

A photograph of a classroom scene. A teacher, seen from the back and side, is holding an open book and talking to three young students. The students are wearing dark blue school uniforms and are looking towards the teacher. The background shows a typical classroom setting with bookshelves and educational materials.

Evaluating implementation of School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support practices in educational settings for Autistic students

Research team

Abigail Love, Tom Tutton, Mustafa Al Ansari & Vicki Gibbs (Autism Spectrum Australia)

Jennifer Stephenson (Macquarie University)

Phillip Whitefield (University of Sydney)

Project summary

Currently there are no School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) evaluation tools that have been designed for Autistic educational settings. This research used co-production principles to develop and trial an autism specific SWPBS audit tool that can be used in Aspect schools and made available to other educational settings.

In order to develop this tool we gathered expert feedback on the current tool designed for mainstream populations and conducted an Australia-wide survey to learn how others were adapting these practices and tools. As we drafted adaptations to the tool, we conducted focus groups with stakeholders to seek additional feedback. Following this step, we piloted the tool with two Aspect schools to gather further information about acceptability and feasibility.

Firstly, the Autism Inclusion Companion (AIC) was designed to accompany the Tiered Fidelity Instrument (TFI), a tool used to evaluate the implementation of SWPBS practices within mainstream schools. The AIC will be published for use in external school settings, where educators who are interested in more inclusive evaluation practices can use the tool along with the traditional TFI. Secondly, a fully adapted Autism-Specific TFI (AS-TFI) was developed for use in Aspect schools.

These tools are the result of this multi-phased research that was a collaboration between ARCAP, Aspect Education, and Aspect Practice.

Project rationale

Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) was initially developed as an approach that supports individuals with disabilities. It has evolved to include whole of organisation approaches including SWPBS where supports are delivered proactively on a three-tiered whole school basis.

Aspect Education uses both [PBS](#) and [SWPBS](#) strategies. This project was devised to standardise the evaluation of SWPBS as part of Aspect's commitment to implement and continually improve autism practices.

Definitions

School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) is an evidence-based framework for restructuring school discipline system through a multi-tiered framework in social, emotional and behavioural supports. SWPBS has a strong focus on the use of systems to support educational practices that already have a strong evidence base, and that may be commonly used in schools.

Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) is an instrument designed to evaluate implementation fidelity of SWPBS. Data collected from the TFI is used by school leadership teams to make decisions across universal or school-wide systems, to targeted and individual student systems. The TFI is also used by researchers when assessing the impact of SWPBS on student and adult variables.

Study stakeholders and participants

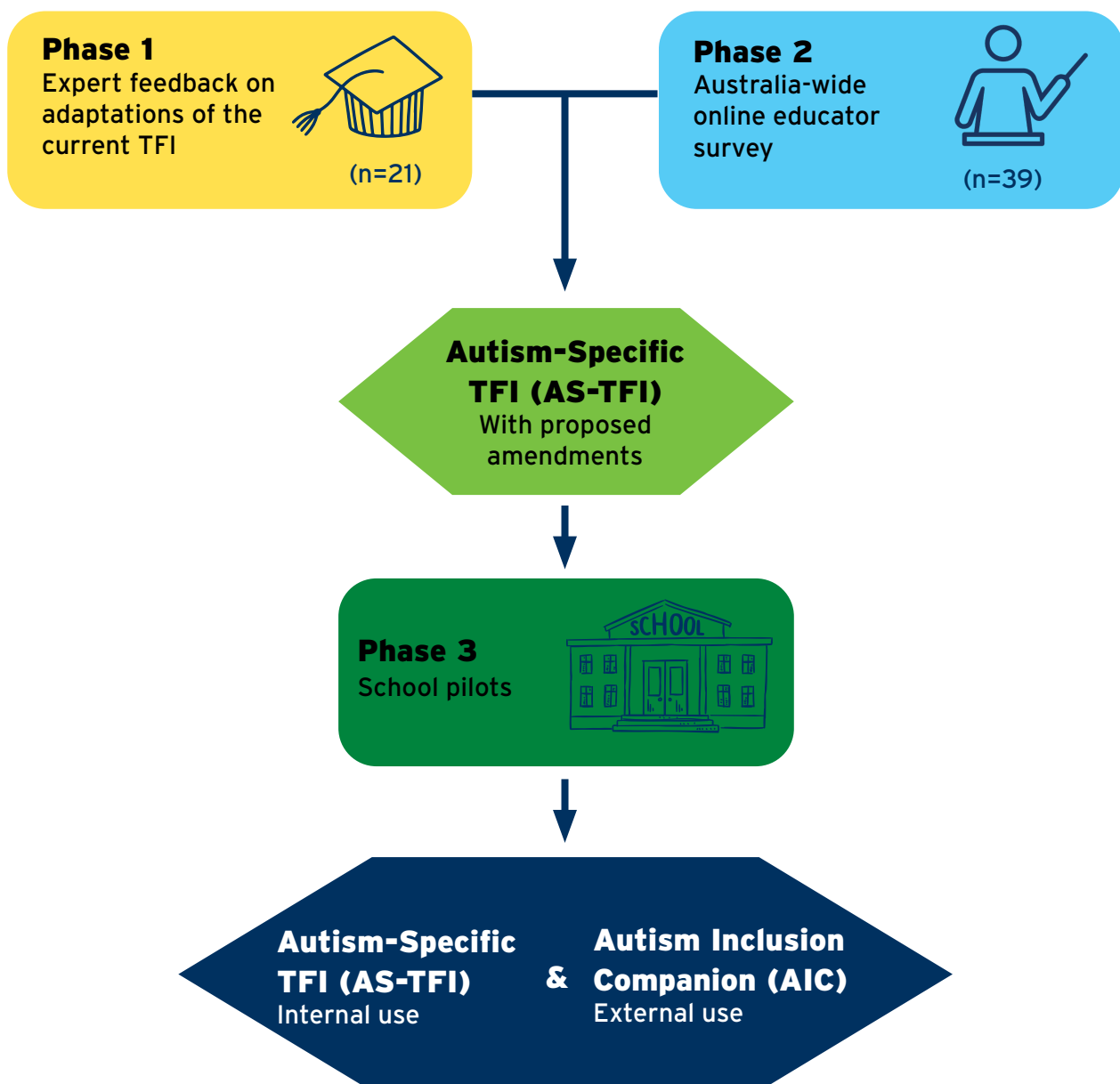
Adapting the instruments

The adaptation of the instruments in Phase 1 was a collaborative project that was completed with contributions from stakeholders with experience in the implementation of SWPBS in schools. The stakeholders included:

- researchers (n=8)
- principals, teachers and therapists (n=9)
- SWPBS academic experts (n=8).

In Phase 2, 39 educators across Australia completed the online survey and provided responses concerning how SWPBS was used in their schools, about strengths and weaknesses of SWPBS, and required adaptations for students on the autism spectrum.

Development of the tools



Australia-wide survey

In addition to the work adapting the instruments, we also conducted an Australia-wide survey to understand how others were implementing SWPBS in autism-specific contexts. As we were familiar with implementation in Aspect's schools, we wanted to ensure we had considered how others viewed SWPBS for this population of students outside of Aspect.

Using Qualtrics, we surveyed educators across Australia who were teaching at a school that adopted SWPBS and had a population of students on the autism spectrum. In total, we had responses from **39 educators**.

Educators responded from all Australian states, multiple settings (mainstream, special school, special development and autism-specific) and across a range of roles (school leaders, teachers, therapists and educational support staff/teacher's aides).

We asked participants about the frequency of the following SWPBS-aligned practices that were conducted in their schools. Participants answered "never", "some of the time" or "most of the time."

We learned that, according to participants, SWPBS school-wide rules were used in high frequency (82% stated most of the time). However, fewer participants said that there was a system for clearly defining behaviours and encouraging behaviour that has been taught (only 50% said most of the time).



Is the system for clearly defining behaviours used?

50%
most of the time

Is the system for encouraging behaviour that has been taught (including feedback) used?

50%
most of the time

Then, we asked participants how often these practices were adapted for students on the autism spectrum at their school.

59% SWPBS-aligned practices are adapted for students on the autism spectrum at their school

41% SWPBS-aligned practices are not adapted for students on the autism spectrum at their school



We asked how participants felt SWPBS-aligned practices benefited students on the autism spectrum

"I think the program supports all the different kinds of learners by not putting blame on the child, and by adapting environmental issues to support them."

"They are supported – and included – in decision-making about what is best for their learning and wellbeing."

"Staff understanding that behaviour is occurring for a reason – supports students as staff are not seeing the child as being naughty and punishing."

Finally, we asked if there were any aspects of SWPBS-aligned practices that were not beneficial for students at their school on the autism spectrum

"Limited success due to lack of training of and buy in. Training is not specific enough. No data. People think they are doing the right thing but treatment integrity and no support from external consultants."

"No parent training."

"too abstract for high support needs"

Tool dissemination

Following the adaptation of the tool, ARCAP has supported its dissemination within Aspect schools:

- 15 features in total were changed from the original TFI.
- The walkthrough tool was adapted to include multiple communication preferences and methods.
- The team composition was changed to include members of the Autistic community.



Find out more

A copy of the adaptation of the tool is available from Lead Researcher, [Abigail Love](#).

The research paper is currently being written. Contact [Abigail Love](#) to obtain a copy once it is published.



a different brilliant[®]

understanding, engaging & celebrating the
strengths, interests & aspirations
of people on the autism spectrum

Aspect Research Centre for Autism Practice (ARCAP)

Level 5, Tower B, The Zenith
821 Pacific Highway, Chatswood NSW 2067
PO Box 697, Chatswood NSW 2057

T 1800 ASPECT (1800 277 328)
E research@autismspectrum.org.au
W autismspectrum.org.au/arcap