The forgotten nurses in Australian special schools

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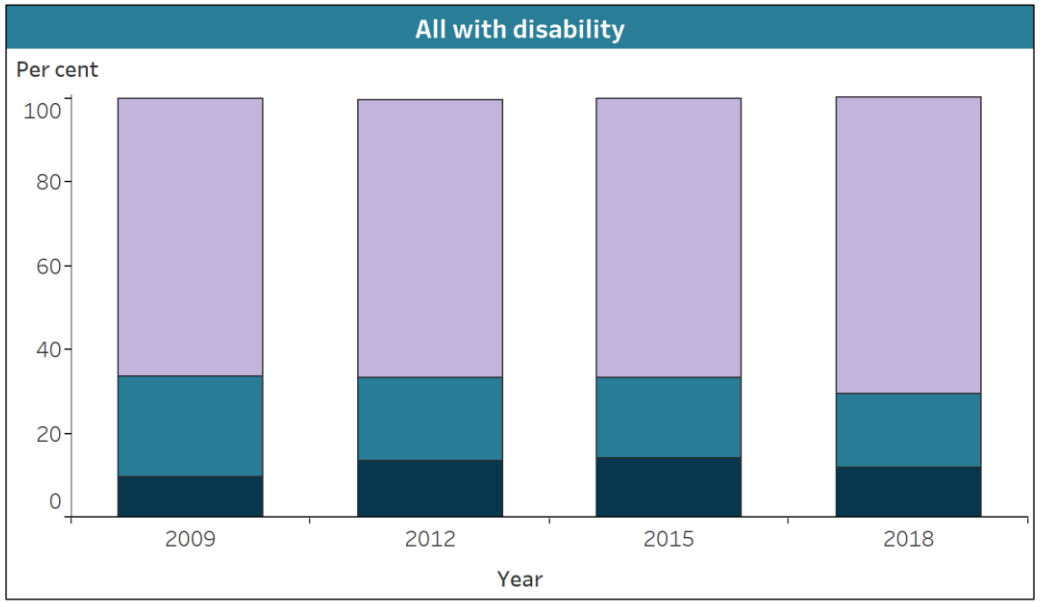
asid 2025 Conference
Learning from the Past, Shaping the Future
12 - 14 NOVEMBER 2025 AERIAL FUNCTION CENTRE, SYDNEY NSW

Early career researcher scholarship

More students with severe and profound intellectual disabilities attend special schools (Lassig et al., 2022)

Select disability status
- ○ Severe or profound disability
- ○ Other disability
- ◉ All with disability

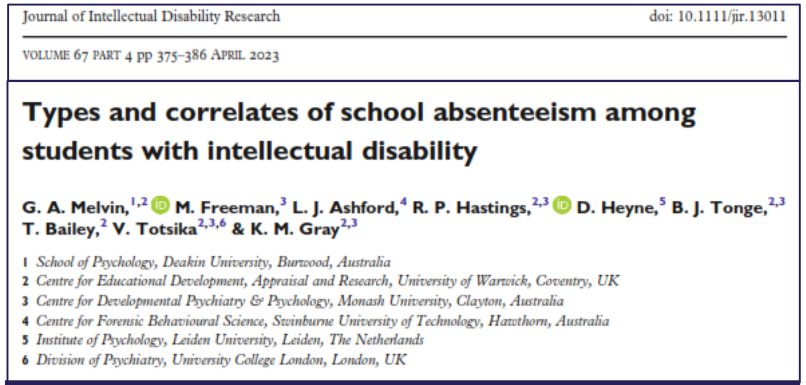
Select to highlight type of school or class
- Regular classes in a mainstream school only
- Special classes in a mainstream school
- Special school



Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents/education-and-skills/engagement-in-education

de Bruin. (2022). Learning in the shadow of eugenics: Why segregated schooling persists in Australia. *Australian Journal of Education, 66*(3), 218-234.
Lassig et al. (2022). The future of special schools in Australia: Complying with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. *Int. J Inclusive Ed, 28*(9), 1701-1719
[1] https://www.education.wa.edu.au/dl/90j6qj7e
[2] https://education.nt.gov.au/media/docs/enrolment-and-attendance-data/enrolment-and-attendance-data-2025/term-2/e-and-a-web-2025-t2-table-4.pdf
[3] https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Work-of-the-Assembly/Tabled-Papers/docs/5825t0321/5825t321.pdf
[4] https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/education-data-and-research/cese/publications/statistics/annual-statistical-bulletin/schools-and-students-2023-statistical-bulletin
[5] https://www.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/2778180/Inclusive-Education-for-Children-and-Young-People-with-Disability-in-ACT-Public-Schools-Information-paper.pdf
[6] https://www.decyp.tas.gov.au/about-us/policies-legislation-data/data-and-statistics/enrolments-in-schools-programs-services-data/
[7] https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/summarystatssnapshot.pdf
[8] https://data.sa.gov.au/data/dataset/students-with-a-disability-by-educational-setting

Special schools in Victoria



Journal of Intellectual Disability Research doi: 10.1111/jir.13011

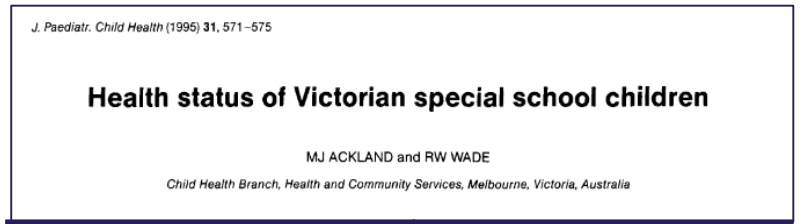
VOLUME 67 PART 4 pp 375–386 APRIL 2023

Types and correlates of school absenteeism among students with intellectual disability

G. A. Melvin,[1,2] M. Freeman,[3] L. J. Ashford,[4] R. P. Hastings,[2,3] D. Heyne,[5] B. J. Tonge,[2,3] T. Bailey,[2] V. Totsika[2,3,6] & K. M. Gray[2,3]

1 *School of Psychology, Deakin University, Burwood, Australia*
2 *Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK*
3 *Centre for Developmental Psychiatry & Psychology, Monash University, Clayton, Australia*
4 *Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science, Swinburne University of Technology, Hawthorn, Australia*
5 *Institute of Psychology, Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands*
6 *Division of Psychiatry, University College London, London, UK*

32% absent because of illness; 24% because of appointments



J. Paediatr. Child Health (1995) 31, 571–575

Health status of Victorian special school children

MJ ACKLAND and RW WADE

Child Health Branch, Health and Community Services, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

27% had insufficient information to ascertain health status

40% of children had newly detected health problems

SCIENTIFIC ARTICLE

Australian Dental Journal 2001;46:(1):41-50

A study of the dental treatment needs of children with disabilities in Melbourne, Australia

Mala Desai,* Louise Brearley Messer,* Hanny Calache*

Children attending schools for students with more severe disabilities had higher unmet dental needs

Students with intellectual disability

Received: 2 October 2020 | Revised: 3 March 2022 | Accepted: 4 March 2022

DOI: 10.1111/jar.12994

REVIEW

JARID WILEY

Unscheduled healthcare for children with intellectual disabilities: A systematic scoping review

Emma Nicholson[1,2] | Ciara Conlon[1] | Laurel Mimmo[3] | Edel Doherty[4] | Suzanne Guerin[5]

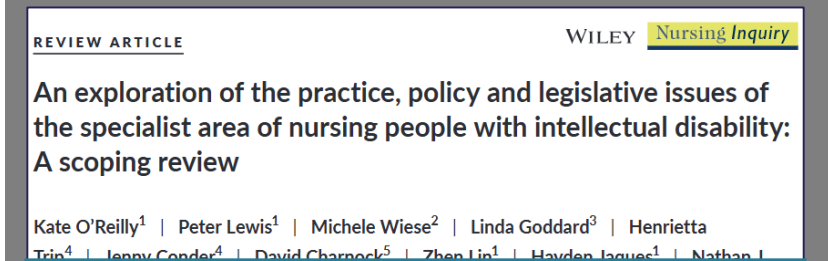
Fewer primary care appointments; more out-of-hours; more ED attendance

INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES VOLUME 49, NUMBER 2: 59–85 | APRIL 2011

Prevalence of Chronic Health Conditions in Children With Intellectual Disability: A Systematic Literature Review

Barth Oeseburg, Geke J. Dijkstra, Johan W. Groothoff, Sijmen A. Reijneveld, and Daniëlle E. M. C. Jansen

Up to 22% have a *chronic* health condition



REVIEW ARTICLE

WILEY Nursing Inquiry

An exploration of the practice, policy and legislative issues of the specialist area of nursing people with intellectual disability: A scoping review

Kate O'Reilly[1] | Peter Lewis[1] | Michele Wiese[2] | Linda Goddard[3] | Henrietta Trin[4] | Jenny Conder[4] | David Charnock[5] | Zhen Lin[1] | Hayden Jaques[1] | Nathan I

Specialist nurses continue to be needed for people with intellectual disability

Special schools in Australia

Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health

RACP Specialists. Together

doi:10.1111/jpc.16515

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Retrospective audit of a school-based integrated health-care model in a specialised school for children with externalising behaviour

Santuri Rungan,[1] Alicia Montgomery,[1] Jennifer Smith-Merry,[2] Huei Ming Liu[1] and John Eastwood[1]

[1]Croydon Community Health Centre, Sydney Local Health District, Melbourne and [2]Centre for Disability Research and Policy (CDRP), The University of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

10% had new physical health problems identified

Newly identified: parental separation, substance use, family violence

COGENT PUBLIC HEALTH
2024, VOL. 11, NO. 1, 2322235
https://doi.org/10.1080/27707571.2024.2322235

cogent

HEALTH SERVICES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

Health needs and health service utilisation of children and adolescents with intellectual disability attending schools for specific purposes in Sydney, Australia

Michelle Corke[a,b], Alicia Montgomery[c], Robert Leitner[a] and Vanessa Sarkozy[c]

[a]Kogarah Developmental Assessment Service, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, Sydney, Australia; [b]Community Child Health, Sydney Children's Hospital Randwick, Sydney, Australia; [c]Tumbatin Child Development Unit, Sydney Children's Hospital Randwick, Sydney, Australia

Access health services less regularly than peers without disabilities

disabilities

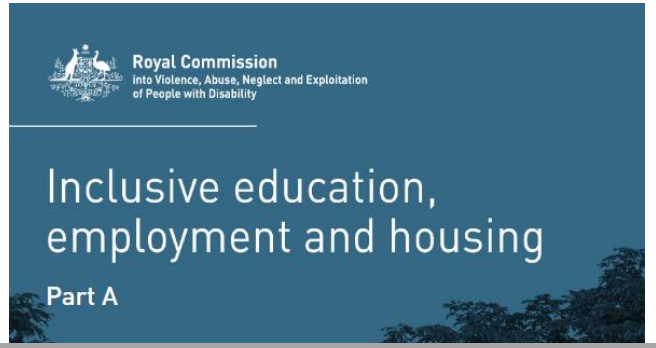
MDPI

Article

Health Profile of Australian Adolescents with Intellectual Disability

Tran Tuan Anh Le [1,2,*], Robert S. Ware [1,3], Simon Denny [4], Nicholas Lennox [1], Lyn McPherson [1,3] and David Harley [5]

Students in special schools have worse health than those from mainstream schools



Divided recommendations about specialist schools for students with disability

*Knowledge of child and adolescent health and development **may include**: developmental milestones, behavioural assessment, chronic conditions and **disabilities***

School nurses excluded

School nurses excluded

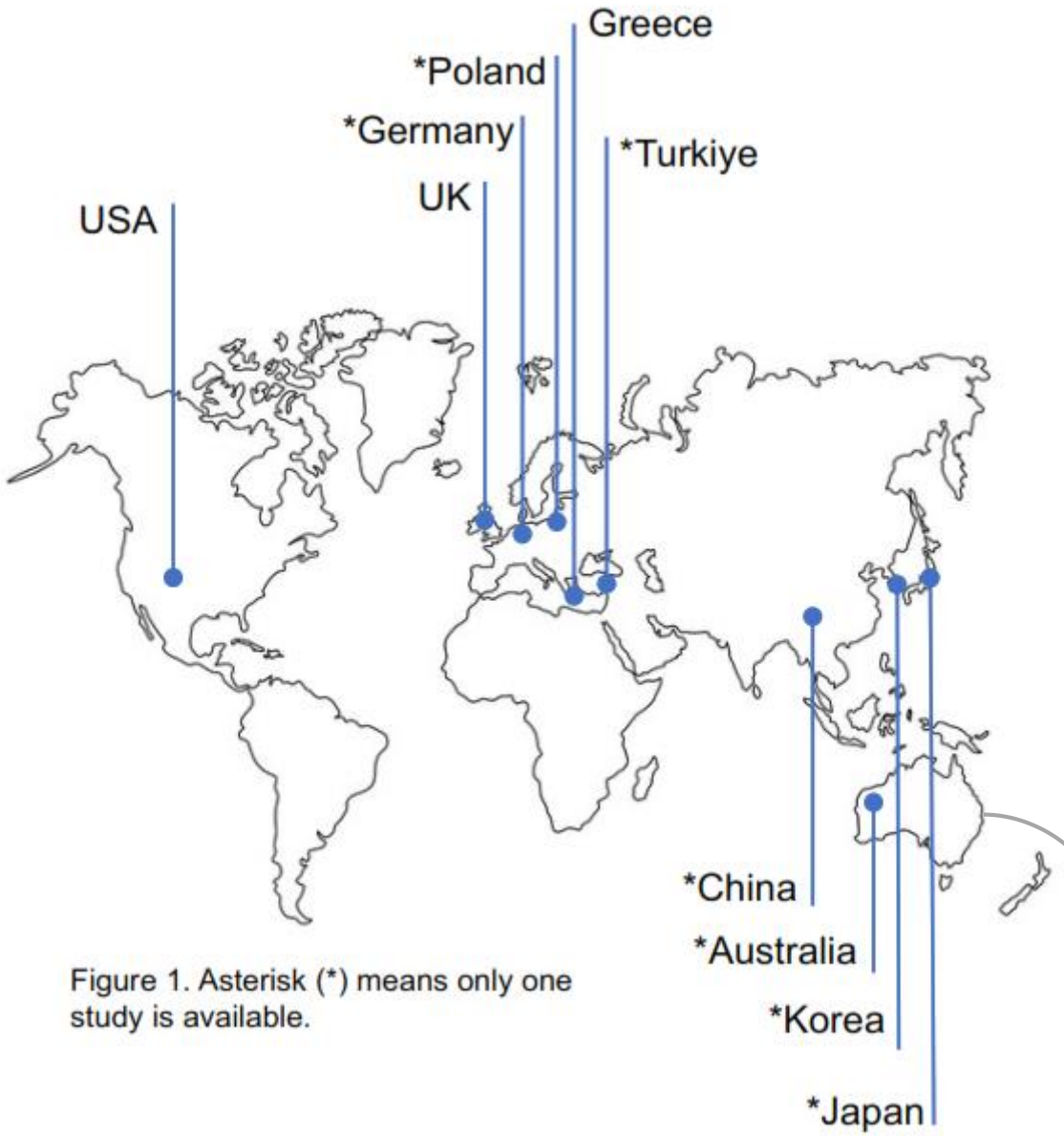
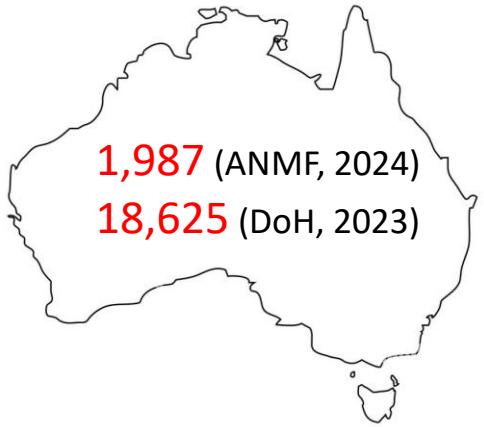


Figure 1. Asterisk (*) means only one study is available.

Nurses in specialist schools "… deliver care to a cohort of children who have intellectual disabilities, complex physical disabilities, complex medical needs, many of whom are life-limited and have palliative care needs .. the ever-increasing survivorship in recent years of children with complex disabilities has made the job of nurses who work in special schools even more specialised"

(Ryan, 2022, p. 29)



1,987 (ANMF, 2024)

18,625 (DoH, 2023)

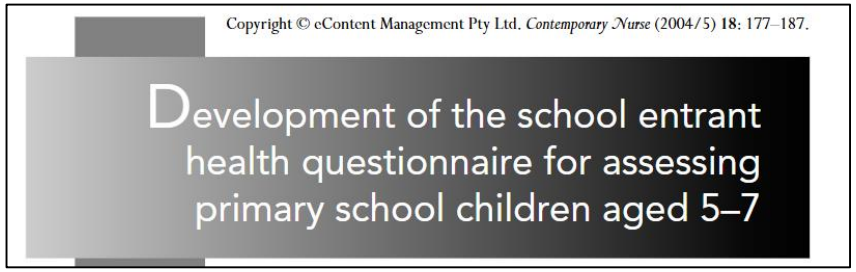
Not well recognised yet integral to the delivery of primary health care

(Nguyen et al., 2023)

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation. (2024). *An overview of the nursing and midwifery workforce in Australia*
Department of Health. (2023). *Health workforce data*. https://hwd.health.gov.au/datatool/
Nguyen et al. (2023). A snapshot of Australian primary health care nursing workforce characteristics and reasons they work in these settings: A longitudinal retrospective study. *Nursing Open, 10*, 5462-5475.
Ryan, M. (2022). Special school nurses need clinical governance. *World of Irish Nursing and Midwifery, 30*(5), 29.

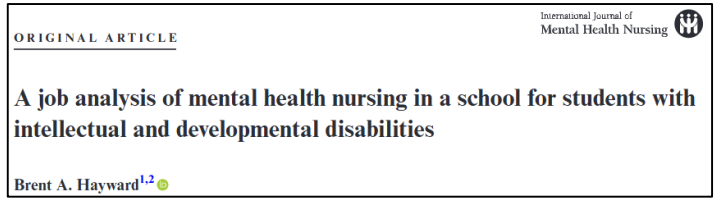
Revision of scoping review manuscript submitted

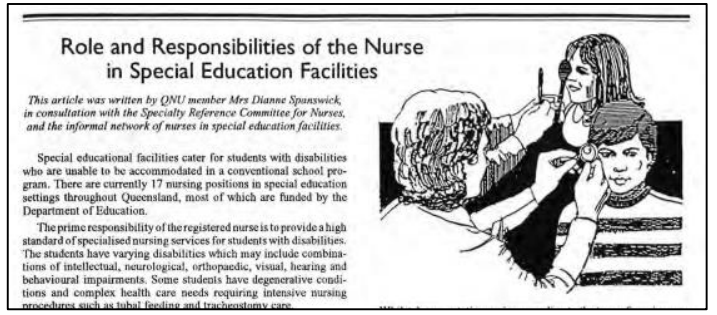
① Disability in mainstream school nursing screening



② Descriptions of nursing practice in mainstream schools

③ Special school nursing





Since the scoping review

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

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journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/colegn

‘Are you sure they’re a nurse?’: Public perceptions of Australian school nursing

Anita Moyes [a,*], Brent A. Hayward [b]

[a] School of Nursing and Midwifery, Edith Cowan University, Joondalup Dr, Perth, Western Australia 6027, Australia
[b] School of Nursing and Midwifery, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, Australia

ISSUES IN MENTAL HEALTH NURSING
2024, VOL. 45, NO. 8, 776–783
https://doi.org/10.1080/01612840.2024.2367154

COMMENT

Should Mental Health Nurses Cry with Patients?

Brent A. Hayward, RN, CMHN, PhD

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RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES
2025, VOL. 12, NO. 1, 84–87

REVIEW

Review of “Unmasking grief”, an online video series that illuminates the grief stories of four bereaved mothers, commissioned by Palliative Care Australia, and funded as part of the Paediatric Palliative Care National Action Plan Project, Palliative Care Australia Ltd., (2024). https://palliativecare.org.au/story/unmasking-grief-a-new-video-series/

Work underway

Secondary analysis of qualitative school nursing data

The Accidental School Nurse: How Australian Registered Nurses Enter School Nursing

The Journal of School Nursing
1–9
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Anita Moyes, RN, PhD[1] and Susan Karemba[1]

MRFF grant application

Medical Research Future Fund

Government school nursing policy

Stories of special school nurses

MONASH University
ECU EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
Peninsula Health
Endeavour Hills Specialist School

Medication management in schools

ECU EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
MONASH University
GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY
Murdoch University
Barker College

SUMMARY

1. Nurses already work in special schools
2. Special schools are here to stay
3. Students in special schools have unmet health needs
4. There is little understanding about what special school nurses do
5. How can special school nurses be supported in their work?
6. What are the impacts of special school nurses?