

## Classification of Special Education Roles: The 2026 Census

In 2023, InSpEd was invited to contribute to a review of the Education and Training focus area of the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO). This involved providing input into the classification of education roles under ANZSCO. The original classifications for those working in special education roles were *special needs teacher* and *remedial teacher*. Following our submission, which criticised these classifications because they appeared to inappropriately describe the educators rather than their roles, those classifications were retired and feedback was received based on the information gleaned from the 2021 census (e.g. the role titles suggested by educators completing the assessment). The feedback stated that:

- *The Unit Group 'Special Education Teachers' will become 'Special Educators'.*
- *The Occupation 'Special Needs Teacher' will become 'Special Education Teacher'.*
- *The Specialisation 'Remedial Teacher' will be retired.*
- *The Specialisation 'Teacher of Gifted Students' will be 'parked' temporarily in the Special Education Teachers, not elsewhere classified, while a more suitable location is determined.*

Unfortunately, we can't yet adopt the new Occupations you suggested:

- *Special Education Teacher (Primary School) – 2021 Census Count is 1,783*
- *Special Education Teacher (Secondary School) – 2021 Census Count is 705*
- *Special Educator (Early Childhood Intervention) – 2021 Census Count is 168*
- *Special Educator (Post-school Programs) – 2021 Census Count is below 10*

The top four classifications were proposed to go forward to the 2024 review. That review did not accept the overarching classification of *'special educator'*. However, the classification of *special education teacher* was accepted and has replaced the earlier inappropriate classifications.

Long-term readers of InSpEd Insights might remember that in 2020 we highlighted the problem of the poor image of special education in Australia. At that time we wondered how much of a problem there might be with the role title. We asked, *"Is it the use of the word 'special', which, perhaps, implies lesser rather than greater, segregation rather than inclusion?"* (December 2020 issue). We also asked *"Is it time to change the name of the profession? If not Special Educator, what then?"*

We did receive some suggestions for a name change following that publication. Among those were *Instructional Specialist* and *Specialist Educator*. The problem for those of us who are both researchers and current or former practitioners is that the term used in research reported in international journals, both academic and practitioner, is still *'special education'*. Some highly regarded journals (e.g., *The Journal of Special Education* and *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*) have the term *'special education'* in their titles. Therefore, we are not currently proposing a change of name for the organisation nor a change to the role titles for those working in the field.

As advised initially by ANZSCO **we are urging teachers to record their profession in the 2026 Census as **special educator or special education teacher, if they are a teacher of a special class in a mainstream school, a teacher in a special school or a teacher in a mainstream school supporting mainstream teachers who have students with disability or learning or behavioural difficulties in their classes.****

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**For educators supporting infants and young children, their families and early childhood education and care (ECEC) providers, and educators working with adults with disability and their families and carers we urge you to register your profession as special educator, early childhood, if you work with infants and young children and their families, or special educator, post school, if you provide specialist support to individuals with disability post-school.** It is particularly important to have the specialists working in prior to school and post-school settings to have their roles recognised as well as recognition for the valuable contribution that special educators can make in these fields.