inclusion of all students:

- Matching resources within schools to individual student learning needs;
- School climate;
- Learning strategies to address diversity;
- Non-instructional support and services;
- Engagement with parents and communities.

This chapter is organised into seven sections. After this introduction, it explores each of the above five categorised in turn, discussing how various interventions can help support the well-being and educational outcomes of all learners. It concludes by setting out some pointers for policy development.

## Matching resources within schools to individual student learning needs

While central authorities often provide targeted (and, at times, earmarked) resources to support equity and inclusion efforts in schools, schools in many education systems across the OECD also have some authority over the allocation of the resources they receive (OECD, 2021[1]). Indeed, over the past three decades, many education systems, including those in Australia, Canada, Finland, Israel, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom, have granted their schools greater autonomy in both curricula and resource allocation decisions (OECD, 2017[2]). In 2015, PISA (2016[3]) asked school principals to report on the actors and bodies (teachers, principals, regions, local education authorities, national education authority) responsible for resource allocation decisions concerning their school (such as appointing and dismissing teachers; determining teachers' starting salaries and salary rises; and formulating school budgets and allocating them within the school). It found that, on average across OECD countries, 39% of the responsibility for school resources resided with principals, 3% with teachers, 12% with school boards, 23% with local or regional authorities, and the remaining 23% with national authorities (OECD, 2016[3]). These results showed that local educational levels, and schools in particular, generally have responsibility for managing resources for their student population. As a result, these schools are responsible for resource policy issues, including concerns relating to an equitable and inclusive allocation of available resources. In terms of vertical equity[1], this can concern addressing the needs of particular students attending the school, ensuring that disadvantaged students receive the necessary support to thrive.

Financial resources, however, are just one of many resources that schools can manipulate to serve their student populations, as mentioned in Chapter 3. The following section provides examples of various resources that can be leveraged directly by schools to address the needs of their students.

### *Allocating support staff within schools*

Learning support staff, such as teaching assistants, can play a key role in supporting the work of teachers and in ensuring that all learners have the ability to achieve their educational potential. Research suggests that, if used effectively, learning support staff can contribute to improved student well-being and learning outcomes (Masdeu Navarro, 2015[4]). The presence of an additional professional in the class can, for instance, mean that students receive more individual help and attention during the lesson, from either the learning support staff member or the teacher. This can mean that students' learning needs are more likely to be met, which in turn can lead to improved learning outcomes (ibid.). The effective use of learning support staff may also facilitate a more flexible learning environment that can contribute to increased engagement and inclusion of students in learning activities (for example, through allowing students to be grouped in ways that responds to different learning needs for particular classroom activities) (ibid.).

Studies have found that learning support staff can be effective at improving attainment when used to support specific students in small groups or through structured interventions (Masdeu Navarro, 2015[4]). In England (United Kingdom), for instance, two randomised control trials – one of a literacy programme targeted at lower secondary school students identified as struggling in literacy and the other of a one-to-one mathematics support programme for primary school students – found significant improvements in students' learning in literacy and numeracy as a result of learning support staff intervention programmes. A large-scale randomised control trial conducted in Denmark analysing the effects of the use of a learning support staff member on Grade 6[2] students' achievement also found positive effects on student reading achievement, particularly among students with less educated parents (defined as both parents having, at most, ten years of schooling) (Andersen et al., 2014[5]). An evaluation of 44 pilot programmes of an initiative of the Denmark Ministry of Education to improve the academic achievement of low performing and disadvantaged students also indicated a positive impact of support staff on students' well-being,[3] particularly for the most disadvantaged students (Masdeu Navarro, 2015[4]).

The Strength through Diversity Policy Survey 2022 found that most education systems allocated learning support staff (such as teaching assistants) to support students with SEN. However, they can also be used to support the learning of other diverse students. For instance, a number of education systems (such as Australia, Finland and the United Kingdom) use bilingual assistants to support the specific language needs of students whose first language is not the language used by the school (Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, 2020[6]).

Learning support staff may be used in various ways in the classroom. One model is co-teaching, which is where the classroom teacher works collaboratively with an assistant in planning and teaching lessons, with the objective of jointly delivering instruction in a way that meets the needs of all learners (Masdeu Navarro, 2015[4]; Mezzanotte, 2020[7]; Morin, 2019[8]). While this approach has its roots in special education, it is now employed in a variety of subjects across all levels of education (Masdeu Navarro, 2015[4]). It is, for instance, used as an approach in some education systems to support students whose first language is not that used by the school (Guthrie et al., 2019[9]; Masdeu Navarro, 2015[4]). Co-teaching has also been implemented in Chile and Canada to support the teaching of Indigenous language and culture (see Chapter 4) (OECD, 2017[10]; Santiago et al., 2017[11]). Co-teaching can be beneficial for students in that it allows them to spend more time with and receive more individual attention from teachers (Mezzanotte, 2020[7]; Morin, 2019[8]). Indeed, the literature suggests that co-teaching can result in a more effective teaching and learning environment, an increased understanding of students' needs and a greater exchange of knowledge and teaching strategies among professionals (Dieker, 2001[12]; Dieker and Murawski, 2003[13]; Masdeu Navarro, 2015[4]). Co-teaching may also contribute to enhanced student engagement: a study analysing the effects of co-teaching in primary school science classes by specialist science student teachers and general teachers found positive effects on students' enjoyment of the classes. Moreover, it also found fewer age or gender differences in attitudes to science than children (when compared with students who had not participated in the project) (Masdeu Navarro, 2015[4]; Murphy et al.,

2004[14]). Co-teaching involving language assistants has also been recognised as beneficial in terms of improving student motivation, participation and cross-cultural understanding (Masdeu Navarro, 2015[4]).

### Box 5.1. Multidisciplinary teams to support inclusion in Portugal

In Portugal, legislation requires that each school have a multidisciplinary team, known as an *Equipa Multidisciplinar de Apoio à Educação Inclusiva*, to support the inclusion of students who may be facing difficulties and who require additional support. The permanent members of each team are a special education teacher, an assistant of the school director, the school psychologist and three members of the school's pedagogical council. In addition, teams include variable members, who are chosen depending on the student in question, as well as the student and their parents or guardians.

These teams are responsible for:

- Raising awareness of inclusive education in their educational community;
- Proposing learning support measures to be mobilised;
- Following-up and monitoring the implementation of learning support measures;
- Advising teachers about the implementation of inclusive pedagogical practices;
- Preparing technical-pedagogical reports, individual education plans and transition plans; and
- Monitoring and following-up on the functioning of learning support centres.

Source: OECD (2022[15]), Review of Inclusive Education in Portugal, Reviews of National Policies for Education, https://doi.org/10.1787/a9c95902-en

#### *Class size*

In some OECD countries, there is some flexibility in the organisation of class size in relation to the diverse composition of the student population. For instance, PISA finds that on average across OECD countries, socio-economically disadvantaged schools had more frequently smaller language-of-instruction classes compared to advantaged schools, as did rural schools compared to urban ones. Class size has been recognised as, in theory, a factor having the potential to impact on student learning – though research on this point is inconclusive (OECD, 2016[3]; OECD, 2019[16]). In smaller classes, teachers might be able to allocate more time and dedicated support to each student, whereas in larger classes some students may become disengaged due to their learning needs not receiving sufficient attention (OECD, 2019[16]). Findings from PISA 2015 show that students in schools with smaller class sizes were "more likely to report that their teachers adapt their lessons to students' needs and knowledge, provide individual help to struggling students, and change the structure of the lesson if students find it difficult to follow" (OECD, 2019[16]). There are also several studies that indicate that smaller classes can improve student outcomes and might be more beneficial for students from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds (Andersson, 2007[17]; Björklund et al., 2004[18]; Dynarski, Hyman and Schanzenbach, 2013[19]). Overall, however, the empirical evidence on the effectiveness of policies to reduce class size on students' academic outcomes is mixed (OECD, 2019[16]). While several studies using robust methodologies suggest that smaller classes may be of particular benefit to primary school pupils (Fredriksson, Öckert and Oosterbeek, 2012[20]; Chetty et al., 2011[21]; Vaag Iversen and Bonesrønning, 2013[22]), with some exceptions (Hoxby, 2000[23]), the evidence is less certain in the case of lower and upper secondary students, with large differences across countries (OECD, 2019[16]; Wößmann and West, 2006[24]). In general, the evaluation of the causal link between class size and performance is complicated by the fact that, in several contexts, disadvantaged schools have lower student-teacher ratios, which means it cannot be determined whether an observed performance outcome is the result of school composition (disadvantaged students often perform worse

than their more advantaged peers) and or of class size. Results from PISA 2018 suggest that small class size in disadvantaged schools does not fully compensate for the negative impact of the concentration of disadvantage within a school, which suggests that allocating more teachers to schools alone is not sufficient for enhancing the learning environment (OECD, 2019[16]). Previous PISA reports have also noted that some of the education systems identified as top-performers have large classes, and have suggested that investments in teacher quality are more effective than investing in efforts to reduce class size (OECD, 2019[16]; OECD, 2014[25]).

### *Leveraging time: Adapting schedules and timetables*

Research on the effects of the amount of learning time on students' academic outcomes presents mixed evidence (OECD, 2020[26]). A number of factors – such as teachers' instructional practices, the curriculum and students' aptitudes – can mediate or condition the effectiveness of learning time, which means that the relationship between learning time and student achievement is hard to observe empirically (Baker et al., 2004[27]; OECD, 2020[26]; Scheerens and Hendriks, 2013[28]). Studies undertaken between 2009 and 2017 indicate that additional learning time has positive but diminishing effects on student performance student (Bellei, 2009[29]; Cattaneo, Oggenfuss and Wolter, 2017[30]; Gromada and Shewbridge, 2016[31]; Patall, Cooper and Allen, 2010[32]). This is reflected in findings from PISA 2018: on average across OECD countries, performance in reading improved with each additional hour of language-of-instruction lessons per week up to three hours, but this positive association between learning time in regular language-of-instruction lessons and reading performance weakened amongst students who spent more than three hours per week in these lessons (OECD, 2020[26]).

Research has also shown that the benefits of additional learning time can vary depending on student profile (for instance, whether they are low performing or come from a low socio-economic background) (OECD, 2020[26]). Radinger and Boeskens (2021[33]) note in an overview of the research that there is support for the hypothesis that added instruction time would be particularly beneficial for socio-economically disadvantaged students and could therefore promote equity in learning outcomes (Gromada and Shewbridge, 2016[31]; Patall, Cooper and Allen, 2010[32]). However, they also underline that in practice the effects of extending instruction time on equity are likely to depend on how the time is used (i.e., what content is covered and how teachers adapt their instruction to individual learners' needs) (Kraft, 2015[34]), and on how students would otherwise have spent their time. For example, all else being equal, substituting supervised learning support at school for time spent on homework (where family inputs play a greater role in students' success) is more likely to reduce inequities than increasing instruction time to cover additional curriculum content (Radinger and Boeskens, 2021[33]). A review undertaken by Patall et al. (2010[32]) found that additional school time may be particularly beneficial for at-risk students (Patall, Cooper and Allen, 2010[32]). Indeed, several studies reported that extended school time appeared to be effective for at-risk students or that more time benefitted minority, lower socio-economic status, or low-achievement students the most. In addition, extending school time may be particularly important for single-parent families and families in which both parents work outside the home (Patall, Cooper and Allen, 2010[32]). Extra time may also be particularly useful for students from an immigrant or refugee background who do not speak the language of instruction (Cerna, 2019[35]). Supplementary extension and enrichment programmes can offer gifted students the opportunity to deepen and extent their learning beyond what is taught within the standard classroom hours (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2019[36]).

Extending school time should, however, be viewed as one of a number of possible interventions to improve the academic success of disadvantaged students, and not as a universal measure to improve achievement among students. Indeed, other support services, such as after-school programmes, summer school programmes, and other out-of-school services, may provide similar levels of academic support when extended school time is not an option for struggling students. Schools may also organise extra-curricular activities considered to have an impact on the overall well-being of students. These can consist of tutoring or after-school programmes for students falling behind (Travers, 2018[37]), supplementary extension or

enrichment programmes for gifted students (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2019[36]; Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[38]), or recreational and social activities designed to improve the overall well-being of students (McBrien, 2022[39]). On this point, findings PISA 2018 showed that students who were enrolled in schools offering more creative extracurricular activities performed better in reading, on average across OECD countries and in 32 countries and economies, after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile. At the system level, countries and economies whose schools offer more creative extracurricular activities were also found to tend to show greater equity in student performance (McBrien, 2022[39]).

### *Use of space*

Another important resource is the school's physical infrastructure: the way in which spaces in schools are designed can influence the ability of the school to be inclusive (Cerna et al., 2021[40]). It can directly affect the school's climate (discussed below in the section on School climate), interactions and relationships in school, and the ability to engage the community around the school. It also concerns the well-being of particular groups such as with the accessibility for students with physical impairments or ways to organise spaces that are sensitive to minority cultures (ibid.).

As discussed in Chapter 3, infrastructural barriers can impede full accessibility of schools for students with physical impairments. Indeed, for a school to be considered accessible, all students, teachers and parents to be able to safely enter, use all the facilities including recreational areas, participate fully in all learning activities with as much autonomy as possible.

Space can also be adapted at the classroom level to support specific student needs. For instance, certain environmental interventions can be employed by teachers to support the learning of students with SEN (Mezzanotte, 2020[41]). For students with ADHD, for example, teachers organise the classroom space in a way that minimises the risk of distraction and supports improved focus, while also providing increased opportunities for teacher monitoring and interaction (CADDRA, 2018[42]). This could involve seating the student in an area with little distractions, such as near the teacher or seating the student next to positive role models, such as classmates who are likely not distract them and can help them stay on task (CHADD, 2018[43]).

Another way in which space can be used within schools to support students with SEN is through the creation of dedicated sensory rooms or designated quiet spaces. Sensory rooms or quiet spaces can help support autistic students through providing them with a safe space away from over-stimulation. If designed and used effectively, these spaces can also aid in developing students' coordination, communication and sensory management skills (AsIAm, n.d.[44]). Providing a dedicated room or space is a strategy that has been employed in some schools in Canada to help Indigenous students feel safe and increase feelings of belonging. In some instances, these rooms provide a space where staff can provide dedicated support to Indigenous students (an example is discussed in OECD (2017[10])).

More generally, findings from PISA 2018 showed that, on average across OECD countries, students who had access to a room at school to complete homework scored 14 points higher in reading than students without access to a room for homework (and five points higher after accounting for socio-economic status). Education systems with larger shares of students in schools offering a room(s) for homework tend to show better performance in reading, mathematics and science. However, students in advantaged schools were found to be more likely than students in disadvantaged schools to attend a school that provides a room for homework (the share of students in advantaged schools whose school provides a room for homework being about seven percentage points larger than for the share of students in disadvantaged schools) (OECD, 2020[26]).

A further way in which school spaces can be made more inclusive is through celebrating the cultural heritages and diversity of the student body. A secondary school in New Brunswick, Canada, for instance,

has sought to visually reflect the cultural diversity of its students through hanging country flags and displaying welcome boards throughout the school (OECD, 2018[45]). A school in the Coimbra Centro school cluster in Portugal has also decorated the walls of its library with flags and words in numerous languages along with a graph showing the different countries students come from (OECD, 2022[15]). In Australia, the New South Wales Department of Education produces an annual Calendar for Cultural Diversity, which schools can download and print to display on their premises. The calendar provides dates and information for key celebrations, commemorations and observances from different cultures. Each month of the calendar features a different language to reflect the linguistic diversity of the state's public schools he calendars feature artworks submitted by students from across the state (NSW Department of Education, 2022[46]). In addition to promoting the inclusion of students from an immigrant or refugee background (OECD, 2018[45]), ensuring the visibility of diverse cultures within schools and classrooms has been recognised as important for fostering a sense of belonging among and supporting the engagement of Indigenous students (OECD, 2017[47]). A simple action that schools can take in this respect is using signage at their entrance that is symbolic of Indigenous cultures and includes the use of an Indigenous language or languages. Indigenous cultural symbolism and language can also be integrated throughout the school's broader ethos, environment and learning activities (OECD, 2017[47]). This approach was taken by a school located in the Northwest Territories of Canada, which used the need to construct a new school building as an opportunity to integrate Indigenous cultural symbolism throughout the school and promote greater learning about Indigenous culture and the region's history (OECD, 2017[47]).

## School climate

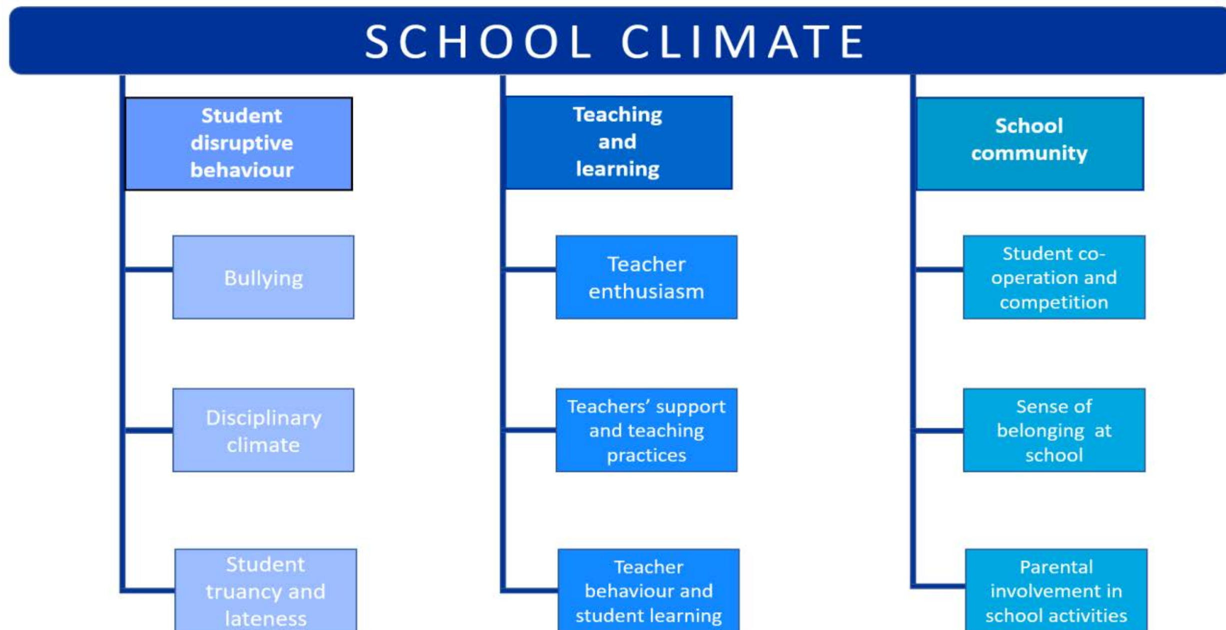
School climate is a broad and multidimensional concept that encompasses "virtually every aspect of the school experience" (OECD, 2019[48]; OECD, 2022[15]; Wang and Degol, 2015[49]). School climate is typically perceived and described as being either positive or negative. In a positive school climate students feel physically and emotionally safe; teachers are supportive, enthusiastic and responsive; parents and guardians engage in school life and activities voluntarily; the school community is built around healthy, respectful and cooperative relationships; and all stakeholders collaborate to develop a constructive school spirt (OECD, 2019[48]; OECD, 2022[15]). While there is not a general consensus on the elements that make up school climate, previous OECD work has identified four spheres that emerge from existing research:

- *Safety*, which includes both maladaptive behaviours (such as bullying, disciplinary problems in the classroom, substance abuse and truancy) and the rules, attitudes and school strategies related to these maladaptive behaviours;
- *Teaching and learning*, which includes aspects of teaching (such as academic support, feedback and enthusiasm, aspects of the curriculum, such as civic learning and socio-emotional skills) and indicators of teacher professional development and school leadership (such as teacher co-operation, teacher appraisal, administrative support and the school vision);
- *School community*, which includes aspects of the school community (such as student-teacher relationships, student co-operation and teamwork, respect for diversity, parental involvement, community partnerships) and outcomes of these indicators (such as school attachment, sense of belonging and engagement).
- *Institutional environment*, which includes school resources (such as buildings, facilities, educational resources and technology) and indicators of the school organisation (such as class size, school size and ability grouping) (OECD, 2019[48]).

The student and school questionnaires distributed with PISA 2018 included more than 20 questions related to school climate, with further questions included in the parent questionnaire, which was disseminated in 17 PISA-participating countries and economies (OECD, 2019[48]). The responses to these questions provide a series of indicators for the safety (which is renamed in the PISA 2018 Results as "student

disruptive behaviour"), teaching and learning, and school community dimensions of school climate, which are summarised in Figure 5.1 below (OECD, 2019[48]).

## Figure 5.1. School climate as measured in PISA 2018




Source: OECD (2019[16]), PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives, PISA, https://doi.org/10.1787/acd78851-en.

A positive school climate can have a significant impact on students' lives and is key for advancing equity and inclusion in education (OECD, 2019[48]; OECD, 2022[15]). Research indicates that a positive school climate promotes students' abilities to learn (Thapa et al., 2013[50]), with a number of studies having shown that school climate is directly related to academic achievement, at all school levels (Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1989[51]; MacNeil, Prater and Busch, 2009[52]; Thapa et al., 2013[50]) and with long-lasting effects (Hoy, Hannum and Tschannen-Moran, 1998[53]). A positive school climate has been found to have a strong influence on the performance of immigrant students (OECD, 2018[54]), and to be able to mitigate the impact of socio-economic status on academic achievement (Berkowitz et al., 2016[55]; Cheema and Kitsantas, 2014[56]; Murray and Malmgren, 2005[57]; OECD, 2019[48]). Beyond academic outcomes, there is a substantial body of research showing that school climate can have a significant impact on students' mental and physical health (Thapa et al., 2013[50]). School climate can, for instance, improve students' self-esteem and mitigate the negative effects of self-criticism, as well as positively affecting a range of other emotional and mental health outcomes (ibid.). A positive school climate has also been associated with lower levels of drug use and fewer self-reported psychiatric issues among secondary school students (LaRusso, Romer and Selman, 2007[58]), and has been recognised as predictive of better psychological well-being in early adolescence (Ruus et al., 2007[59]; Thapa et al., 2013[50]). There is evidence that school climate influences students' motivation to learn (Eccles et al., 1993[60]) and can positively affect student engagement (OECD, 2018[54]; Thapa et al., 2013[50]). A positive school climate can thus, overall, have a profound influence on students' ability to reach their academic potential and on their social and emotional well-being (OECD, 2019[48]).

Research indicates that some student groups may be more likely to be exposed to non-supportive or hostile school climates. Data from the 2021 Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)'s National School Climate Survey shows that school is a hostile environment for a number of LGBTQI+ students

across the United States, with the majority of survey respondents reporting that they routinely heard anti-LGBTQI+ language and experienced victimisation and discrimination at school (GLSEN, 2022[61]). This example highlights how school climate should be considered also in light of how it can affect and be experienced by different students, and interventions designed accordingly.

### *Improving a school's climate*

A school's climate is the result of the multitude of educational policies and practices, student and teacher experiences, and other factors and dynamics that interact with each other in the context of the particular school. Many of these can be grouped in one of the three key elements of school climate identified by PISA 2018 (shown in Figure 5.1). Policies and practices concerning the second and third elements (teaching and learning, and the school community) are discussed in Chapters 2 and 4 of this report and in later sections of this chapter. The next subsection will focus on the first element, school safety, giving particular focus to bullying as a key factor that can shape school climate and that can be addressed through school-level interventions.

#### *Bullying and school climate*

Data from PISA show that bullying is widespread across OECD countries. In the 2018 PISA cycle, on average 23% of students report being bullied at least a few times a month while 8% reported being frequently bullied[4] across OECD countries (OECD, 2019[48]).

Both bullying and being bullied have been associated with poorer academic performance and lower well-being. For instance, students who reported being bullied at least a few times a month scored 21 points lower in reading than those who were less frequently bullied (OECD, 2019[48]). PISA data also suggest that attending a school where bullying is widespread, even if students themselves do not experience bullying, is related to worse performance, highlighting the general role of a safe school climate. From a socio-emotional perspective, students who are frequently bullied are also more likely to report feeling sad, scared and not satisfied with their lives. High bullying prevalence in schools is also related to a weaker sense of belonging at school, along with a poorer disciplinary climate and less cooperation among classmates.

To counter bullying in schools, teachers and school leaders need to be equipped to both recognise bullying and to actively create an environment where it is less likely to occur. Education systems have sought to address bullying in schools through a range of strategies and practices. These include suspending and expelling bullies, training teachers, teaching empathy and respect to students, maintaining constant adult supervision in school settings, collaborating with parents about student behaviour, and enacting school-wide policies about bullying (Hall, 2017[62]). A review and analysis of 100 studies evaluating the effectiveness of school-based anti-bullying programmes across a number of countries found that such programmes were effective in reducing both school-bullying perpetration (by an estimated 19-20%) and school-bullying victimisation (by an estimated 15-16%).

However, the authors of the review also found that there was significant heterogeneity across programmes in terms of their effectiveness (ibid.). Further research is needed to develop an understanding of the factors that can contribute to the success of anti-bullying programmes, though, as a starting point, research has suggested that such programmes may be more effective where they are based on evidence and sound theory and where they are implemented with a high level of fidelity (Hall, 2017[62]). Research from the United States on the impact of anti-bullying policies in reducing anti-LGBT[5] bullying also found that those with a specific LGBT focus were more likely to result in the improved safety and decreased victimisation of LGBT students than generic anti-bullying policies, which may suggest that targeted interventions may be more effective in addressing bullying directed at specific groups of diverse students (Kull et al., 2016[63]; McBrien, Rutigliano and Sticca, 2022[64]).

One of the most well-known anti-bullying programmes is the Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme. As discussed in Box 5.2, there is substantial evidence confirming this programme's effectiveness in reducing bullying.

### Box 5.2. Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme: a whole-school bullying prevention programme

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme was developed to address bullying at both the primary and secondary levels of education. The Programme adopts a whole-school approach to bullying prevention, involving not only students, but also school staff, parents and the community as whole. The Programme is designed so that all students participate in most aspects, with students who have been identified as bullying others or victims of bullying receiving additional individualised interventions.

The Programme addresses the problem of bullying at four levels:

- School level: the Programme includes eight school-level components that focus on school communication and training, including the development of a Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee, the members of which participate in two days of training on Programme implementation.
- Classroom level: interventions include defining and enforcing rules against bullying, holding class meetings focused on bullying prevention, promoting positive peer relations and pro-social behaviours, and periodic classroom or grade-level meetings for parents.
- Individual level: individual-level components are designed for dealing with individual bullying incidents. The Programme encourages and provides training to school staff to intervene when they witness, suspect or hear reports of bullying, and to effectively communicate with parents. On-the-spot and follow-up interventions provide staff with actions to take when they witness bullying first-hand and when they suspect or hear reports of bullying.
- Community level: interventions at this level are designed to develop community support for the Programme so students receive consistent anti-bullying messages in all areas of their lives.

A number of studies have found the Programme to be effective. Quasi-experimental studies that conducted in Norway and the United States, overall found evidence of the Programme having had a short-term positive impact on child outcomes related to student well-being and satisfaction with school life and in terms of preventing crime, violence and antisocial behaviour.

As in 2019, the Programme had been implemented in Barbados, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Iceland, Lithuania, Mexico, Norway, Panama, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Source: Early Intervention Foundation (2019[65]), Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme, https://guidebook.eif.org.uk/programme/olweus-bullying-prevention-programme, (accessed 16 November 2022).

## Learning strategies to support diverse students

The practices and strategies employed in the classroom play a crucial role in ensuring all learners are able to reach their educational potential and feel a sense of belonging. Addressing diverse needs in a classroom might involve the use of a variety of teaching formats and practices, adopting multiple ways of representing content to different learners, and adopting different rhythms with different students. In particular, student-oriented teaching strategies – which place the student at the centre of the activity and give learners a more active role in lessons than in traditional teacher-directed strategies – have been found to have

particularly positive effects on student learning and motivation (OECD, 2018[66]). These include differentiated teaching, individualised learning, such as one-to-one tuition, and small group approaches. In addition to adjustments teaching formats and strategies, flexibility in the way in which the curriculum is implemented at the school level can play an important role in addressing the needs of diverse students. The way in which assessments are designed and carried out can also affect student learning outcomes, having the potential to raise achievement and reduce disparities (OECD, 2013[67]).

The following section provides examples of different types of strategies that can be adopted to advance the learning outcomes and foster the inclusion of diverse learners in the classroom. These include adaptations to teaching formats and the curriculum, the use of frameworks to support inclusive teaching, pedagogical approaches, the use of digital technologies, and strategies to ensure equitable and inclusive student assessment.

### *Adapting teaching formats*

There are a variety of ways in which teaching formats can be adapted to provide targeted support to particular learners. Two main approaches to providing teaching and support assistance are one-to-one tuition and small group interventions, which are often employed to support the learning of students with SEN (Brussino, 2020[68]). One-to-one instruction involves intensive individual education provision supported by a specialised teacher or a teaching assistant inside or outside of mainstream classes. In this format, students are encouraged to learn at their own pace with fewer time constraints and less pressure than may exist in group environments (Grasha, 2002[69]). In addition, one-to-one tuition does not stimulate competition with other students; this, for many, represents a positive aspect of such an approach.

However, limiting learning inputs and stimuli to only one teacher without including opportunities to learn alongside peers could discourage students with SEN. Interacting only with a teacher could make the learning less varied and could enhance feelings of marginalisation with respect to the rest of the classroom. From an economic perspective, one-to-one approaches can also be relatively expensive (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018[70]).

In small-group interventions, learning and teaching occur in small groups where a specialised teacher or teaching assistant follows a small number of students with SEN. In Japan, for instance, students who have been identified as having comparatively mild SEN are supported through small-group instruction in mainstream settings, and students identified as having greater needs can be supported either individually or in small teams in resource rooms in mainstream settings (Brussino, 2020[68]). Unlike one-to-one tuition, the small-group approach encourages peer learning and interaction. Specialised teachers provide support to small groups of students with SEN ensuring that students learn at their own rhythm and receive more support and feedback than in mainstream settings. Compared to one-to-one approaches, small groups can stimulate more active and deeper learning on top of strengthening socialisation and peer learning (Jones, 2007[71]). Small group instruction can also be more efficient in terms of resource and time management than one-to-one strategies (Bertsch, 2002[72]), even if additional investments and resources may be needed to provide specialised staff and teaching rooms (Jones, 2007[71]).

Small-group learning might create pressure and anxiety in students who are less active participants in discussions and group works. Further challenges could arise if teachers are used to teacher-centred teaching strategies as small-group learning entails more student-centred approaches (Bertsch, 2002[72]).

There are therefore several advantages and disadvantages to be considered when designing and implementing teaching formats for students with SEN, as summarised below (Table 5.1).

## Table 5.1. Advantages and disadvantages of one-to-one and small group tuition

| | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|---|
| ***One-to-one tuition*** | • Individual support by specialised teachers<br>• Fewer time constraints, pressure and anxiety<br>• Lack of competition with other students can be perceived as a positive aspect | • Risks of marginalisation and exhaustion, lack of encouragement<br>• Risks of not ensuring enough individual and independent learning time to the student without support by teacher<br>• Lack of peer learning<br>• Can be relatively expensive |
| ***Small-group approach*** | • Increased communication between teacher and students compared to standard learning in mainstream classes<br>• Easier tailoring of learning and activities to individual students' learning pace than in mainstream learning<br>• Promotes more active learning, peer learning and socialisation among students compared to one-to-one approach<br>• Allows students to check and clarify notions learnt and promotes deep rather than surface learning | • Might create pressure and anxiety for students who are not prone to be active participants in small-group interactions<br>• Challenges if teachers are used to teacher-centred strategies as small-group tuition entails student-centred strategies<br>• Often requires additional investments and resources to provide adequate staff and teaching rooms |

*Sources*: Adapted from Brussino (2020[68]), Mapping policy approaches and practices for the inclusion of students with special education needs, OECD Education Working Papers, No. 227, https://doi.org/10.1787/600fbad5-en.

### *Adapting the curriculum*

As discussed in detail in Chapter 2, curriculum has an important role in the promotion of equity and inclusion in education systems. The implementation of curriculum at the school level also has a significant impact on student lives. In practice, the flexibility in delivering the curriculum supports teachers in addressing the needs of diverse students.

#### *Individual Education Plans*

A key tool in the adaptation of the curriculum is the development of individualised plans for students with SEN, which allow for the provision of tailored programmes based on the child's difficulties and needs for flexibility (Mezzanotte, 2020[41]). These programmes are most often referred to as "Individual Education Plans" (IEPs), but may also be known in different education systems as 'Negotiated Education Plans', 'Educational Adjustment Programmes', 'Individual Learning Plans', 'Learning Plans', 'Personalised Intervention Programmes', and 'Supervisory Plans' (Mitchell, Morton and Hornby, 2010[73]). Generally, these plans are documents tailored on the individual children and their needs, and include elements such as a student's present level of performance, the individualised instruction and related services to be provided, the support mechanisms being offered (such as accommodations or assistive technology), and the annual goals set for the student (Undestood, 2019[74]).

Individual Education Plans are offered in most OECD countries, with variation in the way in which they are developed (Mezzanotte, 2020[41]). In some countries, the development of each plan is carried out within the individual school. Some countries, such as the France, Ireland, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States, do not rely only on teachers or principals for the drafting of the IEPs, but also involve – or take into consideration – other actors, such as neuro-psychiatrists or clinical psychologists, parents and sometimes the children themselves, in the process (Sandri, 2014[75]; Cavendish and Connor, 2017[76]). Other countries, such as Spain, make curricula adaptations for students the exclusive competence of the tutor or teacher of the specific subject (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training), 2015[77]). Education systems also differ in the legal status of IEPs and

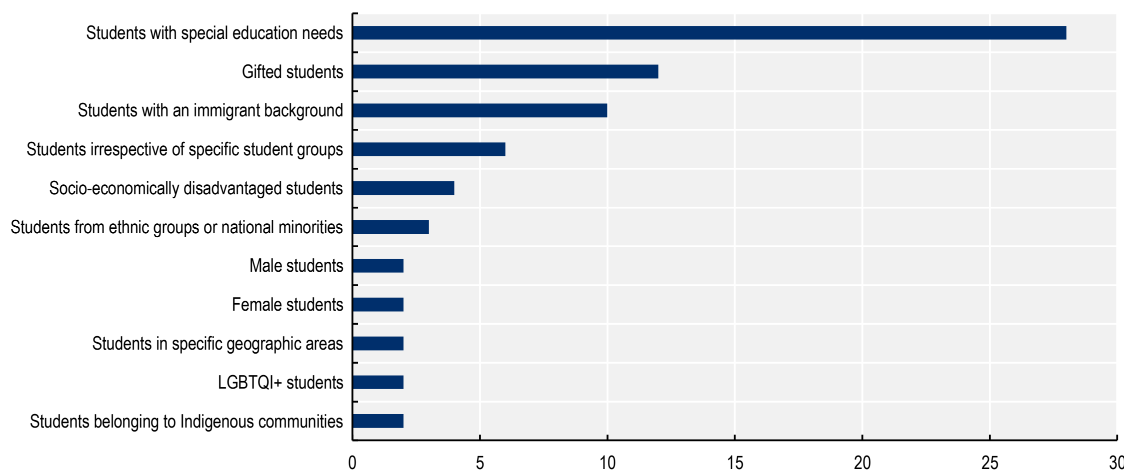
in whether their content is set by law or is a more flexible document that can be amended and updated according to the needs and progress of the student (Mezzanotte, 2020[41]).

The Strength through Diversity Policy Survey 2022 (Figure 5.2) shows that the majority of education systems provided IEPs for students with SEN, as described above. However, the use of such plans extends to other student groups, too. For instance, IEPs are also provided to students with an immigrant background. In Sweden, for example, all new arrivals are assessed on their academic knowledge and language skills within two months of starting school (with academic knowledge assessments being held in the students' mother tongues in order to enable students to demonstrate their previous learning without being hindered by language barriers) (Bunar, 2017[78]; Cerna, 2019[35]). School leaders use the results to determine the most appropriate educational trajectory for each student, having regard to their age, language skills and their academic knowledge. It is mandatory for all newly arrived students from grade 7 onwards to have an IEP (Cerna, 2019[35]; Skolverket (National Agency for Education), 2018[79]). Similarly, in Finland, an individual curriculum is designed for each student with a refugee or immigrant background based on their learning needs, previous school history, age and other factors related to their background that may be relevant to their schooling (such as whether they are an unaccompanied minor or have come from a war situation). The individual curriculum is determined by the teacher in collaboration with the student and their family (Cerna, 2019[35]; Dervin, Simpson and Maitkainen, 2017[80]).

Ten education systems reported providing IEPs to immigrant students in the Strength through Diversity Policy Survey 2022. In addition, 12 reported providing IEPs to gifted students, and six reported providing IEPs to all students, irrespective of whether a student belongs to a particular diverse group or groups.

## Figure 5.2. Provision of an Individual Education Plan (or a similar document)

Number of education systems that provide an IEP to specific student groups




Note: This figure is based on answers to the question "Does the education policy framework in your jurisdiction require teachers at ISCED 2 level to provide diverse students with any of the following? [Provision of an Individual Education Plan (or a similar document)]". Thirty-one education systems responded to this question. Response options were not mutually exclusive.
*Options selected have been ranked in descending order of the number of education systems.*
Source: OECD (2022[81]), Strength through Diversity Policy Survey 2022.

https://stat.link/kjx9lz

Conditions regarding the entitlement of IEPs vary across education systems. Some education systems, for example, require students to have received a formal diagnosis of SEN to be assigned an IEP and receive

instructional support at school (Mezzanotte, 2020[41]). This can present challenges for students who have not been able to obtain an official diagnosis but are nevertheless in need of additional support (ibid). A way of addressing this issue in education systems requiring an official diagnosis could be to offer the option of developing an alternative, less formal individualised learning plan for students who do not meet the official criteria to be eligible for an IEP. In Finland, for example, Learning Plans can be developed for any student, including those who have not received an official SEN diagnosis and who are therefore not eligible for an IEP. The Learning Plan is designed to support any student to learn (be they a student with SEN, a student from an immigrant background, or a gifted student) and to help teachers in adopting differentiation teaching strategies (Mezzanotte, 2020[41]; Mitchell, Morton and Hornby, 2010[73]).

In addition to facilitating the development of tailored learning programmes while a student is at school, IEPs (or equivalent student planning documents) can be used to help students prepare for their future beyond secondary education (Mezzanotte, 2020[7]). The degree and nature of support offered by schools has been recognised as playing a key role in students' ability to cope with and navigate the transition process from secondary education to tertiary education and/or the workforce (Ebersold, 2012[82]). This can be particularly important for students with SEN, who may face many barriers that hinder their entry into higher education or the labour market (Mezzanotte, 2020[7]). Several OECD education systems (such as Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and Scotland (United Kingdom)) specifically include transition planning in the guidelines provided for IEPs (Mitchell, Morton and Hornby, 2010[73]; Mezzanotte, 2020[7]). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 1997 mandates transition planning as part of the IEP for students from the age of SEN (National Transition Network, n.d.[83]), and the statutory guidance for organisations working with young people with SEN in the United Kingdom and Wales also specifies that transition planning must be incorporated into the education, health and care plans for students from year 9 (ISCED 2) onwards (Department for Education; Department of Health, 2015[84]).

### *Accommodations and modifications*

Individual Education Plans enable schools to provide adaptations of the curriculum to address students' specific needs. There are a variety of ways in which curricula can be adapted so as to be made more accessible to students, including in terms of content, teaching materials and responses expected from learners. Modifications (e.g., enlarging the font of a text), substitutions (e.g., Braille for written materials) or omissions of complex work are all possibilities for students with SEN (Mitchell, Morton and Hornby, 2010[73]).

Individual Education Plans generally provide for or facilitate two main types of adjustments: accommodations and modifications (see Chapter 2). Accommodations concern *how* students learn, while modifications relate to *what* students learn (Understood, 2019[85]). Accommodations are intended to help students learn the same information as other students, and can be instructional (adjustments in teaching strategies to enable the student to learn and to progress through the curriculum), environmental (changes or additions to the physical environment of the classroom and/or the school) or relate to assessment (adjustments in assessment activities and methods required to enable the student to demonstrate learning) (Olszewski-Kubilius and Lee, 2004[86]). In their implementation at the school level, accommodations are most effective when tailored to the specific needs of the children. For example, common accommodations that are often offered to students with ADHD include providing additional time for tests, the use of positive reinforcement and feedback, changes to the environment to minimise the risk of distraction and the use of technology to assist with tasks (CDC, 2019[87]; Mezzanotte, 2020[41]).

In cases where accommodations do not sufficiently provide for the needs of children with IEPs, modifications must be made. Whereas accommodations allow students to learn the same content as their peers, modifications are actual changes to assignments or the curriculum that schools and teachers can design to make it easier for students to stay on track (Sands, 2016[88]) and can involve the student learning different material, being graded or assessed under different standards than other students, or being

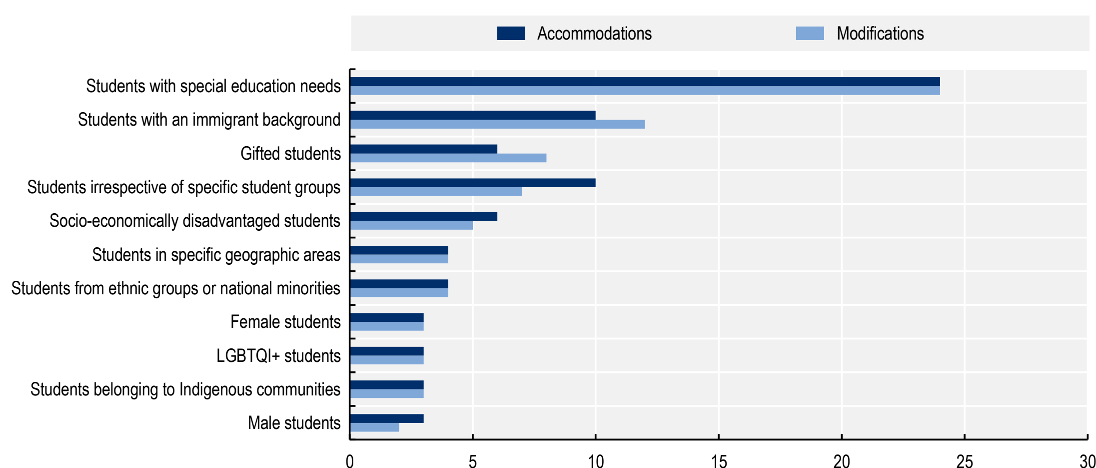
excused from particular projects (Morin, 2019[89]). In the case of gifted students, for instance, schools can provide specific classes or courses with modified expectations. For some students (such as language and mathematics), the gifted student may work to learning expectations from a different grade level. In other subjects, the complexity of the learning expectations may be increased. With this type of programming, the affected subjects or courses would be identified in the IEP as subjects or courses with modified expectations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004[90]).

As shown in Figure 5.3, 24 of the education systems who participated in the Strength through Diversity Policy Survey 2022 reported providing accommodations and modifications for students with SEN. In many of these cases (19), students with SEN were the only group reported as being entitled to accommodations or modifications. Ten education systems reported offering accommodations exclusively to students with SEN (Canada, Denmark, the Flemish Community of Belgium, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the Slovak Republic, Scotland (United Kingdom), United States), and ten reported offering modifications exclusively to this student group (Canada, England (United Kingdom), the Flemish Community of Belgium, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Scotland (United Kingdom), the United States). As discussed above, the entitlement to accommodations and modifications in certain systems may be linked to an official diagnosis of disability or specific disorder.

However, a number of education systems reported providing adaptations to other groups, or to all students irrespective of their specific groups. As shown in Figure 5.3, various systems reported offering accommodations (10) and modifications (12) to students with an immigrant background, and 10 and 7 education systems respectively reported offering them to all students, irrespective of their background. A number of systems also reported offering accommodations and modifications to gifted and socio-economically disadvantaged students.

### Figure 5.3. Accommodations and modifications

Number of education systems reporting they require teachers at ISCED 2 level to provide accommodations and modifications to different student groups




Note: This figure is based on answers to the question "Does the education policy framework in your jurisdiction require teachers at ISCED 2 level to provide diverse students with any of the following?". Thirty-two education systems responded to this question. Response options were not mutually exclusive.

*Options selected have been ranked in descending order of the number of education systems that require the provision of modifications.*

Source: OECD (2022[81]), Strength through Diversity Policy Survey 2022.

StatLink https://stat.link/aqi265

There are, however, concerns that practices associated with providing students with certain accommodations can give rise to the risk of “watering down” the curriculum and expectations of students (Ellis, 1997[91]; Sitlington and Frank, 1993[92]). The types of accommodations concerned are those that seek to enable students to acquire the necessary credits to graduate and enable them to understand and retain the knowledge necessary to attain course credits. Limitations associated with such accommodations include their emphasis on memorising loosely related facts, reduced opportunities for learning content and to develop thinking skills, inhibited "learnability" of subject matter, and reduced investment in learning (Mezzanotte, 2020[41]; Ellis, 1997[91]).

In addition, a study on IEPs in the United States published in 2014 has shown that many of the most commonly used support tools for students with ADHD have very limited research support, and that the most empirically-validated approaches were rarely included on the IEPs of students with ADHD (Spiel, Evans and Langberg, 2014[93]). It was found that only around one-fourth of the interventions implemented for students with ADHD were supported by evidence of efficacy in literature. For example, the most common support mechanisms – extended time on tests and assignments, progress monitoring, and case management – were found to have no reported evidence of effectiveness in improving performance among ADHD students. Other research has also found that additional test time does not appear to provide more benefits to students with ADHD than students without (Lewandowski et al., 2007[94]). In fact, extended test time can affect their ability to stay focused for the whole duration of the test, due to the difficulties such students experience in sustaining attention for longer time periods (Pariseau et al., 2010[95]).

Overall, the researchers identified a need for further research to evaluate the effectiveness of the more frequently-used services for students with ADHD, as most of these had never been systematically evaluated (Spiel, Evans and Langberg, 2014[93]). Another notable issue concerning adjustments to curricula and support mechanisms is that the range of services offered can vary greatly between specialised schools and mainstream classrooms (Murray et al., 2014[96]).

### *Frameworks for inclusive learning*

Advancing inclusion and equity requires learning and teaching to be adapted to students, rather than expecting students to adapt to traditional learning and teaching practices. The next section presents two frameworks that can be used to guide and support teachers and school staff in designing and delivering pedagogies, curricula and assessments that foster the inclusion of all learners in increasingly diverse classrooms.

#### *Universal Design for Learning*

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a tool that can be used to support teachers and education stakeholders in designing and implementing inclusive teaching through pedagogies, curricula and assessments. Universal Design for Learning aims to dismantle barriers to participation and learning for all learning by centring learner variability in curriculum development (Waitoller and King Thorius, 2016[97]; Rose and Meyer, 2002[98]).

The UDL provides three guiding principles for the design and implementation of flexible curriculum goal, materials, methods, and assessments, as follows (CAST, 2018[99]; Brussino, 2021[100]; Rose and Meyer, 2002[98]):

1. Multiple means of representation. This principle addresses the “what” of learning, accounting for the different ways in which learners perceive and understand information, and guides teachers to present information in various, flexible formats.
2. Multiple means of action and expression. This principle addresses the “how” of learning, accounting for the different ways by which students navigate the learning activity and express their knowledge.

3. Multiple means of engagement. This principle targets the "why" of learning, addressing the various ways in which students' interest can be attracted and sustained, while also guiding teachers to build into a particular learning activity various sources of motivation and engagement.

Rather than representing three separate guidelines, these principles constitute an overarching structure to be embedded within curriculum, materials, instruction and assessment. The nature of these three guidelines allows educators to develop learning environments in which accommodations and modifications are not seen as additional work for the teaching staff, but as part of an inclusive structure to be implemented systematically (Jimenez and Hudson, 2019[101]).

The UDL is particularly helpful in increasingly diverse classrooms, as it provides for the flexibility necessary to support diverse learning needs and styles (Brussino, 2021[100]). Through its focus on providing students with different means to interact with learning material and adapting information to students (rather than asking students to adapt to the information), the UDL can help schools better accommodate students' needs and learning in diverse classrooms (CAST, 2018[99]).

Universal Design for Learning Guidelines have been developed for teachers and other education stakeholders to implement the UDL framework. These guidelines provide practical suggestions to develop inclusive teaching and learning strategies that can promote the well-being of all students (see Table 5.2).

### Table 5.2. Universal Design for Learning Guidelines

| Provide multiple means of engagement | Provide multiple means of representation | Provide multiple means of action and expression |
|---|---|---|
| Provide options for recruiting interest:<br>Optimise individual choice and autonomy<br>Optimise relevance, value and authenticity<br>Minimise threats and distractions | Provide options for perception:<br>Offer ways of customising the display of information<br>Offer alternatives for auditory information<br>Offer alternatives for visual information | Provide options for physical action:<br>Vary the methods for response and navigation<br>Optimise access to tools and assistive technologies |
| Provide options for sustaining effort and persistence:<br>Heighten salience of goals and objectives<br>Vary demands and resources to optimise challenge<br>Foster collaboration and community<br>Increase mastery-oriented feedback | Provide options for language and symbols:<br>Clarify vocabulary and symbols<br>Clarify syntax and structure<br>Support decoding of text, mathematical notation and symbols<br>Promote understanding across languages<br>Illustrate through multiple media | Provide options for expression and communication:<br>Use multiple media for communication<br>Use multiple tools for construction and composition<br>Build fluencies with graduated levels of support for practice and performance |
| Provide options for self-regulation:<br>Promote expectations and beliefs that optimise motivation<br>Facilitate personal coping skills and strategies<br>Develop self-assessment and reflection | Provide options for comprehension:<br>Activate or supply background knowledge<br>Highlight patterns, critical features, big ideas and relationships<br>Guide information processing and visualisation<br>Maximise transfer and generalisation | Provide options for executive functions:<br>Guide appropriate goal-setting<br>Supporting planning and strategy development<br>Facilitate managing information and resources<br>Enhance capacity for monitoring progress |

Source: Brussino (2021[100]), adapted from CAST (2018[99]), Universal Design for Learning Guidelines, http://udlguidelines.cast.org (accessed 15 October 2020).

While UDL is often perceived as a tool to support students with SEN, it is designed to support the development of a universal approach to teaching diverse groups that encompasses learners. The UDL framework has been recognised as designing both the instructional context and content for variability and differentiation from the outset, eliminating or reducing the number and severity of learning barriers in way that results in increased access for all and less work for individual educators (Jimenez and Hudson, 2019[101]). A meta-analysis on the empirical research on the effectiveness of UDL as a teaching method to improve the learning of all students found that UDL can improve the learning process and have positive

impacts for both students with SEN and those without (Capp, 2017[102]). Identified benefits of implementation of the UDL for students without SEN increased academic engagement, improved relationships with peers, a greater appreciation of diversity, the acquisition of new advocacy and support skills, increased empathy, and having higher expectations for their classmates (Capp, 2017[102]).

### *Intercultural education*

Intercultural education has received increasing attention as a strategy for the inclusion of diverse students in mainstream education (Rutigliano, 2020[103]), particularly for students from a refugee or immigrant background (Portera, 2008[104]). A growing body of experts and academics have highlighted the necessity of implementing schools with an intercultural programme to enhance ethnic minority students' performance and well-being and to benefit society as a whole (OECD, 2010[105]; Kirova and Prochner, 2015[106]; Calogiannakis et al., 2018[107]; Vandekerckhove et al., 2019[108]; Rozzi, 2017[109]). Researchers have found that intercultural education can lead to intercultural competence, which can be defined as "the ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes" and is associated with empathy, flexibility and reflection (Rapanta and Trovão, 2021[110]). The results of a 2015 study on the impacts of programme implemented in Romania have also been interpreted as suggesting that intercultural education programmes may help promote more positive attitudes among teachers and students toward Roma (Nestian Sandu, 2015[111]).

The concept of intercultural education corresponds to a pedagogy based on "mutual understanding and recognition of similarities through dialogue" (Kirova and Prochner, 2015, p. 392[106]; Rutigliano, 2020[103]). The ultimate goal is to create a shared space where all students' cultural differences are valued, and not put aside or simply acknowledged. In this sense, the notion of interculturalism goes beyond that of multiculturalism which is limited to cohabitation and the acknowledgment of the existence of different cultures (Meer, 2014[112]). UNESCO (2006[113]) has identified three basic principles to guide international action in the field of intercultural education:

- Principle I: Intercultural Education respects the cultural identity of the learner through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all.
- Principle II: Intercultural Education provides every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to achieve active and full participation in society.
- Principle III: Intercultural Education provides all learners with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable them to contribute to respect, understanding and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups and nations.

According to UNESCO (2006[113]), intercultural education should not represent a simple "add on" to the regular curriculum. It rather needs to be embedded into the learning environment as a whole, as well as other educational processes and features, such as teacher education and training, languages of instruction, teaching methods, and learning materials (ibid). Fostering an inclusive and intercultural approach in schools therefore requires actions at the different levels of an education system, i.e. clear legal and political frameworks, sufficient resources, capacity building and consistent changes at the school level in order to implement a new vision based on inclusion and diversity (Guthrie et al., 2019[9]). It can be seen as connected to the concept of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, which emphasises the need to sustain students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and diversity in the classroom (discussed in more detail Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies ). Intercultural education is also tightly linked to the involvement of the community as a whole (discussed further below), requiring both a commitment to creating an inclusive school atmosphere and a desire to strengthen the participation of all stakeholders in the design and implementation of such an environment.

In the European context, "intercultural education" was first referred to in an official capacity in 1983, when European ministers of education highlighted the intercultural dimension of education in a resolution regarding the schooling of immigrant children, and has featured in education projects promoted by the

Council of Europe since the mid-1980s (Portera, 2008[104]; Rapanta and Trovão, 2021[110]). It is now considered by the European Union as the official approach to be used in schools for the integration of immigrant and ethnic minority group students (Tarozzi, 2012[114]). Several European countries, such as Italy and Greece, have specific policies and/or legal frameworks on intercultural education (Tarozzi, 2012[114]; Rutigliano, 2020[103]). Ireland also had a specific strategy for intercultural education from 2010 to 2015, which aimed to ensure that (i) "experience an education that respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society and is conducted in a spirt of partnership" (reflecting the Education Act 1998) and (ii) "all education providers are assisted with ensuring that inclusion and integration within an intercultural learning environment become the norm" (Department of Education and Skills and the Office of the Minister for Integration, 2010[115]).

### *Pedagogical changes to reach all students*

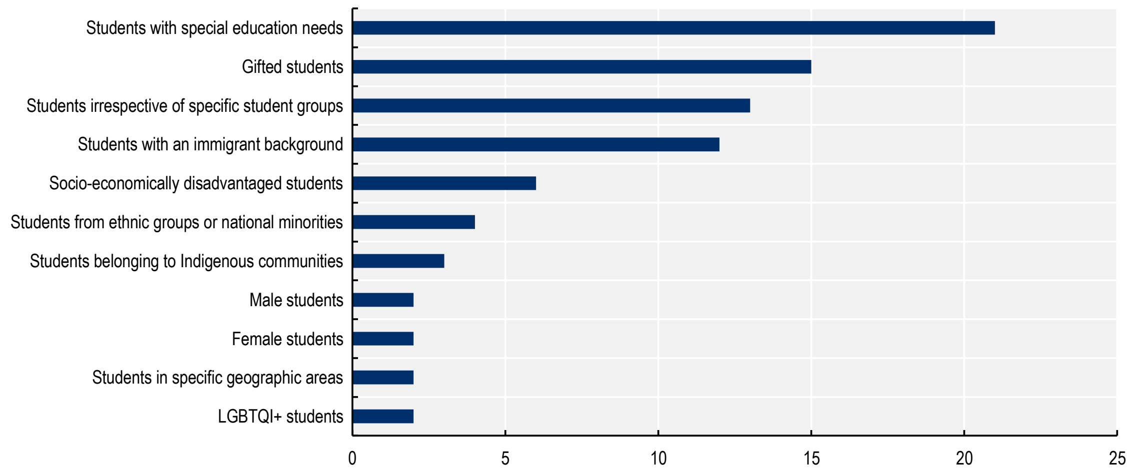
General pedagogical knowledge refers to "the specialised knowledge of teachers for creating effective teaching and learning environments for all students independent of subject matter" (Guerriero, 2017, p. 80[116]). It provides teachers with a common reflection ground and language to discuss their students' learning progress as well as well-being and ways to improve the teaching and learning support across subjects (Ulferts, 2021[117]). Teachers' general pedagogical knowledge is a crucial resource for effective teaching and learning, with research showing that general pedagogical knowledge is associated with higher quality teaching and better student outcomes (Ulferts, 2021[117]; Ulferts, 2019[118]).

The pedagogical knowledge of teachers also has specific implications for equity and inclusion in education. There is, for instance, a growing body of literature that shows that culturally responsive teaching practices - drawing on students' cultures and lived experiences to create authentic learning experiences in an environment that fosters critical engagement and mutual respect (Egbo, 2018[119]) - have a positive impact on not only students' learning (Cabrera et al., 2014[120]; Cammarota, 2007[121]; Dee and Penner, 2016[122]; Ulferts, 2021[117]) but also their engagement and psychological well-being (Cholewa et al., 2014[123]; Savage et al., 2011[124]). Research further indicates that culturally responsive teaching practices improve the school climate (Khalifa, Gooden and Davis, 2016[125]; Ulferts, 2019[118]) and can help to reduce the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education programmes (Klingner et al., 2005[126]; Ulferts, 2019[118]).

A number of education systems reported requiring teachers at ISCED 2 level to adapt their pedagogical approaches to respond to different learners in the Strength through Diversity Policy Survey 2022 (Figure 5.4). This was most frequently reported as being required for students with SEN, by 21 education systems. In addition, 13 systems reported requiring teachers to adapt their pedagogical approaches to respond to all students, irrespective of student groups, and 15 to gifted students specifically. Twelve education systems reported requiring teachers to provide changes in their pedagogical approaches to support students with an immigrant background.

## Figure 5.4. Changes in pedagogical approaches

Number of education systems reporting they require teachers at ISCED 2 level to provide changes in pedagogical approaches to different student groups




Note: This figure is based on answers to the question "Does the education policy framework in your jurisdiction require teachers at ISCED 2 level to provide diverse students with any of the following? [Changes in pedagogical approaches (e.g., differentiated pedagogy for gifted students)]". Thirty-one education systems responded to this question. Response options were not mutually exclusive.
*Options selected have been ranked in descending order of the number of education systems.*
Source: OECD (2022[81]), Strength through Diversity Policy Survey 2022.

https://stat.link/s4ad7r

There is a wide number of pedagogical approaches that can be adopted by teachers to support the learning of all their students, based on their need and attitudes. The following sections discuss some of the most well-known teaching strategies for advancing equity and inclusion in education.

### *Differentiated instruction*

Differentiated instruction, or differentiation, is an approach to teaching that has received increased attention in a context of growing diversity. Differentiated instruction has been defined as a philosophy for teaching that is grounded in the idea that students learn best when their teachers effectively address variance in their readiness levels, interests, and learning profile preferences (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 263[127]). It is based on a flexible approach to education that involves "building instruction from students' passions and capacities, helping students personalise their learning and assessments in ways that foster engagement and talents, and encouraging students to be ingenious" (OECD, 2018[66]; Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[38]). Differentiated instruction is at the core of equitable and inclusive education systems, as it means responding to and serving all student needs (OECD, 2022[128]), thereby supporting all learners in achieving their educational potential (OECD, 2012[129]). In the environment developed through differentiated instruction model, teachers, support staff and professionals collaborate to create an optimal learning experience for students: each student is valued for his or her unique strengths, while being offered opportunities to demonstrate skills through a variety of assessment techniques (Subban, 2006[130]). The differentiated classroom balances learning needs common to all students, with more specific needs tagged to individual learners, and can avoid the need for labelling students (ibid.).

Tomlinson (2001[131]) provides a comprehensive definition that sets out what differentiated instruction is and what it is not, the key elements of which are set out in Table 5.3 below. Based on this definition,

differentiated instruction can be summarised as a proactive, flexible and student-centred approach that provides multiple approaches to learning processes and content and that incorporates whole-class, group and individual teaching formats.

### Table 5.3. What is differentiated instruction?

| What differentiated instruction is not | What differentiated instruction is |
|---|---|
| Differentiated instruction is not the "individualised instruction" of the 1970s. | Differentiated instruction is proactive. |
| Differentiated instruction is not chaotic. | Differentiated instruction is more qualitative than quantitative. |
| Differentiated instruction is not just another way to provide homogeneous grouping | Differentiated instruction is rooted in assessment. |
| Differentiated instruction is not just "tailoring the same suit of clothes." | Differentiated instruction provides multiple approaches to content, process, and product. |
| | Differentiated instruction is student centered. |
| | Differentiated instruction is a blend of whole-class, group, and individual instruction. |
| | Differentiated instruction is "organic." |

Source: Adapted from Tomlinson, C.A. (2001[131]), How To Differentiate Instruction In Mixed-Ability Classrooms, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, https://rutamaestra.santillana.com.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Classrooms-2nd-Edition-By-Carol-Ann-Tomlinson.pdf (accessed 16 January 2023)

Differentiation is an approach to teaching that supports all learners in achieving their educational potential (UNESCO, n.d.[132]; OECD, 2022[128]), with studies indicating that it can have positive effects on student achievement (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019[133]). It has been recognised as essential both to enhance the academic development of gifted students and to prevent the development of interpersonal challenges for gifted children (Beljan et al., 2006[134]). Differentiated instruction can also play an important role in the learning of immigrant students in the sense that it takes into account their proficiency in the host country language and ensures learning content is delivered in a way that is comprehensible (OECD, 2022[128]). The incorporation of tailored behavioural interventions and teaching practices also plays an important role in promoting the learning of students with SEN (Mezzanotte, 2020[7]). Box 5.3 provides an example of how teaching can be differentiated to support the specific needs of students with ADHD. Differentiated instruction can similarly be leveraged to support other students with similar SEN.

### Box 5.3. Targeted academic instruction: an example for ADHD

Adapting academic instruction can help teachers support students with ADHD in achieving and fulfilling their potential (U.S. Department of Education, 2008[135]). Indeed, teachers can foster their students' academic success by differentiating teaching methodologies to address different learning needs (HADD Ireland, 2013[136]).

For instance, teachers can adopt specific strategies with respect to the timeline and structure of their lessons to address the learning needs of students with ADHD. As discussed by the US Department of Education (2008[135]), students with ADHD are more likely to learn best when they are situated in a structured lesson, where the teacher is able to clearly explain what they want students to learn and what they expect from them, both from an academic and a behavioural perspective. In this respect, a number of specific teaching practices at the start of the lesson can be helpful, such as preparing the students for the day's lesson by summarising the order of various activities planned and reviewing the

content that was studied during the previous lesson. In addition, teachers can specify how they expect the children to behave and act (such as speaking with a low tone to their classmates to work on an assignment or raising hands before speaking) and set out all the material students will need for the class.

While conducting the lesson, it is important for teachers to keep track of the children's understanding of the material by asking questions, divide work into smaller tasks that can foster the concentration, and provide follow-up directions both orally and in written form. In addition, as children with ADHD tend to struggle with transitions between lessons, preparing them for transitions from one lesson to the other can help them stay on task. Lastly, in terms of the conclusion of the lesson, it is helpful for teachers to notify students in advance, verify whether the assignments have been completed and instruct students on how to start preparing for the following lesson.

Table 5.4 summarises potential ways in which teachers can adapt their lessons and teaching to more effectively support students with ADHD.

### Table 5.4. Academic instruction interventions

| Academic Instruction | |
|---|---|
| Introducing lessons | Provide an advance organiser |
| | Review previous lessons |
| | Set learning expectations |
| | Set behavioural expectations |
| | State needed materials |
| | Explain additional resources |
| | Simplify instructions, choices, and scheduling |
| Conducting lessons | Be predictable: maintain structure of the lessons |
| | Support the student's participation in the classroom |
| | Use audio-visual materials |
| | Check student performance |
| | Ask probing questions |
| | Perform ongoing student evaluation |
| | Help students correct their own mistakes |
| | Help students focus |
| | Follow-up directions (oral/written) |
| | Lower noise level |
| | Divide work into smaller units |
| | Highlight key points |
| | Eliminate or reduce frequency of timed tests |
| | Use cooperative learning strategies |
| | Use assistive technology |
| Concluding lessons | Provide advance warnings |
| | Check assignments |
| | Preview the next lesson |

Sources: Mezzanotte (2020[41]), Policy approaches and practices for the inclusion of students with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), OECD Education Working Paper, No. 238, OECD Publishing, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/49af95e0-en; US Department of Education (2008[135]), Teaching Children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: Instructional Strategies and Practices, https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/adhd/adhd-teaching.html (accessed 19 December 2022).

#### *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies*

As noted above, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) is a concept for teaching that emphasises the need to sustain students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and diversity in the classroom. It builds on asset-based pedagogical research that counters deficit views regarding students of colour, especially

those who are from a socio-economically disadvantaged background (Waitoller and King Thorius, 2016[97]). Asset pedagogies argue that learning is a lifelong process of intersecting cultural practices and all students' cultural practices matter. Asset-based pedagogical research includes Ladson-Billings' (1995[137]) work on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, which focuses on affirming the backgrounds of students of colour (California Department of Education, 2022[138]). The concept of CSP was introduced by Paris (2012[139]) to emphasise that asset pedagogies should be more than responsive to students of colour, supporting students to "perpetuate and foster – to sustain - linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as a needed response to demographic and social change." Rather than merely being relevant for or responsive to certain cultures, CSP seeks to sustain linguistic and cultural pluralism in the classroom (Paris, 2012[139]). Similarly to how intercultural education has been recognised as needing to be embedded into the learning environment as a whole, CSP involves centring students' languages, cultures, literacies and ways of being meaningfully and consistently in classroom learning, rather than approaching them as "add-ons" (California Department of Education, 2022[138]).

Waitoller and King Thorius (2016[97]) argue that CSP should be cross-pollinated with Universal Design for Learning (discussed above), as a way to develop an inclusive pedagogy that also accounts for disability. Indeed, they argue that recent work at the intersection of disability studies, special education and critical race studies in education have examined and underlined the relationship between racism and ableism as one of the intersecting drivers of inclusion (see for instance Annamma et al. (2013[140])). Box 5.4 discusses why and how CSP and UDL can be cross-pollinated to tackle the intersection between ethnicity and SEN.

### Box 5.4. Cross-pollinating Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies and Universal Design for Learning

**The troubling relationship between racism and ableism**

Paris and Alim (2014[141]) provide four main reasons why a UDL/CSP cross-pollination is necessary to foster inclusive education.[6] First, they argue that scientific, political and economic purposes have solidified, throughout history, the relationship between racisms and ableism[7] (Paris and Alim, 2014[141]). These phenomena have had detrimental effects for both students from ethnic minorities and students with disabilities. Second, they underline that both racism and ableism are based on social constructs within a relational system (Leonardo, 2009[142]). Indeed, the two concepts have their origin in the attribution of otherness and deviance from cultural beliefs of the norm: black being other from white, and disabled being other from able. Third, the effects of racism and ableism are tangible in societies and in schools, and work as interlocking systems of oppression. Fourth, racism and ableism have to be dismantled together to address complex challenges to equity issues. For example, the fact that black male students are generally disproportionately over-identified for special education services and placed in segregated settings, cannot be explained by examining only racism or ableism (U.S. Department of Education, 2014[143]).

Given this rationale, the authors argue that there are three areas in which CSP can be extended by incorporating elements of UDL, and vice versa, as shown in Table 5.5.

### Table 5.5. How to cross-pollinate CSP and UDL

| Extending CSP through UDL | Extending UDL through CSP |
|---|---|
| CSP must explicitly consider disability as an essential component in the construction of fluid cultural identities. | UDL can be extended to nurture learners who interrogate multiple forms of oppression and who make themselves as key participants in a pluralistic democracy. |
| CSP attention to cultural aspects needs to be concretised in school curricula, by explicitly including ability pluralism within the goal of sustaining cultural pluralism. | A key element of CSP, critical reflexivity, could strengthen UDL's critique of traditional curricula beyond discussing the barriers to access for students. It would thus refuse a noncritical approach to the |

| | |
|---|---|
| | construction of disability as a dimension of diversity and refuse hierarchy between ability and disability. |
| Extending CSP needs to discuss which cultural aspects of disability it should conserve, in particular in relation to labels. Questioning the role and use of labels can support students navigate the creation of their identity and their relation with labels. | ULD can be extended to address the role of power and privilege in shaping and block learning opportunities from an intersectional perspective between disability and ethnicity. |

The CSP/UDL cross-pollination has implications for teachers, teachers' educators and researchers. It implies a need for teachers to engage with pedagogies that aim to dismantle intersecting forms of oppression and requires teacher preparation programmes to account for these goals.

Paris and Alim acknowledge that the proposed framework is incomplete, and that there are other dimensions of diversity that are impacted by different forms of oppression, which may intersect in different ways.

Source: Adapted from Paris and Alim (2014[141]), What Are We Seeking to Sustain Through Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy? A Loving Critique Forward, Harvard Educational Review, https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.84.1.982l873k2ht16m77.

### *Use of digital technologies to foster equity and inclusion*

Digital technologies, if used effectively, can help to facilitate the inclusion and promote the academic outcomes of all students (Gottschalk and Weise, Forthcoming[144]) and thus contribute to reducing inequities in education. Digital technologies can play an important role in supporting teachers in adapting to different learning styles (OECD, 2021[145]) and in meeting students' particular needs (Cerna et al., 2021[40]). As is discussed in more detail below, digital and assistive technologies can be key in supporting the learning outcomes of students with SEN (Gottschalk and Weise, Forthcoming[144]) and gifted students (Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[38]). In addition, they can be used to provide language and comprehension assistance for students from immigrant backgrounds (Cerna et al., 2021[40]). In Victoria, Australia, for example, the Virtual English as Additional Language New Arrivals Programme provides newly arrived students with the opportunity to learn English online if the school they are attending cannot provide them with language support. Systems such as Skype and Moodle are used to develop the students' English language proficiency and support them in being able to access the mainstream curriculum (Cerna et al., 2019[146]). Some municipalities in Sweden are also working with digital platforms in order to be able to offer mother tongue study supervision for students whose first language is not Swedish (Cerna et al., 2019[146]). Digital technologies can further enhance communication and collaboration between the different actors involved in supporting students. For instance, they may be used to allow various stakeholders to share information to support the inclusion and educational outcomes of students who live in marginalised areas or communities and who face barriers in accessing education, such as Roma students (Rutigliano, 2020[103]).

Digital technologies can also help improve access to learning for students who struggle in formal learning contexts, live in rural or isolated areas or who may otherwise be unable to attend school on a regular basis (FutureLab, n.d.[147]). In the context of COVID-19, online learning platforms played a crucial role in allowing students in various education systems to continue their education despite school closures. In some education systems, such as Chile and Slovenia, computers and other electronic devices were distributed to students without access to technology (OECD, 2020[148]). Technology has also been used for a number of years in New South Wales Australia to provide distance education through both real-time remote teaching sessions and non-real-time learning support (Cerna et al., 2019[146]; New South Wales Government, 2017[149]).

*Digital and assistive technologies to support students with SEN*

Assistive technology (AT) can help support the inclusion of individuals with SEN and disabilities in education, along with various other domains of life (Brussino, 2020[68]; UNESCO, 2010[150]). The need for AT is usually assessed when designing students' IEPs (as discussed above in the section Individual Education Plans).

Empirical evidence shows that AT helps students in overcoming significant learning barriers posed by learning disabilities such as dyslexia and dysgraphia (Couteret, 2009[151]). Low-technology AT tools include adapted pencils and papers, word processing software, audiobooks, reading trackers and enlarged texts. Assistive technology advantages concern both students' academic and social outcomes (Brussino, 2020[68]) . Assistive technology can have positive impacts on students' academic outcomes (ibid.). For example, it can improve students' ability to acquire and develop skills such as handwriting, reading, and visual skills, as well as enhancing their problem-solving ability and attention span. From a socio-emotional perspective, AT can contribute to enhancing students' independence, social interactions, motivation and self-esteem (Copley and Ziviani, 2004[152]). For instance, video-self monitoring – which uses model videos to teach behaviours and skills – and e-book AT appear to have great potential for students with Emotional Behaviour Disorders to develop and sustain social relationships with peers (Murry, 2018[153]).

In addition, more advanced digital technologies can play an important role in supporting the academic and well-being outcomes of students with SEN (Gottschalk and Weise, Forthcoming[144]), and have been associated with increased motivation, engagement and confidence (Benmarrakchi, El Kafi and Elhore, 2017[154]; OECD, 2021[155]). For example, devices using augmented reality can support knowledge assimilation (Hrishikesh and Nair, 2016[156]), problem solving and collaboration with others through providing students with different ideas and ways of interacting with others (Cascales-Martínez et al., 2016[157]). Research suggests that augmented reality devices can benefit a range of students with SEN, including those with auditory limitations, visual limitations, autism, ADHD and dyslexia (Quintero et al., 2019[158]). Tools such as social robots have also been associated with outcomes such as increased self-regulation and decreased anxiety in children with autism spectrum disorder (Brussino, 2020[68]), as is discussed in Box 5.5 below.

### Box 5.5. Social robots for students with autism spectrum disorder

There has been increasing interest in the potential of social robots in supporting the learning of students with diverse SEN, including students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). A variety of humanoid artificial intelligence robots have been designed to interact with and help promote the social and communication skills of students on the autism spectrum. Research suggests that these social robots may increase the capabilities of students with ASD to self-regulate their emotions, improve their attention spans and decrease their levels of social anxiety. Social robots can be highly adaptive to individual students' needs, educational objectives and personal characteristics, and therefore have the potential to be effective tools in supporting the learning and facilitating the inclusion of students with diverse SEN. Additionally, social robots can support teachers and families in following students' learning, development and growth.

However, as the growth pace of this new technology has been faster than research in the field, further investigation is needed regarding the efficacy of social robots for students with ASD still needs to be further investigated. While preliminary findings show positive impacts of social robots on the educational and social life of students on the autism spectrum, there are also key challenges to be addressed, including high costs, teacher training and social acceptance of robot usage.

Sources: Alcorn, A. et al. (2019), "Educators' Views on Using Humanoid Robots With Autistic Learners in Special Education Settings in England", Frontiers in Robotics and AI, Vol. 6, p. 107, https://doi.org/10.3389/frobt.2019.00107; Hooft Graafland, J. (2018), "New

technologies and 21st century children: Recent trends and outcomes", OECD Education Working Papers, No. 179, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/e071a505-en ; Weir, W. (2018), "Robots help children with autism improve social skills", YaleNews, https://news.yale.edu/2018/08/22/robots-help-children-autism-improve-social-skills#:~:text=Known as social robots%2C the,individual child's ways of learning (accessed 8 June 2020).

Assistive technology is not only beneficial in supporting the learning of students with SEN, but also in increasing teacher awareness of students with SEN's cognitive experiences and improving the overall quality of teaching (Brussino, 2020[68]). For example, evidence shows that experiencing various types of simulated dyslexia with virtual reality fosters teacher awareness of the cognitive experiences of students with dyslexia (Passig, 2011[159]) as it allows teachers to better empathise with students and understand the needs arising from dyslexia, therefore promoting quality education for students with SEN.

While the effective use of assistive technologies can have positive impacts on students' academic outcomes and overall well-being, there are challenges that may arise in the use of AT to support the inclusion of students with SEN in schools (Brussino, 2020[68]). Inadequate training for teachers can, for instance, be a major obstacle to making effective use of AT (OECD, 2015[160]). Limits to the effectiveness of AT can also arise when the assessment of a student's SEN is poorly carried out and when there is an inadequate identification of the necessary AT equipment to support a student's learning activities (Copley and Ziviani, 2004[152]). The effectiveness of AT usage could also be limited if schools lack sufficient financial resources to afford and sustain the costs of needed AT devices (ibid.). The time taken to obtain and prepare the equipment and to train students and teachers on how to use it may also hamper the effectiveness of AT. Finally, the effectiveness of AT could be also challenged by the risk of stigmatisation arising from AT usage. This could be due to reasons related to perceived gender and age appropriateness of AT device aesthetics induced by diffused stereotypes, such as gender stereotypes linked to colours. Stigmatisation due to AT usage could also be triggered by other factors, such as teachers' negative attitudes in supporting students with SEN who deploy AT in the classroom (Parette and Scherer, 2004[161]). It is therefore important that the advantages and disadvantages of AT (which are summarised in Table 5.6 below) are carefully assessed in the development of school-level interventions policies and strategies.

### Table 5.6. Advantages and disadvantages of assistive technology

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|
| • AT can contribute to enhancing students' independence, social interactions, motivation and self-esteem.<br>• AT can improve students' ability to acquire and strengthen skills such as handwriting, reading and visual skills, as well as enhancing their problem-solving ability and attention span.<br>• AT can also be economically convenient (e.g., digital examination papers can be more independent and cost-effective means compared to readers and/or scribes). | • Limits for AT if teachers and school personnel are not adequately trained.<br>• Challenges when there is an inadequate assessment of SEN and planning of interventions.<br>• Scarcity of resources to afford and maintain necessary AT equipment and finance training can challenge AT effectiveness.<br>• Insufficient timing challenges effectiveness of training, assessment and planning, equipment provision, and service delivery. |

Sources: Adapted from Brussino (2020[68]), Mapping policy approaches and practices for the inclusion of students with special education needs, OECD Education Working Papers, No. 227, https://doi.org/10.1787/600fbad5-en.

#### *Digital technologies to support gifted students*

Digital technologies can also support the academic outcomes and well-being of gifted students (Gottschalk and Weise, Forthcoming[144]). There is consensus within the gifted education literature that technology, if properly used, may improve the effectiveness and quality of gifted education programmes, including by

creating online learning communities, allowing distance mentoring practices and supporting the development of critical thinking and creativity skills (Chen, Yun Dai and Zhou, 2013[162]). Benefits for individual students include expanded access to resources that can accelerate content and learning (Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[38]) and the potential for enrichment through differentiation (Siegle, 2013[163]). Expanded information, digital books, interactive projects, advanced classes in the digital environment, online publishing and virtual mentoring are examples of ways in which digital tools can facilitate enrichment for gifted students.

Several studies show that online personalised assessments allowed for better monitoring and evaluation of strategies involved in critical thinking for gifted students (Chen, Yun Dai and Zhou, 2013[162]; Cope and Suppes, 2002[164]). For example, Computerised Adaptive Testing personalises the difficulty of questions in real-time depending on correct or incorrect responses. It provides fast, precise and thorough feedback so that learning can be better personalised (Olson, 2005[165]). In addition, inclusive digital tools can improve motivation across content and tasks by stimulating and extending learning opportunities while giving more flexibility for students to pursue their individual interests (Olszewski-Kubilius and Lee, 2004[86]; Periathiruvadi and Rinn, 2012[166]; Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[38]).

Digital technology may also help to reduce gaps in access to educational opportunities for disadvantaged gifted students (Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[38]). Research shows that it can support the learning of gifted students who have physical impairments are live in challenging and remote geographical locations (Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[38]; Chen, Yun Dai and Zhou, 2013[162]). As such, free learning portals can be essential for gifted learners from low socio-economic backgrounds or rural areas who would otherwise be unable to access such courses and learning opportunities (Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[38]). It should be noted, however, that, while access to online learning portals can provide valuable support for gifted students, they may lack an interpersonal social interaction element that is important for their well-being (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2019[36]).

Gaps in teacher education and training, both on the use of digital technologies and on gifted education (see Chapter 4), may represent a challenge in the effective implementation of digital technologies to support gifted students (Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[38]). TALIS 2018 estimates that across participating countries, 44% of teachers do not receive digital technology training during their formal teacher education and training and slightly more than 40% of them feel well or very well prepared to use technology in the classroom (OECD, 2019[167]). Consistent digital technology skills for teachers are needed not only to promote gifted students' learning, but also to ensure students' safety and access to appropriate information when using such tools (Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[38]).

## Ensuring equitable and inclusive assessment practices

There is a large body of research showing that the type of assessment can have a strong impact on student learning outcomes (OECD, 2013[67]). Evidence on different approaches indicates that assessment may support or diminish student motivation and performance depending on the way it is designed, implemented and used. Assessments that are not well designed and implemented can contribute to alienating students (and teachers) from the education system and exacerbate inequity in education. By contrast, carefully planned assessment interventions that are well aligned with learning goals and that place students at the centre of the process can raise achievement and reduce disparities (ibid.).

The assessment literature has traditionally made a distinction between assessment for summative purposes and assessment for formative purposes. Student summative assessment, or assessment *of* learning, aims to summarise learning that has taken place, in order to record, mark or certify achievements; whereas student formative assessment, or assessment *for* learning, aims to identify aspects of learning as it is developing in order to deepen and shape subsequent learning (OECD, 2013[67]).

### *Diagnostic assessment to evaluate student needs*

While some authors make a distinction between formative assessment and diagnostic assessment, the OECD generally considers diagnostic assessment as type or aspect of formative assessment. Diagnostic assessment often takes place at the beginning of a study unit in order to find a starting point, or baseline, for learning and to develop a suitable learning programme (OECD, 2013[67]).

Diagnostic assessment typically focuses on very specific areas of learning and produces fine-grained information about individual student strengths, weaknesses and learning needs. Many diagnostic tools are designed specifically to uncover the causes of students' learning difficulties. The results of diagnostic assessment are typically used to inform future programme planning, design differentiated instruction and deliver remedial programmes for at-risk students. The distinctive feature of diagnostic assessment, with respect to formative assessment more generally, is its greater focus on the use of results for individualised intervention and/or remediation. Indeed, diagnostic assessments are often used to identify students who are at risk of failure, uncover the sources of their learning difficulties, evaluate their learning needs, and plan for appropriate interventions or remediation strategies (OECD, 2013[67]).

For instance, various OECD countries implement early diagnostic assessments to develop IEPs for refugee children (Cerna, 2019[35]). This is intended to support them to learn the host country language, overcome interruptions in schooling and fully benefit from learning opportunities. In Sweden, early initial assessment is essential in providing language support to immigrant students as it is an important starting point in the language learning process (Siarova and Essomba, 2014[168]). Within two months of starting school, all new arrivals are assessed on their academic knowledge and language skills. Academic knowledge assessments are offered in the students' mother tongues in order to best assess previous knowledge without language barriers (Berglund, 2017[169]). School leaders use the results to determine the best educational trajectory for the student, taking into account the student's age and language skills and results of the mapping of existing academic knowledge (Bunar, 2017[78]). For example, if a student demonstrates good knowledge in a subject, they can then participate in regular teaching of that subject with mother tongue study supervision (i.e., tutors in the student's native language) (Cerna, 2019[35]).

Assessment in school can also be implemented to identify students' SEN, as teachers often play an active role in the identification of learning disabilities or certain developmental disorders such as in the case of ADHD (Mezzanotte, 2020[41]). Diagnostic assessments are also used to identify the needs of students embodying more than one dimension of diversity who could require additional support. This can be the case, for instance, for students with an immigrant background who are suspected to have one or more SEN (Brussino, 2020[68]). Across Canada, many school boards have put in place specific services to diagnose and address any SEN immigrant students may have (Education International, 2017[170]). While early and well-timed identification of special education needs is important, in the case of migrant/refugee students the diagnosis of SEN may sometimes require some delay in order to get an accurate assessment of the student's learning needs and to carefully take into account conditions related to trauma and linguistic and/or culturally different behavioural attitudes (Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, 2013[171]). In this respect, the specialised counselling services for immigrant students in place across Canada are intended to detect and address SEN taking into account the challenges and difficulties that may have arisen from the students' migration experiences (Education International, 2017[170]).

### *Bias risk in assessment design and teacher-based assessment*

Several studies indicate that certain formats of assessment may advantage or disadvantage certain student groups (Gipps and Stobart, 2004[172]; OECD, 2013[67]), which raises issues in terms of equity in education (OECD, 2013[67]). Test bias is defined as the differential validity of a test between specific sub-groups of students (Sattler, 1992[173]). There are a variety of ways in which assessments can be biased: unnecessary linguistic complexity, for instance, is an example of context-irrelevant bias in assessment, particularly when testing students who do not speak the language of instruction and

assessment at home (OECD, 2013[67]). There may also be bias in content validity when the choice of a particular set of knowledge and skills is likely to privilege certain groups of students over others (Klenowski, 2009[174]). In addition, there may be bias in item selection, which is related to how one item is included in the test while another is not. While an overall test may not be biased statistically, a few items in it may be. Finally, the choice of method may also lead to bias for certain groups, depending on their familiarity with the general idea of a test, the motivational context in which the test is taken and the frequently implicit assumptions about appropriate behaviour in such a context. For instance, students that have dysgraphia or dyslexia may struggle with written assignments if they do not receive appropriate accommodations.

There are also risks of conscious or unconscious bias in teacher-based assessment, which go beyond the risks of biases in assessment design mentioned above. Bias in teachers' assessment may be related to teachers' prior knowledge of student characteristics such as behaviour, gender, SEN, immigrant background, first language, overall academic achievement or verbal ability (OECD, 2013[67]). For example, the OECD (2015[175]) has found that teachers generally tend to award higher grades to girls than to boys, given what would be expected considering their performance in PISA 2012 (Brussino, 2021[100]). The fact that the gender gap in grading appears much wider in language-of-instruction courses than in mathematics suggests that teachers' evaluations may be affected by conscious or unconscious gender stereotyped biases concerning girls' and boys' strengths and weaknesses in school subjects (ibid.). Research has also shown that girls tend to score higher than boys in maths when name-blind tests are carried out, whereas boys tend to receive higher grades when assessments are not name-blinded (Lavy and Sand, 2015[176]).

### *Advancing equity in assessment design and teacher-based assessment*

Assessments should allow all students to show what they have learned and understood, without being disadvantaged by individual characteristics that are irrelevant to what is being assessed (Binkley et al., 2010[177]; Abd Razak and Lamola, 2019[178]). Assessment therefore needs to be appropriate for students at different developmental levels, and sensitive to the needs of particular groups, such as ethnic minorities, non-native speakers and students with SEN (OECD, 2013[67]). To ensure fairness in assessment for all students, it is important to develop frameworks for equitable assessment for the wide range of different student groups without privileging one group over another (OECD, 2013[67]). The development of a broad framework for equity in assessment for all students requires central guidelines for orientation and coherence across educational settings, but it should at the same time allow for flexibility and adaptability of practices at the local and school level (OECD, 2013[67]).

The Educational Testing Service has published the International Principles for the Fairness of Assessments, which are intended to serve as a basis for developing appropriate guidelines for the fairness of tests and assessments in particular education systems (Educational Testing Service, 2016[179]). The key principles are as follows:

- **Measure the important aspects of the relevant content**: A test that does not measure the important aspects of the intended content cannot be valid. Because of the close link between validity and fairness, an invalid test is not likely to be fair. Therefore, any material that is important for valid measurement may be acceptable for inclusion in a test, even if it would otherwise be out of compliance with the guidelines.
- **Avoid irrelevant cognitive barriers to the performance of test takers**: Unfair barriers may occur when knowledge or skill not related to the purpose of the test is required to answer an item correctly.
- **Avoid irrelevant emotional barriers to the performance of test takers**: Unfair barriers may occur if unnecessary language or images cause strong emotions that may interfere with the ability to respond to an item correctly.
- **Avoid irrelevant physical barriers to the performance of test takers**: Unfair barriers may occur (most often for test takers with SEN) if unnecessary aspects of tests interfere with the test takers'

ability to attend to, see, hear, or otherwise sense the items or stimuli and respond to them. For example, test takers who are visually impaired may have trouble understanding a diagram with labels in a small font, even if they have the knowledge and skills that are supposed to be tested by the item based on the diagram.

In teacher-based assessment, a careful examination of the tone and framing of the assessment and questions can help mitigate the risk of bias towards students from diverse backgrounds (Brussino, 2021[100]). It is important that teachers are aware of diverse cultural ways of communicating and participating that may affect the performance of students from immigrant backgrounds in the assessment process (Nortvedt et al., 2020[180]; Brussino, 2021[100]).

### *Improving equity through multiple assessment opportunities*

Since it is very difficult to make assessment fully inclusive and neutral – as formats, contents, constructs, and methods may be biased in some direction – a mix of different versions of format, content and construct may help ensure fairer assessment (OECD, 2013[67]). The OECD therefore recommends that high-stakes decisions about students should not be based on the results of one test alone. A more equitable approach is to collect multiple data using a range of assessment tasks involving a variety of contexts, response formats and styles, and draw on this in the decision-making process. This broader approach is likely to offer students alternative opportunities to demonstrate their performance if they are disadvantaged by any one particular assessment in the programme (Gipps and Stobart, 2009[181]). It is also important that the format and design of different assessment instruments is informed by research on effective approaches for diverse student groups. Moreover, in areas where there is limited evidence, as in the case of inclusive assessment for students from ethnic minorities, education systems should encourage the development of more research to extend the knowledge and evidence base (OECD, 2013[67]).

Using a range of assessment techniques can help build students' motivation, confidence and achievement (OECD, 2017[47]). Using a broad range of assessments can provide a more comprehensive overview of students' strengths and build a more enduring sense of efficacy and achievement. In addition, ensuring that all students are acknowledged for what they know and can do and their interests and aspirations is important for student motivation (OECD, 2017[47]). For instance, New Zealand's National Certificate of Education Achievement focuses on recognising, in senior (upper) secondary schools, what students know and can do, and values a wide body of knowledge, including knowledge related to Indigenous culture and language (OECD, 2017[47]). It uses a range of assessment methodologies, allows credits to be collated across a range of subject areas, and offers flexibility in terms of the timeframe in which students can complete a particular qualification level. Indigenous students have shown improved outcomes in achieving qualifications under this more flexible system.

### *Adapting assessment formats to foster inclusion*

Inclusive assessment systems are those that are developed based on the principle that all students should have the opportunity to participate in educational activities, including assessment activities, and to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and competencies in a fair way (OECD, 2013[67]). In addition to avoiding potential bias, this involves a sensitivity to the different needs of diverse students and an understanding of how assessments can be adapted to accommodate these (ibid).

The Scottish Government recognises the importance of inclusive assessment approaches in its Gender Equality Toolkit for Education Staff. The Toolkit recommends that education staff use a variety of assessment modes "to provide all learners with the opportunity to produce their best performance (e.g., oral questions, written answers, multiple choice, observation of group work)". It also encourages the use of assessment information to identify and plan future learning, recommending that assessment criteria be reviewed for bias where one gender out-performs the other and that positive steps be "taken to

acknowledge success and encourage ambition from all children and young people" (Scottish Executive, 2007[182]).

There are a variety of ways in which assessments can be adapted or structured to serve students with SEN. For instance, for students with ADHD, eliminating or reducing timed tests can be an effective strategy to support them, together with technology to assist them with tasks (Mezzanotte, 2020[7]), with assistive technology more generally suitable to supporting students with different special education needs in the assessment process (Brussino, 2020[68]; Brussino, 2021[100]). An inclusive approach to assessment for students with SEN requires an acknowledgement that every student is unique and the selection of appropriate strategies in light of the needs of the particular student (All Children Learning, n.d.[183]). In Australia, the Checklist of Learning and Assessment Adjustments for Students is a tool that was developed to help teachers select and document adjustments to support students with additional needs in classroom and external assessment (as well as in classroom instruction), drawing from previous research on instructional and testing accessibility. A study examining its application concluded that it has the potential to help ensure equitable assessment opportunities for students with SEN (Davies, Elliott and Cumming, 2016[184]).

Accommodation or adjustments in terms of language can be crucial to ensure inclusive assessment for students from an immigrant or refugee background (OECD, 2013[67]). Several education systems across the OECD have implemented a range of options for students to be assessed in their first language, which include administrating the assessment orally with an assessor who speaks the student's mother tongue, or translating or developing assessment instruments in the student's first language. Another approach is to reduce the linguistic complexity of the assessment through measures such as simplification or modification of test elements and permitting the use of dictionaries or glossaries. It should be noted, however, that empirical evidence relating to the effectiveness and efficiency of language accommodation measures in assessment is varied and, at times, contradictory (ibid.). Further research would be beneficial to advance understanding on how assessment processes can be made more inclusive for students whose first language differs from the language of instruction.

### *Using assessment results to meet students' learning needs*

The way in which the information obtained through student assessment is used is also a factor that impacts on the equity and inclusiveness of education systems. Indeed, there is strong evidence on the power of assessment in shaping new teaching and learning strategies and on the strong relationship between assessment for learning and improvements of student learning outcomes (OECD, 2013[67]). Regular summative reporting can help engage parents or guardians in supporting their child's learning. Information gained through both formative assessment plays a critical role in identifying students' learning needs and in the development and refinement of teaching strategies to meet these. Records of student achievement can also assist in-school communication among school staff regarding student progress and inform decisions about additional targeted support that may be needed (ibid.). PISA 2018 results indicate that, in countries or economies with greater equity in education, student assessments are used to inform parents about their child's progress and to identify aspects of instruction and the curriculum that can be improved. For instance, across OECD countries, the higher the percentage of students in schools that use student assessments to inform parents about their child's progress, the weaker the relationship between students' socio-economic status and their performance in reading (OECD, 2020[26]).

Information obtained through assessment can also feed into the school-wide coordination of pedagogical support and can play a critical role in developing effective and timely intervention strategies for students facing learning difficulties or who are at risk of falling behind or not achieving their educational potential (OECD, 2013[67]). Evidence indicates that appropriate early educational interventions can have substantive effects on cognition, socio-emotional development and student learning outcomes (Barnett, 2011[185]; Travers, 2018[37]), and can have positive impacts on the progress and adult success of children from

disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (Barnett, 2011[185]). Providing appropriate early interventions within school is important from an equity perspective, as it ensures that access to additional support is not just limited to those families with the means to pay for tutoring and other remediation support delivered by private providers outside school (Travers, 2018[37]). This appears particularly crucial in light of the fact that, across OECD countries, students' socio-economic status has been shown to impact on students' academic performance (Ikeda, 2022[186]). In Australia, the New South Wales Department of Education provides specialist early intervention support services (which complement programmes provided by other government and non-government agencies). These include early intervention support class sessions (which young children with a young support need or disability attend two or three times a week), resource support from dedicated early intervention teachers to children attending an ECEC centre, and transition support teachers, who support local schools in providing successful transitions for children with significant support needs or a disability (NSW Department of Education, 2021[187]).

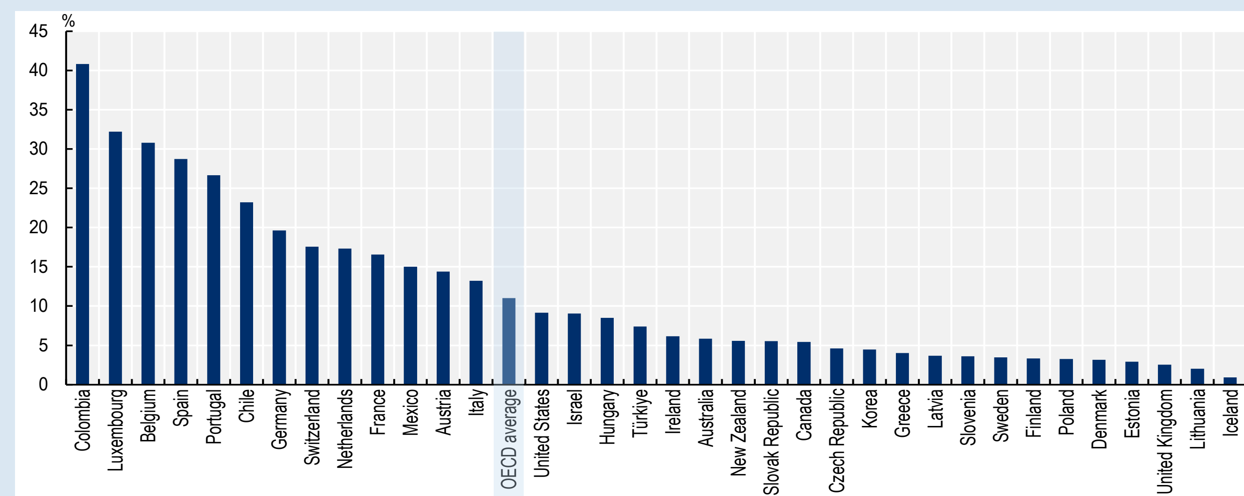
Intervening early when there are indications that a student may be facing difficulties has also been recognised as being much more effective than strategies that seek to help students catch up once they have fallen behind (Travers, 2018[37]). Indeed, grade repetition, which is used in several education systems to address individual student low achievement, has been widely shown to impact negatively on student learning outcomes as well as raising concerns for equity and inclusion in education (Box 5.6).

### Box 5.6. Grade repetition

Grade repetition refers to when students are retained in the same school grade for an extra year rather than moving up to a higher grade along with their age peers (Brophy, 2006[188]). Despite some research suggesting that repeating a grade generally does not yield improvements in students' learning outcomes and is associated with high economic and social costs, grade repetition is still commonly used in many OECD countries (OECD, 2022[128]; OECD, 2016[3]).

#### Figure 5.5. Grade repetition in OECD countries (PISA 2018)

15-year-old students who reported that they had repeated a grade at least once in primary, lower secondary or upper secondary school (%)




Note: Data for Japan and Norway is missing from this figure.
Source: OECD (2020[26]), PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools, Figure V.2.5, https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en.

While determinations regarding grade repetition are usually officially made on the basis of students' academic performance, some studies suggest that students' behaviour and other factors can also influence the decision in practice (OECD, 2022[128]; OECD, 2015[189]). Results from PISA 2015 show that students who reported that they had missed a day of school or had arrived late for school at least once in the two weeks prior to the PISA test were 38% and 24% more likely, respectively, to have repeated a grade than students who reported that they had not done so (OECD, 2022[128]; OECD, 2015[189]).

**Impacts on learning outcomes**

Evidence has shown that, while grade repetition can improve academic achievement temporarily, in the long-term those who have repeated a grade tend to fall further and further behind other students with low achievement who were promoted with their age peers (Brophy, 2006[188]; OECD, 2013[67]). Results from PISA 2018 show a negative relationship between grade repetition and reading performance, at both the student level and the system level. The percentage of students who had repeated a grade at least once was negatively correlated with mean performance in reading in all participating countries and economies. Participating countries and economies with smaller shares of students who had repeated a grade generally showed higher mean performance in PISA (OECD, 2020[26]).

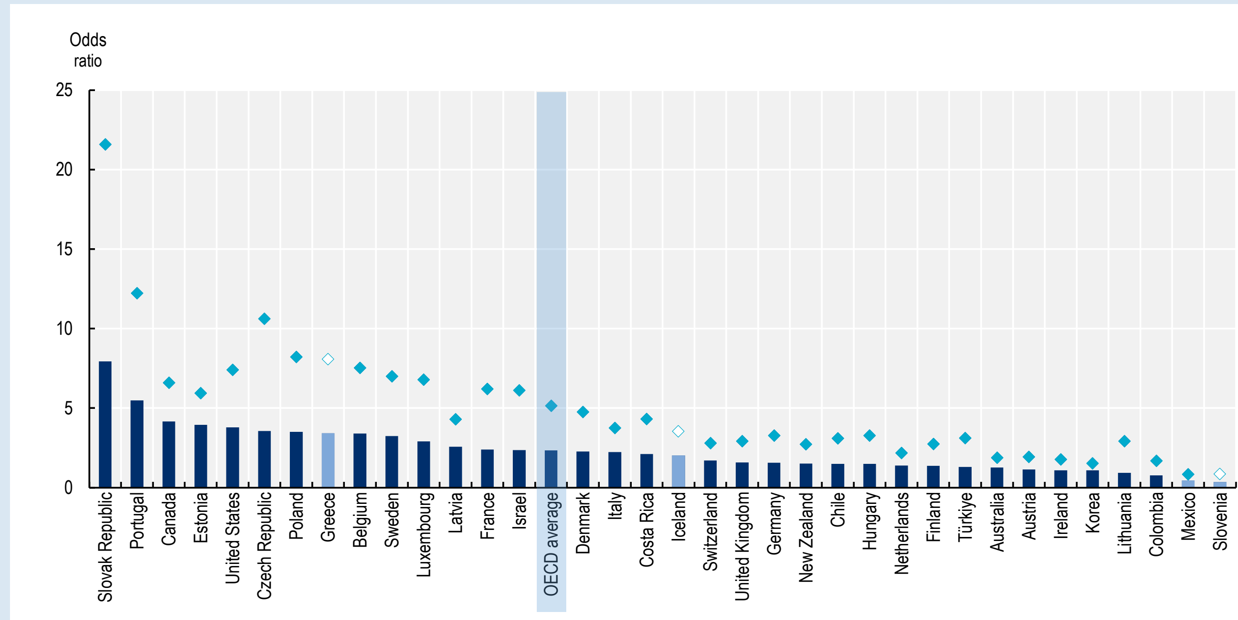
**Effects on students' sense of belonging to school**

Research has further shown that grade repetition is associated with reduced self-esteem among students, can impair their relationships with their peers and can increase their sense of alienation from school (Jimerson et al., 2005[190]) – which can increase the likelihood of them dropping out of school (OECD, 2013[67]). Empirical evidence suggests that students who have been held back a year hold more negative attitudes towards school at the age of 15 than students who had not repeated a grade in primary or secondary education (OECD, 2022[128]). Students who have repeated a grade have also been found to be more likely to drop out of school (Manacorda, 2012[191]; OECD, 2022[128]). Research indicates that grade retention can negatively affect students'' well-being, their sense of belonging to the school community and their life satisfaction. On average across EU countries in 2015, students who had repeated a grade were six percentage points less likely to report being satisfied with life (OECD, 2022[128]; OECD, 2018[54]).

**Equity concerns**

Grade repetition has been recognised as negatively impacting on educational equity, with research showing that students with certain characteristics are more likely to have repeated a grade in many education systems (OECD, 2022[128]; OECD, 2015[189]). The probability of grade repetition has been found to be associated with a student's socio-economic status (De Witte et al., 2018[192]), with evidence showing that socio-economically disadvantaged students are more likely than advantaged students to repeat a grade across OECD countries (OECD, 2022[128]; OECD, 2015[189]; OECD, 2020[26]). In addition, across OECD countries, students with an immigrant background are more likely to repeat than students with a non-immigrant background, and boys are more likely than girls (OECD, 2022[128]; OECD, 2015[189]). Data from Australia also indicate that Indigenous students may be more at risk of repeating, at least at the primary level (Anderson, 2014[193]). Results from PISA 2018 further showed that participating countries and economies with smaller shares of students who had repeated a grade generally showed greater equity in education, with the percentage of students who had repeated a grade at least once being negatively correlated with equity in reading performance across all participating countries (OECD, 2020[26]).

**Figure 5.6. Grade repetition, socio-economic status and reading performance (PISA 2018)**




Note: The socio-economic profile is measured by the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). Statistically significant odds ratios are shown in darker tones. Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the increased likelihood of having repeated a grade amongst disadvantaged students, after accounting for reading performance.
Source: Adapted from OECD (2022[15]), Review of Inclusive Education in Portugal, Figure 1.20., https://doi.org/10.1787/a9c95902-en.

**Early interventions to support students at risk of academic failure**

Research points to the importance of targeted instructional strategies and specific interventions to support students at risk of academic failure (OECD, 2022[128]). For instance, Early Warning Systems can provide actionable indicators and predictors of students who may be experiencing challenges to help inform targeted intervention strategies (OECD, 2021[145]).

The "Tackling early school leaving project" in Latvia is an example of a programme that focuses on intervening early to support students who may be at risk of failing. Teachers create an individual support plan for each student at the beginning of the school year based on an assessment of various risk factors, which is then used to guide tailored follow-up support measures through the year, such as consultations with specialists (OECD, 2021[194]). Interventions to reduce grade repetition were also implemented by the Flemish Community of Belgium following the period of school closures driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. Targeted remedial courses were offered to small groups of students in order to enable them to catch-up on learning and become more resilient (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021[195]; OECD, 2022[128]).

## Non-instructional support and services

Supporting all learners to achieve their educational potential and in fostering a sense of belonging depends not only on teachers and school leaders, but also on the availability of non-instructional support and services at the school (Cerna et al., 2019[146]). School counsellors and psychologists can, for instance, play an important role in supporting and promoting the well-being of students from diverse backgrounds. In addition, social and emotional learning programmes and trauma-informed teaching strategies can help address the needs of students who may have experienced trauma or who may otherwise need particular

social and emotional support (Cerna, 2019[35]; McBrien, 2022[196]; Sullivan and Simonson, 2016[197]). Other therapeutic services, such as physiotherapy and mental health support, may also be beneficial for certain students, in particular those with physical impairments.

In addition, career and educational guidance can help ensure all students have equal opportunities to succeed and contribute to improved educational and employment outcomes (Cerna et al., 2021[40]). Tutoring and/or mentoring programmes can further serve as a means of supporting diverse or marginalised students to achieve their educational potential and feel a sense of belonging in schools.

### *Supporting students' well-being*

#### *Counselling and therapeutic services to support students' well-being*

In-school counselling and therapeutic services are offered in a number of education systems to support the psychological and social well-being of students. Psychologists working in schools have been recognised as being in a unique position to support students' mental health needs as a result of their training in both psychology and education (Reupert et al., 2022[198]; Splett et al., 2013[199]). The role of school psychologists can extend beyond conducting psychoeducational assessments and providing counselling services, and include the provision of a broader range academic, behavioural and social-emotional support services, the development of school-wide strategies to facilitate supportive learning environments, and programme evaluation (McNamara, Walcott and Hyson, 2019[200]; Reupert et al., 2022[198]). In Australia, for instance, school psychologists deliver a range of services to support the well-being of students, staff and parents, which include individual and group counselling, identification of students at risk of mental illness or suicidal behaviour, assessments, parental support and "school-wide approaches to enhance staff and student well-being" (Reupert et al., 2022[198]). Similarly, in Germany, the role of school psychologists may involve case consultation and professional development with teachers, in addition to counselling services. In Canada, psychologists may also be involved in the development and implementation of school-based prevention programmes, in addition to conducting psychoeducational assessments and consult with school staff regarding interventions for individual students with particular needs (ibid.).

#### Box 5.7. School-based counselling and mental health support in the context of COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis highlighted the crucial role schools can play in supporting student well-being and in serving as a safe space where students can access psychological support services (OECD, 2020[201]). In addition to resulting in disruptions to student learning, the pandemic and its consequences also had significant impacts on students' mental health (Elharake et al., 2022[202]; Hawrilenko et al., 2021[203]; OECD, 2020[148]; Reupert et al., 2022[198]). For instance, a systematic evidence review (covering more than 130,000 children and adolescents across 22 countries) conducted by UNICEF's Office of Research - Innocenti on the immediate effects of COVID-19 on child and adolescent mental health found that higher levels of depression, fear, anxiety, anger, irritability, negativity, conduct disorder and alcohol and substance abuse were commonly reported in children and adolescents in 2020, compared with pre-pandemic rates (Unicef Office of Research - Innocenti, 2021[204]).

To respond to students' mental health needs, a variety of school-based initiatives were implemented in education systems across the OECD, both during the period of school closures and following re-openings. In several education systems (such as Australia, Canada, Germany and the United States), school psychologists provided virtual counselling and consultation services, as well as developing and posting videos and written material on socio-emotional and behavioural issues to support parents and students (Reupert et al., 2022[198]). Resources regarding mental health were also developed and disseminated among students, parents and teachers in several education systems. In

Canada, to support students' mental health during school closures and re-openings, material aimed at promoting positive mental health was produced and translated into the country's 14 most commonly spoken languages, including Indigenous languages and American sign language (OECD, 2020[201]). The French Ministry of Education created a dedicated page with resources and advice for teachers to best support students during school re-openings (OECD, 2020[201]). In England (the United Kingdom), well-being guides were downloaded by hundreds of schools to help communicate with students and discuss their feelings (Shoffman, 2020[205]).

Sources: Elharake et al. (2022[202]), Mental Health Impact of COVID-19 among Children and College Students: A Systematic Review, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10578-021-01297-1; Hawrilenko et al. (2021[203]), The Association Between School Closures and Child Mental Health During COVID-19, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34477850/; OECD (2020[201]), The impact of COVID-19 on student equity and inclusion: supporting vulnerable students during school closures and re-openings, https://www.oecd.org/education/strength-through-diversity/OECD%20COVID-19%20Brief%20Vulnerable%20Students.pdf; (accessed 19 August 2022); Reupert et al. (2022[198]), The practices of psychologists working in schools during COVID-19: A multi-country investigation, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34383527/ ; UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti (2021[204]), , https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/Life-in-Lockdown.pdf (accessed 23 August 2021).

In-school counselling services can be targeted to address the needs of students from diverse backgrounds or who embody a particular dimension of diversity. For instance, counsellors with specific training in learning disabilities and mental health issues are offered in some education systems to support the learning and inclusion of students with SEN (Goodman-Scott, Bobzien and Milsom, 2018[206]; Brussino, 2020[68]). Counselling support is also provided in several OECD education systems as part of programmes or initiatives to support the socio-emotional well-being of refugee or immigrant students (Cerna, 2019[35]). Counselling support can be particularly important to address mental health needs arising from the trauma these students may have experienced (Brussino, 2020[68]). In Türkiye, for instance, guidance counsellors were appointed to public schools and temporary education centres as part of a series of targeted policy measures to support the integration of refugee students (Cerna, 2019[35]). In Austria, psychologists often form part of the specialist support teams deployed to support schools with high percentages of immigrant students through the Ministry of Education's Mobile Intercultural Teams programme that has been implemented since 2016 (Cerna, 2019[35]; Scholten et al., 2017[207]). The psychologists are qualified to help children who have experienced trauma or difficulty in their lives (Cerna, 2019[35]; Scholten et al., 2017[207]). In Canada, school counsellors have been recognised as playing an instrumental role in the integration of refugee students through, for instance, identifying and addressing mental health needs (such as feelings of depression, dislocation and anger and post-traumatic stress) and ensuring support for language acquisition (Brussino, 2020[68]; Education International, 2017[170]).

In addition to providing targeted support to specific groups of diverse students, school counselling services can be used as a tool in developing more inclusive learning environments generally. For instance, the American School Counsellor Association in the United States has provided guidelines on the role of school counsellors in promoting gender equity as part of creating an emotionally, intellectually and physically safe environment for all students. The guidelines encourage school counsellors to "model inclusive language reflecting identities across the gender spectrum" and to "actively advocate for equitable policies, procedures, practices and attitudes embracing equity in opportunities and access to resources for all students and colleagues" (American School Counselor Assoication, 2020[208]).

Beyond counselling, other non-instructional support services can be key in ensuring that all students are able to thrive while at school. Timely and high-quality medical assessment is, for instance, important to adequately diagnose the needs of some students with SEN and orient them towards the most suitable educational provision. Medical assessment can help ensure that students have access to the therapeutic support and additional services they may need in order to be able to achieve their educational potential and feel a sense of belonging. In Finland, 2014 legislation establishing a right for all pupils to have access to student welfare students has resulted in a health and welfare team being embedded into every school.

Consisting of a school nurse, doctor, social worker and a psychologist, the role of the teams is to identify any social and mental health needs students may have and ensure that they receive appropriate support while at school (Coburn, 2019[209]). In New Zealand, physiotherapists and occupational therapists form part of the Physical Disability Service provided by the Ministry of Education, which provides support for students who have a physical disability that prevents them from learning (Brussino, 2020[210]; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2022[211]).

*Social and emotional learning programmes and trauma sensitive strategies*

Some students may have experienced trauma in their lives that may impact on their experiences in the classroom and mean they have particular learning needs. Researchers, have noted, for instance, that teachers and school staff may need to provide refugee students with particular social and emotional support due to the challenges or difficulties they may be facing as a result of their pre-migration or resettlement experiences (Sullivan and Simonson, 2016[197]; McBrien, 2022[39]). Schools can help support the needs of these learners through effective social and emotional learning programmes and trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive teaching strategies (Tanyu et al., 2020[212]). Research has demonstrated that dedicated school-based social and emotional learning programmes can help meet children's developmental needs and can lead to improved outcomes for students, both in terms of behavioural issues and mental well-being (Tanyu et al., 2020[212]). For instance, a study of 33 universal and 15-targeted social and emotional learning interventions implemented in Denmark, Portugal, South Africa, Türkiye and the United States, showed positive effects for pre-school children, particularly those who had been identified as in need of early intervention (Murano, Sawyer and Lipnevich, 2020[213]; Tanyu et al., 2020[212]; McBrien, 2022[39]).

Developed by the global not-for-profit organisation Committee for Children, the Second Step programme is designed to provide an holistic approach to social and emotional learning across different education levels (from ECEC to upper secondary) and have been implemented a number of countries, including Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Japan, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and the United States (McBrien, 2022[39]; Second Step, 2022[214]). The programme teaches skills for conflict resolution, working with others, decision-making and developing healthy relationships (Second Step, n.d.[215]). Second Step also supports schools in developing and implementing trauma-informed practices to help create trauma-sensitive schools in which students feel safe to learn (Second Step, 2016[216]). An evaluation of a German adaptation of the programme found that students who had participated showed significantly reduced anxiety and depression and improved social behaviour (Schick and Cierpka, 2005[217]).

Dedicated social and emotional learning programmes can play an important role in supporting the needs of refugee students who have experienced trauma (UNESCO, 2019[218]; Cerna, 2019[35]). School-based interventions with a cognitive behavioural therapy basis, which can deal with both past experiences (for instance, through verbal processing) and current and future challenges (using methods such as self-soothing) have been found to have the potential to have positive therapeutic effects (Cerna, 2019[35]; Sullivan and Simonson, 2016[197]; Tyrer and Fazel, 2014[219]). Creative expression programmes – which aim to develp social and emotional skills through art, music or drama – have also been implemented in several education systems (Cerna, 2019[35]), and have been recognised as having the potential to reduce symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression (UNESCO, 2019[218]). For instance, in Montreal (Canada) a 12-week creative arts workshop programme offered in primary schools to develop immigrant and refugee students' confidence and help address behavioural issues was associated with higher self-esteem and reduced mental health symptoms (UNESCO, 2019[218]). In Türkiye, the Trauma-Informed Schools project is a social and emotional learning programme that has been implemented in selected primary schools and temporary education centres hosting refugees from Syria. The programme runs eight-week long art therapy workshops that seek to provide children with the skills to deal with trauma and adjust to their new environment. Activity groups are tailored to respond to the specific symptoms displayed by students, with a one-day general session also being held for the whole school

(UNESCO, 2019[218]). The government-financed NGO Pharos programme in the Netherlands is a further example of an initiative to support the socio-emotional well-being of refugee students (Cerna, 2019[35]). The programme has been implemented in secondary schools since the 1990s and seeks to address the difficulties refugee students face, strengthen peer support systems, foster teacher support and strengthen coping ability and resilience among refugee children (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2012[220]; Cerna, 2019[35]). The programme includes a series of 21 lessons emphasising non-verbal techniques such as drawing and drama. The lessons aim to improve the well-being of youth seeking refuge or asylum and to prevent them from developing psychosocial problems by building bridges between the past, the present and the future. Classmates become companions and learn how to support each other (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2012[220]; Cerna, 2019[35]).

OECD research with Indigenous communities indicates that culturally responsive trauma-informed approaches developed in collaboration with students, families and communities can help promote the well-being of Indigenous students. In Alaska (the United States) the Tranforming Schools Framework was developed to help schools improve student well-being and academic outcomes by implementing trauma-engaged policies and practices. The Framework was designed by community members, school leaders and school staff in accoredance with factors that are important in the education of Indigenous students, including the need for culturally-responsive programmes and policies (Murano, Sawyer and Lipnevich, 2020[213]; Tanyu et al., 2020[212]).

### *Career and educational guidance*

Career and educational guidance can help ensure that all students receive equal opportunities to achieve throughout education and beyond (Cerna et al., 2019[146]). Effectively designed, career and educational guidance services can serve as a means of recognising the unique characteristics and backgrounds of young people and, in particular, patterns of disadvantage, which can lead to a greater understanding of students' different educational needs and in turn contribute to improving educational, social and economic outcomes (Jeon, 2019[221]; Musset and Mytna Kurekova, 2018[222]). Guidance is particularly important to support students' transitions across different education levels (such as between primary and lower secondary level, upper secondary and tertiary level) and between education and the labour market, particularly for diverse students who might otherwise be left behind (Cerna et al., 2019[146]).

Career and educational guidance can, for instance, be used as a tool to improve the secondary school completion, employment and income rates of students with SEN, who, research has shown, may face additional challenges in transitioning from one educational level to another and/or from education to the labour market (Brussino, 2020[68]; Jenkin, 2021[223]).[8] In Ireland, the National Council for Special Education has published guidelines to assist schools in supporting students with SEN to make successful transitions between different education levels and from school to post-school options. The guidelines set out a list of "inclusive practices" to support students during periods of transition and provide a series of principles for effective post-school transition planning (National Council for Special Education, 2016[224]). Similarly, in England (United Kingdom), the Careers and Enterprise Company has published practical guidance for schools and colleges on how careers programmes can best support students with SEN, including an evidence-based guide to assist schools and colleges in developing and implementing transition programmes (Hanson, Codina and Neary, 2017[225]). The Careers and Enterprise Company also has a Community of Practice that aims to support schools and colleges working with students with SEN through the sharing of good practice and the development of resources and a Company Enterprise Adviser Network that connects schools and colleges with employers to provide students with work experience opportunities (Department for Education, 2021[226]).

Career and educational guidance may also play a critical role in supporting the social inclusion of refugees and immigrants (Fejes, Chamberland and Sultana, 2021[227]). In Norway, for instance, career guidance has been officially recognised as a tool that should be used in achieving greater integration (ibid). In line with

this, a statutory right to career guidance has been established both for all pupils enrolled in lower and upper secondary compulsory education and for all newly arrived refugees (Euro Guidance, 2022[228]). Career guidance can be particularly important in light of the fact that that immigrant students and their families may have limited knowledge regarding the career and educational opportunities available in their host country and how best to prepare for them (Jeon, 2019[221]), and considering that PISA 2018 showed that immigrant students were less likely to hold ambitious but realistic career expectations compared to native students, in most countries across the OECD (Cerna, Brussino and Mezzanotte, 2021[229]).[9] Career guidance can also help to change perceptions immigrant or refugee students and their families may have regarding upper-secondary Vocational Education and Training (Jeon, 2019[221]). In addition to more general career counselling programmes within schools, some OECD education systems provide guidance tailored to the particular needs of students from refugee or immigrant backgrounds. In the United States, for instance, career and educational counselling is one of the services provided as part of the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Programme developed and implemented by the Office of Refugee Resettlement within the United States Department of Health and Human Services (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2021[230]; Cerna, 2019[35]).

Career guidance has further been identified as a measure to help promote improved educational and employment outcomes for Roma students (Alexiadou, 2019[231]; Rutigliano, 2020[103]). Researchers have also emphasised the importance of providing targeted support to gifted students in the transition beyond compulsory education through tailored career counselling (Greene, 2005[232]; Jung, 2017[233]; Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[38]).

### *Tutoring and mentoring*

Tutoring and/or mentoring programmes have been implemented in several OECD education systems as a means of supporting students, particularly diverse students or students from disadvantaged backgrounds, to achieve their educational potential and feel a sense of belonging. Strategies include teacher-student mentoring, peer-to-peer tutoring and mentoring, student mentoring or tutoring from a higher education student or professional, and student-expert mentoring. Research has shown that providing targeted academic support and mentoring to students who are most at risk of dropping out of school can be effective in reducing dropout rates and improving learning outcomes (Borgonovi, Ferrara and Maghnouj, 2018[234]; Wilson et al., 2011[235]). As discussed in Chapter 4, peer-to-peer mentoring programmes can also serve as a strategy for encouraging the development of positive relationships among students, which can in turn improve student well-being.

Peer-to-peer tutoring is a common learning support strategy in OECD education systems, with findings from PISA 2018 showing that almost half of all students reported attending a school that provides peer-to-peer tutoring as a form of study help, on average across OECD countries (OECD, 2020[26]). Peer-to-peer tutoring is a strategy where students work in pairs or small groups to provide each other with learning support (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021[236]). There are a variety of peer-to-peer tutoring models, including: (i) cross-age peer tutoring, where an older student teaches or reviews skills or content with a younger student; (ii) peer assisted learning strategies, where students who need additional instruction or support are paired with a peer who can assist; (iii) same-age peer tutoring, where peers who are within one or two years of age of each other are paired to review key concepts; and (iv) reciprocal peer tutoring, where two or more students alternate between acting as the tutor and the tutee during the session (Regional Directorate of Primary and Secondary Education of Thessaly, 2017[237]). Peer learning programmes have been shown to positively affect student learning, with a number studies showing benefits for both tutors and tutees, across a wide range of age groups (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021[236]; Ibeth et al., 2018[238]; Moliner and Alegre, 2020[239]). In PISA 2018, for instance, students in schools offering peer-to-peer tutoring scored 14 points higher in reading than students without access to peer-to-peer tutoring (four points higher after accounting for socio-economic variables), and peer-to-peer tutoring was associated with better reading performance in 15 countries and economies, after accounting for students'

and schools' socio-economic profile (OECD, 2020[26]). While research shows that peer-to-peer tutoring can positively impact on the academic outcomes of all students, there is evidence to indicate that it may particularly benefit students showing low academic achievement and those with special education needs (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021[236]; Stenhoff and Lignugaris/Kraft, 2007[240]). Peer-to-peer tutoring can also result in improved self-esteem, motivation and peer relationships (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021[236]; Moliner and Alegre, 2020[239]; Regional Directorate of Primary and Secondary Education of Thessaly, 2017[237]). A study undertaken in Spain found that it can mitigate feelings of anxiety students may have regarding mathematics (Moliner and Alegre, 2020[239]).

Mentoring programmes can also be an effective strategy to promote the inclusion and learning outcomes of diverse learners and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. There are, for instance, several examples of mentoring programmes that explicitly focus on supporting the educational engagement and participation of boys, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds (Borgonovi, Ferrara and Maghnouj, 2018[234]). In the United States, for example, Becoming a Man is a mentoring programme targeting boys and young men from low socio-economic backgrounds in neighbourhoods with large shares of minority populations. Introduced in a number of public schools in Chicago in 2009, the programme seeks to reduce dropout rates and behaviour patterns that can lead to problems in school-related activities by teaching boys self-regulation, problem-solving and impulse control through a series of weekly group meetings that take place during the school day. Evaluations of the programme revealed positive impacts on participants' learning outcomes and retention rates in school (Borgonovi, Ferrara and Maghnouj, 2018[234]; Heller et al., 2016[241]). The positive evaluations of the programme were key in the adoption of similar initiatives in Chicago and elsewhere in the United States (Borgonovi, Ferrara and Maghnouj, 2018[234]).

Mentoring programmes have been recognised as tending to improve gifted students' motivation, self-worth and education (Ball, 2018[242]; Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[38]). Mentoring is, for example, explicitly recognised by the New Zealand Ministry of Education as a key strategy in supporting the learning needs of gifted students, particularly Indigenous gifted students (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2012[243]). Mentoring strategies for gifted students include teacher-student mentoring, mentoring with an older gifted student and student-expert mentoring (Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[38]). An example of this third strategy from Germany is CyberMentor, an online mentoring programme for female students between the ages of 11 and 18 who have been identified as talented in STEM subjects. Participating students are individually mentored by a woman who is working on a graduate degree in a STEM field, undertaking postdoctoral research or is currently working in the STEM field. Over the course of a year, mentee students and mentors meet weekly via a members-only online platform, which also enables networking with the other programme participants (Stoeger et al., 2019[244]).

## Engagement with parents or guardians and communities

Promoting an inclusive school climate that supports all learners in achieving their educational potential involves all members of the school community, including school staff, students, parents and family members, agencies that engage with the school, and members of the broader community (Cerna et al., 2019[146]). Research has shown that the involvement of parents or guardians and communities in the learning of their children plays a pivotal role in students' educational achievement and broader well-being (OECD, 2019[245]; Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[38]). Engaging local communities, parents or guardians and families is therefore important for schools who seek to create inclusive and equitable school environments (Cerna et al., 2021[40]). The participation and involvement of parents or guardians and the broader community can be promoted through school governance structures and initiatives and mechanisms that relate to fostering a positive school climate. This is key in ensuring horizontal accountability in assessing the extent to which schools are equitable and inclusive, greater responsiveness to the diverse needs and priorities of communities served by the school, and the development of joint

strategies to create a school environment that supports all learners in achieving their educational potential and fosters a sense of belonging (Cerna et al., 2021[40]).

### *Fostering engagement with parents*

The involvement of parents and guardians in the school community and their children's educational pathway can have positive impacts on the school climate and help advance inclusion within schools (Cerna et al., 2019[146]). There is evidence to indicate that engaging with families can bring new ideas and encourage schools to reflect on how to more effectively welcome diverse identities into their communities and develop more inclusive ways of working (Guthrie et al., 2019[9]; Rojas Fabris, 2016[246]; Calderón-Almendros et al., 2020[247]; OECD, 2022[15]). Research has further shown that parental and family engagement can have a positive impact on students' educational outcomes (OECD, 2019[245]), as well as their overall well-being more broadly (Koshy, Smith and Brown, 2016[248]; Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[38]). Parental or guardian involvement can be particularly important for disadvantaged or marginalised students or students who are otherwise at risk of not achieving their educational potential (OECD, 2019[245]). Parents or guardians are essential in identifying and conveying the needs of their children and in collaborating with the school to address such needs, which can be key in supporting diverse students' learning and well-being (Cerna et al., 2021[40]). For instance, parents or guardians have a central role in the early identification of a child's giftedness (Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[38]; Sękowski and Łubianka, 2013[249]) and, in turn, supporting programmes or interventions to address their specific educational needs (Bicknell, 2014[250]; Koshy, Smith and Brown, 2016[248]; Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[38]). Parental engagement in educational decisions regarding their children's SEN can play an important role in influencing learning outcomes and has been shown to lead to improvements in students' academic performance, school participation and behaviour (Barlow and Humphrey, 2012[251]; Brussino, 2020[68]). In New Zealand, for instance, an external evaluation carried out in more than two hundred schools on the impact of parental and broader familial engagement for students with SEN found a number of benefits from consolidating partnerships between schools and parents and/or families, including both improved academic and social outcomes for students with SEN and an increased sense of appreciation of their talents and skills (Mutch and Collins, 2012[252]; New Zealand Education Review Office, 2008[253]; Brussino, 2020[68]).

Legislation concerning the inclusion of parents generally in school activities is prevalent among OECD education systems (OECD, 2019[245]). Data from PISA 2015 showed that, across OECD countries, approximately 70% of 15-year-old students attended schools whose principals reported that there was national, state or district legislation in place on including parents in school activities. In all participating OECD countries apart from Japan and the Slovak Republic, the majority of students attended schools operating under legal rules concerning parental engagement (OECD, 2016[3]; OECD, 2019[245]).

In practice, schools can play an important role in helping parents and guardians support their child's learning and connect with other social services that may be relevant to their progress and development (Guthrie et al., 2019[9]). However, a number of factors can operate as barriers to effectively engaging with students' families. Navigating the educational landscape in a new country can, for instance, be challenging for immigrant parents and guardians, and they may not be aware of how to engage in the school community and/or face language barriers that prevent them from doing so (Guthrie et al., 2019[9]). Some parents may also have limited education, lack the time and resources to engage in their child's education and provide a rich home learning environment (Guthrie et al., 2019[9]; OECD, 2010[254]), or face other challenges such as inflexible work hours that prevent them from being able to meet with teachers or school leaders at the allocated times (Guthrie et al., 2019[9]). In addition, the expectations and experiences of some parents and guardians also may not align with those of the education system in which they live (ibid.). For instance, the pedagogy and the vision of childhood and adulthood encountered in various Roma communities combined with the expectations Roma parents have regarding school may be in sharp contrast with the mainstream

Western education system, which can operate as a barrier to effective dialogue with the school (Rutigliano, 2020[103]).

One way in which education systems can support schools in this respect is by providing schools with guidance on how to involve parents and guardians from all backgrounds in the school community (Guthrie et al., 2019[9]; Santiago et al., 2017[11]). Recommendations on steps schools can take to engage with refugee parents and families are, for example, included as part of guidance published by the Department of Education in New South Wales, Australia, on how schools can support students from refugee backgrounds (Cerna, 2019[35]; New South Wales Department of Education, 2016[255]). In Austria, the multi-dimensional talent support tool *mBET*, which supports teachers in providing personalised support to gifted students, includes guidelines for support-orientated counselling talks between teachers, parents and students to foster a "personalised form of gifted education" and ensure that parents' perspectives are incorporated into educational decision-making (Rutigliano and Quarshie, 2021[38]; Stahl, 2014[256]).

Providing language support to parents and guardians who do not speak the first language of the education system can be an effective way to promote the engagement of immigrant families in the school community (Cerna, 2019[35]; Guthrie et al., 2019[9]; Santiago et al., 2017[11]). In Vienna, Austria, and cities across Germany, the programme Mommy learns German – Daddy too (*Mama lernt Deutsch – Papa auch*) provides linguistic support to the parents and guardians of immigrant students. The programme allows immigrant parents to meet and share their migration experience through the German language (Guthrie et al., 2019[9]; Cerna et al., 2019[146]). Intensive English-language courses are offered in Queensland, Australia, as part of the government's commitment to improve the engagement of immigrant and refugee communities in education (Cerna, 2019[35]). In addition to language support, community groups or support networks can also help in disseminating information to immigrant or refugee parents (ibid.).

Dedicated liaison workers have been used as a tool in several education systems to strengthen communication between schools and parents or guardians. In Ireland, the Home School Community Liaison scheme, which was introduced in 1990 and targets schools in disadvantaged areas, provides support for families to become more engaged in their child's education, which includes visits by scheme coordinators (Guthrie et al., 2019[9]; Weir et al., 2018[257]). The responsibilities of the role of the coordinators are detailed in an information booklet published by the Irish Department of Education and Skills and include the following (Tusla Education Support Service; Department of Education and Skills, 2021[258]):

- Encouraging, supporting and facilitating partnership between parents and teachers in the education of their children;
- Working with school staff to develop an understanding of educational disadvantage and promote innovate approaches to address it;
- Actively developing and promoting parental involvement as an integral part of the school planning process;
- Working with parents to prepare and support them as a resource to their own children and also to the wider school community; and
- Visiting the homes of students in order to develop bonds of trust between parents and school, encourage parents to be involved in their child's education, and to provide information about the school and services available in the community.

As of 2017, 259 primary schools and 181 post-primary schools were included in the programme, and evaluations suggest that it has been successful in increasing parental involvement among targeted disadvantaged parents (Guthrie et al., 2019[9]; Weir et al., 2018[257]). Some coordinators also reported that the programme has had a positive impact on immigrant families (Guthrie et al., 2019[9]; Weir et al., 2018[257]).

Home visits are also a strategy that has been implemented by an early childhood education and care centre located at the heart of a low socio-economic and predominantly Indigenous community in

North Winnipeg in Manitoba (Canada). Engagement with children's families is an important part of the programme, both to support parents in enhancing their children's development and learning and to address any barriers or issues that families may be facing (OECD, 2017[47]).

#### *Use of mediators*

The cultural mediator is a well-known concept and widely used strategy among a variety of institutions and organisations in various countries across the OECD (OECD, 2022[15]). The Department of Education of the state of Colorado (United States), for example, makes use of cultural mediators to facilitate successful communication and promote positive relationships with parents and families, including within its Head Start programmes, which seek to promote the school readiness of infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children from low socio-economic status families (ibid.). In the European Union, the use of cultural mediators with a Roma background is considered to be one of the most effective practices for bridging potential gaps and fostering connections between Roma communities and public institutions (OECD, 2022[15]; Rutigliano, 2020[103]). Cultural mediators with a Roma background are employed in the education systems of a number of countries in Europe to build trust and sustained relationships between schools and Roma families and to support the learning of Roma students. They have proven successful in improving the well-being and academic performance of Roma students as well as promoting the inclusion of the community as a whole (OECD, 2022[15]; Rutigliano, 2020[103]). In the Santo António school cluster in the Barreiro region of Portugal, for example, the employment of a cultural mediator from a local Roma community has been instrumental in engaging with Roma families and communities and improving outcomes for Roma students. Among other achievements, rates of absenteeism have decreased for Roma students, increased numbers of female Roma students are staying at school until the age of 18, and projects to specifically improve the inclusion of Roma girls and women have been implemented (OECD, 2022[15]).

Similarly, some schools in provinces of Canada employ dedicated Indigenous support staff who, in addition to supporting teachers regarding teaching strategies and practices to foster the inclusion of Indigenous students, serve as a connecting point with Indigenous parents (OECD, 2017[10]). In addition, language facilitators are employed by some schools in Chile to both provide mother tongue language support within the classroom and to facilitate relationships between schools and immigrant parents or guardians who may not speak Spanish. For instance, some schools in the Santiago Metropolitan Region employ language facilitators who speak Creole (Kreyòl) due to the growing number of immigrant students and families from Haiti (Guthrie et al., 2019[9]).

Mediators or language facilitators can also play a vital role in liaising and building relationships with the parents or guardians of newly-arrived immigrant or refugee students. In Austria, for example, one of the functions of the Mobile Intercultural Teams established by the Ministry of Education is to work with parents or guardians to support the successful integration of immigrant and refugee students into the school community. Members of these teams often serve as a language bridge between students, parents and the school (Eurydice, 2018[259]; Felder-Puig, Maier and Teutsch, 2016[260]; Cerna, 2019[35]). In a study evaluating the programme's effectiveness, many schools (over 30%) reported improvements in overcoming communication difficulties stemming from language and cultural barriers, informing migrant families about school operations, and co-operation with parents (Felder-Puig, Maier and Teutsch, 2016[260]; Guthrie et al., 2019[9]).

### *Engaging with the broader community*

In addition, local communities can play an important role in educating young people and contributing to their overall well-being, including through supporting parents in creating safe and positive home environments (Cerna et al., 2021[40]; Smith et al., 2017[261]). Alongside school-family partnerships, community-centred approaches have been recognised as effective tools in helping all students achieve their educational potential (Matthews and Menna, 2003[262]; OECD, 2019[245]; Rutigliano and Quarshie,

2021[38]). In education systems across the OECD, there are various examples of schools, parents and community organisations collaborating closely to develop or implement community-based programmes to support the inclusion of specific groups of diverse students (OECD, 2022[15]).

Collaboration with the broader community can, for instance, play a key role in fostering the inclusion of refugee or immigrant students and students from ethnic minority backgrounds. As part of the Settlement Workers in Schools Program in Canada, for instance, settlement workers from across community agencies work across and facilitate collaboration between schools and various community organisations and actors to support the successful integration of newcomer students into schools (Koehler, Palaiologou and Brussino, 2022[263]). In Portugal, the Manuel Ferreira Patricio school cluster in the Évora area collaborates with several local associations on a variety of initiatives to promote the inclusion of students with an immigrant background and from Roma communities. Similarly, the Santo António school cluster in Barreiro has implemented a number of activities to strengthen engagement with the broader community, such as regular culinary events where families from different nationalities come together to share food from their different home countries (OECD, 2022[15]).

The engagement and involvement of Indigenous communities in educational decision-making and school activities can also help meet the needs and support the inclusion of Indigenous students (Cerna et al., 2021[40]). Community (and parental) engagement has, for instance, been identified as one of the key elements to improve Indigenous education outcomes in the Northern Territory of Australia (Smith et al., 2017[264]). Engaging and involving Indigenous community members is also a central feature of programmes and initiatives intended to improve the well-being of Indigenous students in Canada (OECD, 2017[47]). One example of this is the Trauma-Informed School project in Ontario, which was a multi-phase and community-driven project that sought to develop trauma informed approaches and support mechanisms for Indigenous students as part of improving their educational outcomes (Tanyu et al., 2020[212]). Engagement with families and community members was the central component of the first phase of the project, and community support and collaboration were identified as a key theme in how schools can implement trauma-informed approaches that better support Indigenous students (ibid.).

## Pointers for policy development

The final section of this chapter provides a series of policy pointers that education systems can consider to promote equity and inclusion through school-level interventions. These have been developed on the basis of the analysis of different policies and practices developed in this chapter, which draws on available evidence and research literature along with experiences discussed in country-specific work of the Project and other OECD work.

### *Ensure that teachers adopt a variety of teaching formats and delivery methods to address the learning needs of all students*

The practices that teachers adopt in the classroom have an important role in the learning of their students. Different students can have a diversity of learning needs and styles and benefit from different approaches and teaching strategies - which teachers should leverage to foster their learning potential. Moreover, supporting students with a variety of teaching methods can help keep them engaged in education, make them feel valued and improve the overall school climate.

Supporting all learners and fostering more equitable and inclusive learning settings entails a reflection on the learning frameworks adopted by teachers and the impact these can have on students. Inclusive models can improve the equity and inclusivity of schools and classrooms, and should be used by teaching and school staff in the design and delivery of pedagogies, curricula and assessments. Universal Design for Learning and intercultural education are, for instance, two frameworks that can be adopted by teachers to

support all learners in achieving their educational potential. These frameworks are meant to design content and differentiate delivery so as to eliminate or reduce possible learning barriers for students from the outset. Intercultural education also aims to ensure that all students' cultural differences are valued, and not simply acknowledged, in the design and delivery of instruction.

Different pedagogies play an important role. Growing evidence shows that culturally responsive teaching practices have a positive impact not only on students' learning but also on their engagement and psychological well-being. Differentiated instruction, in particular, is at the core of inclusive education as it is tailored around the differentiation of approaches to serve various student needs through a blend whole-class, group and individual instruction formats. Indeed, adopting a range of teaching formats – from one-on-one tuition to small group approaches – can help teachers to support the needs of various students. The effective use of digital technologies can serve as a tool to support teachers in adapting to different learning styles and in meeting students' particular needs, as well as helping to promote greater student engagement more broadly through providing scope for a range of different learning activities.

### *Provide appropriate support measures and tools to accommodate diverse student needs*

The implementation of the curriculum at the school level plays a key role in addressing the needs of diverse students. It is important that education systems provide for sufficient flexibility regarding curriculum delivery so that students can receive appropriate support measures and, if necessary, different tools can be used to support their learning. Education systems should provide for and facilitate schools' use of tools such as Individual Education Plans (IEPs), which are tailored programmes designed on the basis of the individual student's difficulties and needs. While most OECD countries provide these to students with SEN, only a small number leverages them to support other diverse student groups, such as newcomer students. Individual Education Plans enable schools to provide adaptations of the curriculum to address students' specific needs, generally through accommodations and modifications. These measures should be leveraged to allow all students to access learning and fulfil their potential. Accommodations can help students access the same curriculum of other students, through adjustments that can be instructions (e.g., providing additional time for a task) or environmental (e.g., changes to the environment to minimise the risk of distraction). Modifications are changes to assignments or the curriculum that schools and teachers can design to make it easier for students to stay on track and can involve the student learning different material, getting graded or assessed under different standards than other students, or being excused from particular project. These tools should be adopted by education systems and granted to students that require support to be able to access the curriculum and thrive in education. They can also be adapted to the needs of different groups of students, such as students with SEN, students with an immigrant background and gifted students, among others. These measures can be complemented when appropriate with the provision of relevant digital and assistive technology. Finally, the tools can aid students in overcoming learning barriers, driven for instance by learning disabilities, physical impairments or language skills, while also supporting their wellbeing. Appropriate digital and assistive technology support tools to support students' learning can be assessed as part of the design of students' IEPs.

### *Ensure student assessments are designed and implemented equitably and inclusively*

The way in which student assessments are designed, implemented and used can have a strong impact on student engagement, motivation and learning outcomes. Research indicates that some assessment approaches can contribute to alienating students (and teachers) from the education system and exacerbate inequity in education. Conversely, assessment interventions that place students at the centre of the process and are well aligned with learning goals can raise achievement and reduce disparities.

Assessments should allow all students to show what they have learned and understood, without being disadvantaged by individual characteristics that are irrelevant to what is being assessed. It is therefore crucial that they are designed in a way that accounts for and mitigates the risk of bias for or against certain

groups. Guidelines for equitable assessment design should be developed at the system level that set out how to avoid bias in aspects such as content validity, item selection and method choice.

Beyond those that may occur in assessment design, risks of conscious or unconscious bias can also arise in teacher-based assessment processes as a result of teachers' perceptions of certain students. It is therefore important that teachers are equipped (through ITE and continuous professional learning) with the knowledge and competences to recognise and address any biases they may hold, understand how students' backgrounds may affect the way in which they communicate and participate in the classroom, and critically examine the tone and framing of assessment questions in light of this.

Ensuring equity and inclusion in student assessment processes also entails offering students a variety of ways to demonstrate their knowledge by employing multiple assessment forms and techniques. High-stakes decisions about students' learning trajectories should not be based solely on the results of a single test, but should draw on data obtained through a range of assessment tasks of different response formats and styles. This broader approach offers students other opportunities to demonstrate their performance if they are disadvantaged by any one particular assessment in the programme, and can thus help to promote equity in education.

Assessment frameworks should also be sufficiently flexible to allow for adaptations to respond to the particular needs diverse students may have. Depending on the student, this may entail providing extra time or removing time requirements entirely, reducing the linguistic complexity of written tests, allowing students to demonstrate their knowledge orally with the aid of an interpreter or language assistant, or incorporating assistive technologies.

### *Leverage the provision of non-instructional services to foster students' well-being*

Supporting the well-being of learners extends beyond classroom learning and may require a variety of non-instructional services or interventions. As was highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, schools can play a crucial role in providing access to psychological services (such as counselling or psychotherapy), particularly for students who may otherwise face barriers in obtaining the support they need in this regard. School-based counsellors have been recognised as being uniquely placed to promote students' mental health and psychosocial well-being due to their training in both education and psychology. Depending on the student profile of the particular school, school-based counsellors may require specialist knowledge and training in particular areas (such as SEN or mental health needs that may arise from traumatic migration experiences), or require guidance and additional support from external expert teams.

Where resource constraints do not allow for all schools to have a dedicated counsellor or psychologist on-side, it will be important that there are frameworks or mechanisms in place that facilitate collaboration between schools and local community service providers. This is necessary to ensure that schools can refer students in need of support beyond that which can be provided by school staff to the relevant professionals.

Schools can also help support the well-being of diverse learners through social and emotional learning programmes and trauma-informed teaching strategies. Social and emotional learning is increasingly being recognised as an important element of students' education that can facilitate academic learning, lead to improved behavioural and mental health outcomes, and help students feel a sense of belonging at school and in their broader communities. School-based interventions with a cognitive behavioural therapy basis and creative expression programmes – which seek to develop social and emotional skills through art, music or drama – have been found to have positive therapeutic effects, including reduced symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression. To effectively promote social and emotional learning, teachers need to be equipped (through high-quality continuous professional learning) with the knowledge and competences to recognise and respond to students' diverse psychosocial needs. In addition, teachers require both the training and time to develop their own social and emotional skills and to reflect on how their thoughts, emotions and relationships may affect their teaching. In some instances,

social and emotional learning programmes may be better delivered by external expert teams rather than school staff, which may require financial resources.

Career and educational guidance represent a further important non-instructional support intervention to help ensure that all students receive equal opportunities to achieve throughout education and beyond. Career and educational guidance is especially important to support students' transitions across different education levels (such as between primary and lower secondary level, upper secondary and tertiary level) and between education and the labour market, particularly for diverse students who might otherwise be left behind. Guidance at the system level can assist schools in effectively supporting diverse students who may face additional challenges in transitioning from one education level to another and/or from education into the labour market.

### *Implement strategies to engage parents and communities*

Engaging or involving parents, guardians and members of the broader community is key to creating a positive school climate and can play a pivotal role in promoting students' educational achievement and broader well-being.

Legislation providing for the inclusion of parents or guardians in school activities is prevalent across OECD education systems. In practice, however, a number of factors can operate as barriers to schools' ability to effectively engage with students' families. Education systems can support schools in this respect by providing guidance on steps schools can take to build connections with and involve parents and guardians in school life. Dedicated liaison workers or cultural mediators can also serve as a key tool to strengthen communication and build trust between schools and families from diverse communities and backgrounds. Targeted programmes and interventions – such as language courses, linguistic support mechanisms and alternative forms of information dissemination for families from different linguistic and/or cultural backgrounds – are a further strategy that can help schools strengthen engagement with the broader community.

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## Notes

[1] As described in Chapter 3, vertical equity focuses on providing differential funding for different student groups based on their needs (OECD, 2017[2]).

[2] In Denmark, grade 6 is the final year of primary school.

[3] Measured according to the Child Outcome Rating Scale, which assessed four dimensions of student functioning: (i) personal or symptom distress (measuring individual well-being); (2) interpersonal well-being (measuring the nature of students' relationships with their peers; (3) social role (measuring satisfaction with school); and (4) overall well-being (Masdeu Navarro, 2015[4]).

[4] Students were classified as being "frequently bullied" if they were amongst the 10% of students with the highest values in the index of exposure to bullying across all countries and economies with available data.

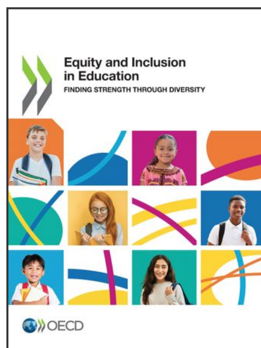
[5] While the Strength through Diversity Project uses the acronym LGBTQI+, LGBT has been used here to reflect the focus of the study.

[6] While the Strength through Diversity Project adopts the term special education needs over disability, the latter is here used to reflect the language used by the authors and to underline the cultural dichotomy between ability and disability.

[7] Ableism is defined as discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities (Merriam-Webster, 2022[266])

[8] For instance, research from across the United States has shown that students with disabilities generally tend to have lower high school graduation and tertiary education enrolment rates than their peers (Brussino, 2020[68]; Mader and Butrymowicz, 2017[265]; Johnson et al., 2019[268]). Students with SEN have also been shown to be less likely to obtain academic certifications and qualifications in the context of the European Union, which in turn hinders their access to, and retention in, the labour market (Brussino, 2020[210]; European Commission, 2018[267]).

[9] PISA 2018 defines students holding ambitious but realistic career expectations as those who expect to become managers, professionals or associate professionals and technicians by the age of 30 and who achieved at least PISA proficiency Level 2 in all three core PISA subjects.

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# Equity and Inclusion in Education

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