



# **Submission to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability**

## **Education of children and young people with disability**

### **Submission No 1.**

**Children and Young People with Disability Australia**

**October 2019**

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**Acknowledgements:**

Children and Young People with Disability Australia would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which this report has been written, reviewed and produced, whose cultures and customs have nurtured and continue to nurture this land since the Dreamtime. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future. This is, was and always will be Aboriginal land.

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## Executive summary

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) is the national representative organisation for children and young people with disability aged 0–25 years. CYDA has an extensive national membership of more than 5000 young people with disability, families and caregivers of children with disability, and advocacy and community organisations.

CYDA's purpose is to systemically advocate at the national level for the rights and interests of all children and young people with disability living in Australia.

We are pleased to provide our first submission to the Royal Commission into Abuse, Violence, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability on the topic of school education. This is the first of many submissions we plan to make over the course of the Royal Commission on the topic of education and we will be making submissions on the other areas of inquiry such as employment, housing, child protection and justice.

CYDA's first submission to the Disability Royal Commission on school education covers:

- The evidence base for inclusive education from a review of 60 years of evidence about the benefits of inclusive education for students
- The results from our 2019 National Education Survey of 505 families/caregivers of students with disability and young people with disability
- The results of our Freedom of Information requests from state and territory government education jurisdictions on incidents of a child protection nature and restrictive practices
- Four detailed case studies of the educational experiences for students with disability.

The Disability Royal Commission must make the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CPRD) as its starting point for its investigation to the experiences of people with disability and the changes that need to be made to ensure they are free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. In relation to education this includes General comment No. 4 (2016) Article 24: Right to inclusive education where the Committee provided detailed definitions and guidance on what is and isn't inclusive education. These definitions must be a starting point for the Commission and the right to inclusive education must not be contested, despite the vested interests many stakeholders have in the continuation of segregating students with disability into special schools and separate environments from their peers without disability. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child also needs to be a lens through which the Royal Commission considers children and young people with disability. Additionally the evidence base for inclusive education must not be contested. Our report *Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation* provides definitive evidence from Australia and internationally about the benefits of inclusive education from a rights perspective as well as the outcomes for children and young people with disability, other students without disability, schools and the general community. An inclusive society for people with disability must include inclusive education.

The key findings from our 2019 National Education Survey, which is consistent with our previous three other surveys, show that students with disability are routinely excluded in their education, with many being segregated from 'mainstream' schools and classrooms, not attending school full-time, refused enrolment and excluded from school activities. Suspensions and expulsions are also familiar practices, showing the lack of understanding and support for students with disability.

While the majority of students receive some specific support at school because of their disability or learning difference, there are many families who are out-of-pocket for supports and equipment to enable the student to participate in education. Many students do not have a personalised individual education plan in place.

Families did **not** believe:

- students with disability received adequate support in their education
- that they were communicated with regularly about the student's learning progress
- that teachers had high expectations of the student, or
- that teachers had the required training to provide a supportive and enriching education environment.

Students with disability experience unacceptably high levels of abuse and violence at school, including bullying and restrictive practices such as restraint, seclusion or both of these.

Following consultation with our members and research CDYA will be providing education submissions to the Disability Royal Commission in relation to:

- school funding for inclusive education
- early childhood education
- post-school transition/education
- the interface between education and other systems such as health, National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), child protection and out-of-home care.

# Recommendations and considerations for the Disability Royal Commission

## Recommendations to ensure inclusive education

- Develop and implement a National Action Plan for Inclusive Education to ensure a successful transition from parallel systems of education to one inclusive system of education
- While this transition is occurring ensure that no new segregated settings (schools, pre-schools, centres, units or classrooms) are created in educational jurisdictions
- Ensure the full recognition of human rights through:
  - conducting a robust review, in consultation with organisations of persons with disability, of the Disability Standards for Education 2005 and implement the recommendations in the new standards.
  - expanding the current data collection practices to include recording and transparent reporting of the numbers of students who do not qualify for an adjustment, who are prevented from enrolling in their local education settings, and of all use of restrictive practices, suspension and expulsion.
  - transparent and disaggregated reporting of educational attainment and completion rates
- Foster a culture of inclusion to address ableism within and beyond education settings and systems through policy, practice and education
- Introduce compulsory, comprehensive and ongoing teacher education for inclusion in pre-service and in-service professional development for educators (not to be confused with 'special' education) including developing awareness regarding ableism and the provisions of the CRPD. This includes at least one compulsory core (semester-long) subject in every pre-service teacher education program that is solely dedicated to inclusive education
- Build the foundations for successful collaboration for inclusion by:
  - ensuring inclusive education practice is an integral part of education for all allied health and education leaders and other education support professionals.
  - developing evidence-based policy and standards regarding the use of paraprofessional support and teachers' aides
  - providing information to families about how to advocate for inclusive education
- Ensure flexible and responsive curriculum and assessment approaches
- Listen to students with ongoing commitment to direct, accountable and regular consultation with students who experience disability and their families across all aspects of policy-making and implementation for inclusive education
- Prioritise disability equity education through further development of the diversity approach within the Australian Curriculum and the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, including awareness-raising regarding ableism and educational practice
- The new National Disability Strategy has a strong focus on inclusive education with appropriate targets and monitoring of progress

### **Recommendations to preventing violence and abuse against students with disability**

- A national framework is developed and implemented by all educational authorities to eliminate the use of the restrictive practices in schools and ensure educators and educational systems are held to account when restrictive practices occur
- Each state and territory educational authority develop and implement whole school anti-bullying policies, practice and reporting to prevent bullying of students with disability
- Review the legislative protections, the National Principles for Child Safety developed following the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and state and territory based reportable conduct schemes to ensure they adequately cover violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of students with disability.

### **Recommendations to increase transparency, accountability and complaints methods**

- Ensure there are clear and consistent legislation, independent oversight bodies and processes to ensure families of students with disability can complain and have their concerns heard and investigated when violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation occurs in education without fear of reprisal
- That independent oversight bodies for education have consistent powers and resourcing to conduct systemic inquiries and education about violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation for students with disability
- The Australian Government reports regularly progress of students with disability in line with its CPRD obligations.

### **Further considerations for the Disability Royal Commission**

- In light of CYDA's unsuccessful attempt under Freedom of Information laws to receive data about violence and abuse against students with disability, compel the states and territories to provide these data to the Royal Commission so an analysis of the prevalence and systemic issues can be completed by the commission
- The Royal Commission ensure they schedule a sufficient number of hearings (private and public) to enable families of students with disability and young people with disability to tell their story and be heard and believed
- Identify children and young people with disability as a priority group for engagement in the Royal Commission across all topic areas under investigation
- As a matter of priority publish the Royal Commission Accessibility Strategy and ensure there is a strong communications strategy to assist people to engage with the Royal Commission.

## Introduction

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) is the national representative organisation for children and young people with disability aged 0 to 25 years. CYDA has an extensive national membership of more than 5000 young people with disability, families and caregivers of children with disability, and advocacy and community organisations.

CYDA's purpose is to systemically advocate at the national level for the rights and interests of all children and young people with disability living in Australia, and it undertakes the following to achieve this:

- listening and responding to the voices and experiences of children and young people with disability
- advocating for children and young people with disability for equal opportunities, participation and inclusion in the Australian community
- educating national public policy-makers and the broader community about the experiences of children and young people with disability
- informing children and young people with disability, their families and caregivers about their citizenship rights and entitlements
- celebrating the successes and achievements of children and young people with disability.

Research evidence overwhelmingly supports inclusive education. As well as positive outcomes for social justice and a sense of community and belonging, there are benefits for learning outcomes and for the social, behavioural and physical development of children and young people who do and do not experience disability.

Inclusive education is about everyone learning, growing and flourishing – **together** – in all our diversity. Inclusive education recognises **the right of every child and young person** – without exception – to be included in general education settings. It involves adapting the environment and teaching approaches to ensure genuine and valued full participation of all children and young people. It embraces human diversity and welcomes all as **equal** members of an educational community.<sup>1</sup>

This submission is informed by deep consultation with CYDA members over many years and research and policy development including annual education surveys, government submissions, and our second review of the evidence released in October 2019 by Dr Kathy Cologon, *Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation* included in this submission, building on our previous review of the evidence<sup>2</sup>.

The data included in this submission is from CYDA's National Education Survey conducted between August and September 2019 to provide important information on the experience of children and

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<sup>1</sup> Children and Young People with Disability Australia (2019) Fact Sheet 1, 'What is inclusive education?'

<sup>2</sup> Cologon, K. (2019) *Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation*. Report written by Dr Kathy Cologon, Macquarie University, for Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) and Cologon, K. (2013) *Inclusion in education: towards equality for students with disability*. Report written by Dr Kathy Cologon, Macquarie University, for Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA)



young people with disability in their school education<sup>3</sup>. There were 505 young people with disability and families and caregivers of children with disability who responded to the survey.

The survey had representation from all states and territories, all age groups and from metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Australia. The majority of respondents were from families of students with disability (97%), with the balance of respondents being students with disability.

The key findings from our survey, which is consistent with our previous three other surveys, are that students with disability are routinely excluded in their education, with many being segregated from 'mainstream' schools and classrooms, not attending school full-time, refused enrolment and excluded from school activities. Suspensions and expulsions are also familiar practices, showing the lack of understanding and support for students with disability.

While the majority of students receive some specific support at school because of their disability or learning difference, there are many families who are out-of-pocket for supports and equipment to enable the student to participate in education. Many students do not have a personalised individual education plan in place.

Families did **not** believe:

- students with disability received adequate support in their education
- that they were communicated with regularly about the student's learning progress
- that teachers had high expectations of the student, or
- that teachers had the required training to provide a supportive and enriching education environment.

Students with disability experience unacceptably high levels of abuse and violence at school, including bullying and restrictive practices such as restraint, seclusion or both of these.

CYDA's first submission to the Disability Royal Commission on school education covers:

- The evidence base for inclusive education from a review of 60 years of evidence about the benefits of inclusive education for students
- The results from our 2019 National Education Survey of 505 families/caregivers of students with disability and young people with disability
- The results of our Freedom of Information requests from state and territory government education jurisdictions on incidents of a child protection nature and restrictive practices
- Four detailed case studies of the educational experiences for students with disability.

Following consultation with our members and research CDYA will be providing education submissions to the Disability Royal Commission in relation to:

- school funding for inclusive education
- early childhood education
- post-school transition/education
- the interface between education and other systems such as health, NDIS, child protection and out-of-home care.

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<sup>3</sup> Children and Young People with Disability (2019) Time for change: The state of play for inclusion of students with disability

## The evidence for inclusive education

Research evidence overwhelmingly supports inclusive education. As well as positive outcomes for social justice and a sense of community and belonging, there are benefits for learning outcomes and for the social, behavioural and physical development of children and young people who do and do not experience disability.

Inclusive education is about everyone learning, growing and flourishing – **together** – in all our diversity. Inclusive education recognises **the right of every child and young person** – without exception – to be included in general education settings. It involves adapting the environment and teaching approaches to ensure genuine and valued full participation of all children and young people. It embraces human diversity and welcomes all as **equal** members of an educational community.<sup>4</sup>

The evidence base for inclusive education cannot be contested. CYDA commissioned Dr Kathy Cologon from Macquarie University to conduct an extensive review of the evidence on inclusive education. The resultant report, *Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation* (**Appendix A**) reviewed evidence across six decades and incorporated more than 400 research papers, relevant treaties and reports, to further explore the existing barriers and the possibilities for addressing these to bring about the realisation of inclusive education.

The evidence report has been augmented by a series of fact sheets designed to help parents, educators and educational policy makers to understand the evidence base. The fact sheets at (**Appendix B-E**) are:

- What is inclusive education?
- The benefits of inclusive education
- Addressing ableism in education
- Transformation to inclusive education: the next steps

The key findings of the *Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation* report were:

- There is no evidence base to support segregated education in any form, including in special schools, special units or special classrooms, and that this is a breach of Australia's international human rights obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CPRD)
- There is no child or young person too complex or 'disabled' to be included in general 'mainstream' education settings
- The research shows benefits for students who experience disability for inclusion in 'mainstream' education including:
  - better academic and vocational outcomes than their peers in non-inclusive settings
  - greater social interaction, resulting in more opportunities to establish and maintain friendships
  - increased independent communication and speech and language development, in turn supporting greater inclusion and active participation

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<sup>4</sup> Children and Young People with Disability Australia (2019) Fact Sheet 1, 'What is inclusive education?'

- a sense of belonging and a self-concept of not just being a receiver of help but also a giver of help
  - access to a broader range of play and learning activities, which can stimulate physical development and enhance children's experiences.
- Inclusive education benefits students without disability, teachers and educators and the community.

## Neglect of students with disability

### Macro-exclusion

“In its most extreme form, macro-exclusion in education involves denial of any formal education opportunities.

While this form of macro-exclusion is ongoing, macro-exclusion more commonly occurs when a student is excluded from ‘mainstream’ education and segregated into a ‘special’ school or ‘special’ class/unit for all or part of the day, the week or the year.

Macro-exclusion is a clear form of segregation that is straightforward to identify. However, the frequent misunderstandings of the term ‘inclusive education’ lead to a situation where exclusion is often called, or misappropriated as, ‘inclusion’. Many genuine efforts towards inclusive education have been and continue to be made, in response to the national and international attention to the importance of inclusive education over the past decades. In many instances, however, the terms ‘special education’ or ‘special needs education’ have been replaced with the term ‘inclusive education’, without any actual change in policy or practice.”<sup>5</sup>

The CRPD definition of inclusion in education explains that no form of segregation or integration constitutes inclusive education.<sup>6</sup> In our report, *Time for change: The state of play for inclusion of students with disability* (**Appendix F**) we found that there was widespread macro-exclusion in schools. Based on the 2019 National Education Survey results (Table 1), we found, that one in four students is in a special school or has a dual enrolment between a ‘mainstream’ and special school<sup>7</sup>. Meanwhile, one in ten is enrolled in a ‘mainstream’ school but is separated from the class in a separate unit. There is also evidence of ‘gate-keeping’ and students being denied enrolment, with one in ten students with disability having been refused enrolment. There are significant numbers of students who are not participating in full-time schooling, with families reporting that schools are using suspensions and ‘support needs’ as ways to prevent students from attending school full-time.

Our report at **Appendix F** has case studies and detailed results about macro-exclusion of students with disability.

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<sup>5</sup> Cologon, K. (2019) Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation. Report written by Dr Kathy Cologon, Macquarie University, for Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), p. 27

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General comment No. 4 (2016) Article 24: Right to inclusive education

<sup>7</sup> Children and Young People with Disability (2019) Time for change: The state of play for inclusion of students with disability

**Table 1. Educational segregation and exclusion\***

	AUS	VIC	NSW	WA	QLD
No of students with disability	505	141	119	85	82
% were enrolled in segregated education in either dual enrolment with a special school or attending a special school	24.2	32.6	22.7	28.2	13.4
% who attended a 'mainstream' school were separated from their peers either on a full-time basis in a special unit, or withdrawn to the special unit for instruction in combination with attending a regular class	15.5	8.5	18.5	22.4	15.9
% who have been refused enrolment	12.5	9.2	10.9	5.9	25.6
% who did not attend school full time	16.6	22.0	12.6	10.6	11.0
% who were suspended in the last year	14.7	12.8	13.5	16.5	15.9
% who were expelled in the last year	1.8	1.4	1.7	3.5	1.2

\*While data were collected from ACT, TAS, SA, NT there were insufficient numbers to do jurisdictional comparisons

### Micro-exclusion

"When exclusion occurs within 'mainstream' settings that claim to be inclusive, this results in 'micro-exclusion'. One common form of micro-exclusion is where a student is present within a 'mainstream' setting, but is separated from the group and the curriculum, often through the provision of 'inclusion support' that (usually unintentionally) isolates the student educationally, socially and even physically. ... Micro-exclusion can occur when people misunderstand inclusion as a continuation of 'special' education but in a 'mainstream' context.... Micro-exclusion forms one of the biggest barriers to inclusive education. . . Micro-exclusion also occurs when someone is not fully included as a valued member of the classroom community (often as a consequence of other forms of micro-exclusion)... micro-exclusion commonly occurs when integration is misunderstood as inclusion"<sup>8</sup>

Our report also highlighted the insidious micro-exclusion that occurs for students with disability, where students are not valued members of the school community or included along with their peers (Table 2). We found strong evidence that students are routinely being denied opportunities to fully participate in the curriculum and school life, with almost half of students being excluded from participating in camps, sports, excursions, events and school activities.<sup>9</sup> The survey results showed one in ten students with disability has been suspended and many on multiple occasions.

Families reported they were not included in the development of personalised learning plans for their child and that they and the student are not made to feel welcome at school. One in three said that teachers and support staff do not have high expectations of the student and their learning.

Despite many students receiving additional support at school and additional funding, half of the survey respondents believed the student didn't receive adequate support in their education and that teachers and support staff do not have the training required to provide a supportive and enriching education environment. Families are also using their child's NDIS supports and are paying personally to ensure the participation and access of the child or young person with disability.

<sup>8</sup> Cologon (2019), p.27

<sup>9</sup> Children and Young People with Disability (2019)

The micro-exclusion described above is equally concerning as the macro-exclusion, where “...segregation on the basis of ‘disability’ is, arguably, the last remaining ‘respectable’ form of segregation in schooling.”<sup>10</sup>

Micro-exclusion, which the survey results highlight, reflects a deep systemic and cultural problem that needs to be urgently addressed in Australia’s educational system. These problematic attitudes, behaviours and ableism are not going to be solved without whole-of-system educational reform and investment in inclusive education.

The following table shows some of the alarming statistics from our education survey results on the micro-exclusion in schools. Our report at **Appendix F** has detailed results and case studies about the experiences of micro-exclusion experienced by students with disability.

**Table 2. School cultures for inclusion\***

	<b>AUS</b>	<b>VIC</b>	<b>NSW</b>	<b>WA</b>	<b>QLD</b>
% who were excluded from events or activities at school in the last year	40.2	40.4	42.0	42.4	32.9
% who did not have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) in place	17.8	22.7	10.9	22.4	18.3
% of families who didn’t know if an IEP was in place	9.1	12.1	10.9	3.5	8.5
% of families who were not involved in the development of the IEP	36.4	44.0	29.4	37.7	39.0
% of families who were out-of-pocket for a range of supports or equipment and have paid personally to enable a student with disability to access and participate in education	57.2	54.6	58.0	54.1	63.4
% who disagreed that teachers and support staff had the training required to provide a supportive and enriching education environment for students with disability	52.1	52.5	56.3	50.6	48.8
% who disagreed that the student receives adequate support in their education	48.9	45.4	53.8	52.9	41.5
% who disagreed that there was regular communication with the family/caregivers about the student’s learning progress	34.7	29.8	38.7	36.5	35.4
% who disagreed that teachers and support staff had high expectations of the student and their learning	29.7	34.0	33.6	23.5	23.2
% who disagreed that family/caregivers of the student were made to feel welcome at school	23.4	23.4	27.0	23.5	20.7
% who disagreed that the student was made to feel welcome at the school	18.2	15.6	19.3	21.2	15.9

\*While data were collected from ACT, TAS, SA, NT there were insufficient numbers to do jurisdictional comparisons

<sup>10</sup> Cologon (2019), p. 18

## Violence and abuse against students with disability

### Bullying and restrictive practices

Our report shows that violence against and abuse of students with disability is widespread (Table 3). Almost half of students with disability have been bullied by either their peers or by teachers and school staff, and one in three students with disability has been subject to the restrictive practices of restraint and seclusion. “Research has demonstrated that, in practice, restraint and seclusion are used in school settings for a variety of purposes beyond or in addition to a protective purpose, including as a means of coercion, discipline, convenience or retaliation.”<sup>11</sup>

Our report at **Appendix F** has detailed results and case studies about the experiences of abuse and neglect of students with disability.

**Table 3. Abuse and neglect\***

	AUS	VIC	NSW	WA	QLD
% who experienced bullying at school in the last year	47.9	48.2	44.5	55.3	46.3
% who experienced restraint or seclusion in the last year	30.9	29.1	29.4	37.7	31.7
% who experienced both restraint and seclusion in the last year	11.1	9.9	10.1	15.3	9.8
% who experienced restraint in the last year and the most common form was physical restraint, followed by psycho-social, mechanical and chemical restraint	21.0	18.4	16.8	24.7	25.6
% who experienced seclusion in the last year and the settings for seclusion included solitary confinement with and without supervision in a room, classroom or staff office	21.0	20.6	22.7	28.2	15.9

\*While data were collected from ACT, TAS, SA, NT there were insufficient numbers to do jurisdictional comparisons

In the Australian Civil Society Shadow Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disability we highlighted under *Article 15, Freedom from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment* that Australia has no regulatory protective framework to protect children with disability from being subjected to behaviour modification and restrictive practices in schools. We called for “a nationally consistent legislative and administrative framework for the protection of people with disability from behaviour modification and the elimination of restrictive practices across a broad range of settings”<sup>12</sup>.

Existing national guidelines and frameworks do not directly address the use of restraint and seclusion in schools, and state and territories have differing regulations, most allowing physical restraint and some including seclusion. What is common is a complete lack of policy frameworks that sit around eliminating restraint and seclusion.<sup>13</sup> One of the ongoing challenges is that there is no consistent data routinely collected in Australian schools on the rates of restrictive practices including restraint and seclusion.

<sup>11</sup> McCarthy, T (2018), Regulating restraint and seclusion in Australian Government Schools, A Comparative Human Rights Analysis, QUT Law Review Volume 18, General Issue 2 pp. 194–228 ISSN: Online–2201-7275, p. 200, citing a range of research

<sup>12</sup> *Disability Rights Now*, 2019 Australian Civil Society Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: UN CRPD Review 2019, p.23

<sup>13</sup> McCarthy, T (2018)



## CYDA Freedom of Information (FOI) request to education jurisdictions on abuse and neglect

In February 2019 CYDA wrote to every state and territory education department with an FOI request for information regarding

- a) any complaints, investigations and outcomes regarding incidents of a child protection nature against employees where the alleged victim has been identified as a child or young person with disability.
- b) information of any incidents of restraint and seclusion of students with disability during the timeframe stipulated.

CYDA sought de-identified information regarding any complaints or incidents which occurred from 1 January 2017 to 8 March 2019. Complaints or incidents of a child protection nature would include those involving allegations of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation (including restrictive practices). It was requested that the information include the date the allegation was received, employee type, initial allegation, outcome and action(s) taken as a consequence of the allegation.

There were significant difficulties in obtaining the data, with sometimes multiple requests made from February 2019 to October 2019. This resulted in CYDA needing to change the scope of the requests to match the data that is collected by the state and territories, or in some instances the FOI request was refused. The following table shows responses that have been received to date. All data of complaints or incidents of a child protection nature or incident provided to CYDA is at **Appendix G**.

**Table 4. Violence and abuse FOI request status**

State/ Territory	Response Received	Outcome
ACT	The Education Directorate provided partial access to 1 document which related to point a) of our request. It was provided with deletions applied because it contained information considered to be contrary to the public interest to disclose, or would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest to disclose under the test set out in section 17 of the Act.	The Directorate provided a one page document containing 6 incidents
NSW	The Department of Education requested our application be amended to “A de-identified Employee Conduct and Performance (EPAC) directorate report containing a summary of the allegation and the investigation outcomes of incidents of a child protection nature against employees where the alleged victim has been identified as a student in an NSW government school with a disability. Please include incidents of restraint and seclusion of students with a disability.”	The Department provided a 17 page document with 263 allegations of employee misconduct and the outcomes.
NT	The Education Department did not provide the information requested on the basis that “...I am of the view that the time required to process your application is substantial and would be an unreasonable interference with the work of the Department.”  An offer to amend our request was made, asking CYDA to identify 10 schools where the information could be collected. An amended request made 15 August 2019, data have yet to be provided.	Data yet to be provided



State/ Territory	Response Received	Outcome
QLD	The Department of Education and Training provided a copy allegations of employee misconduct.	The Department provided a spreadsheet containing 39 allegations of employee misconduct and the outcomes.
SA	<p>The Department of Education stated that “the Department does not hold a document that addresses the scope of your request, nor could information/data be readily extracted into a single document.” The Department was able to offer information from the Incident and Response Management System (IRMS) and asked for confirmation to amend scope of our application. CYDA did not respond in time for completion of the FOI request. A new application was made on 15 August 2019.</p> <p>Subsequently, four documents located relating to one incident. Department determined to refuse access to the documents pursuant to the following clauses of Schedule 1 of the FOI Act.</p> <p>4 – Documents affecting law enforcement and public safety</p> <p>6 – Documents affecting personal affairs</p> <p>11 – Documents relating to judicial functions etc.</p>	Refused FOI request
TAS	The Education Department requested CYDA to refine our application however ultimately refused to process CYDA’s application on the basis that it would involve “substantial and unreasonable diversion of resources.”	Refused FOI request
VIC	<p>The Department of Education and Training in relation to part a) of our request advised “it may be necessary to look at every misconduct file to determine if a document may fall in scope. We note that ‘child protection matters’ generally are more closely connected with the functions of the Department of Health and Human Services, so you may wish to consider if the documents you seek are held by that Department.”</p> <p>In relation to part b) of our request we were advised “the Department does not have access to individual student demographics in the incident reporting system data-set (so could not identify if a student has a disability”. We were asked to amend our request to ask for the number of students reported to DET Emergencies in relation to Special Schools). New request currently being prepared by CYDA.</p>	Partially refused FOI request
WA	<p>The Department of Education provided results from their Online Incident Notification System.</p> <p>The information consisted of 122 pages. 122 pages were offered in part only pursuant to section 24 of the FOI Act 1992 which allows for exempt material to be deleted from documents so that documents can be released.</p>	The Department provided a reports containing 122 incidents.

What is clear from our FOI requests, and from the information we did receive, is that the state and territory government education jurisdictions do not collect data in the same way, or provide it in a format that is comparable to look at the nature of the incident or allegation, the factors leading up to the incident or allegation, the detailed nature of the incident or allegation or whether a human rights approach was taken by the school, for example aiming to eliminate restrictive practices or taking an inclusive education approach as defined by the CPRD.

In reviewing the incidents for jurisdictions, in some cases it is difficult to look at any detail about the nature of the incident, for example, Australian Capital Territory. Queensland and New South Wales provided more detailed information which could assist with looking at systemic abuse issues.

While Queensland and New South Wales reported on allegations of misconduct against employees and whether they have been sustained, Western Australia reported from its Online Incident Notification System. In reviewing many of the incidents from WA in many cases the incident is reported in the context of what the student had done wrong and how the school responded, rather than the context and antecedents.

While we have not yet had the capacity to do a full thematic analysis of the FOI results we have received it will be difficult from the information to make conclusions and comparisons because of the data limitations.

Another challenge is the complete fragmentation of legislation, oversight bodies and complaints mechanisms across Australia. While in some states there are Commissioners for Children and Young People, Public Advocates, and Ombudsmen with responsibility for complaints and investigations about education, their powers are inconsistent. Families have difficulty because of this complexity and fragmentation in making complaints and having them independently reviewed. Many have reported to CYDA their complaints are minimised, ignored or that they are subject to harrowing processes by education departments which makes them fearful of reprisals against their child.

Recommendation 6.4 of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was that “All institutions should uphold the rights of the child. Consistent with Article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, all institutions should act with the best interests of the child as a primary consideration. In order to achieve this, institutions should implement the Child Safe Standards identified by the Royal Commission”.<sup>14</sup> However, these standards were developed in a preventing sexual abuse context.

As of February 2019, the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations were endorsed by members of the Council of Australian Governments, including the Prime Minister and state and territory First Ministers. The principles aim to provide a nationally consistent approach to creating organisational cultures that foster child safety and wellbeing. Many states and territories are in the process of implementing reportable conduct schemes. However the standards and the reportable conduct schemes need to be reviewed in the context of education to determine whether they are sufficient.

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<sup>14</sup> Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

## Detailed case studies

Following the education survey, we contacted four parents with their permission to provide detailed case studies that illustrate the broad range of challenges that students with disability face. This is just one of many case studies we could have provided from the 505 respondents to the survey.

The case studies highlight the complexity of the issues that students with disability face and the exclusionary and abusive practices of schools. Some families have needed to attend multiple schools (Charlotte and Max) or felt that segregated education or specialist units are the only alternative they have (Matthew and Max), or in one case withdrawing their children to home school because of the lack of inclusion and abuse (Thomas).

### Charlotte's story

Charlotte\*, 10, is a student with Asperger's Syndrome who was recently withdrawn from a Melbourne private school after bullying that became so bad she stopped attending. Her parents felt they had no choice but to remove her from the school after incidents that included her being pushed off a pier, and hiding in a garbage bin to escape taunting.

"It just got to a point where she was unsafe," says Charlotte's mother Nicole\*.

"She was being hurt and the teachers were just saying that it was always an accident – if [other children] hurt her it was because she didn't want to play with them.

"But she genuinely didn't want to play with certain children because they were being rough to her or mean to her or they were breaking her comfort toys."

On one occasion, Charlotte was admitted to hospital suffering severe anxiety and stress after a teacher confronted her with a false accusation that she had stolen another child's property.

"The teacher said to Charlotte, 'Did you do this?' and yelled and said, 'Why would you do this?' ... and Charlotte didn't say anything, she shut down," Nicole says.

Two days later, she "just stopped functioning"; her walking and speech were affected and she "felt pain everywhere". The hospital wrote to the school but the family received no response.

"All the teacher said was 'but the other kids blamed Charlotte'."

In a separate incident, she was taken to hospital after being hit across the head with a stick and knocked to the ground by another child. Other injuries Charlotte suffered while at the school included black eyes, and a hurt shoulder caused by a child who pushed her over and jumped on her back.

Nicole says Charlotte had an Individual Education Plan in place for just a single term, and it contained points such as "Charlotte will not walk off on a 'group of friends'".

"I said to the teacher, 'Kids spit on her, why would she not just walk off?' Why does she have to say to them, 'I'm going to leave now, I don't want to play with you'? No one else has to do that but Charlotte does.

Sometimes, other children were just too socially demanding for her, exacerbating her anxiety. However, Nicole says teachers were always perplexed as to why Charlotte would favour playing with one, gentler child rather than in a large group.

"This is not uncommon for autistic children and they were told several times."

Charlotte has recently started attending a Catholic school; she had previously also attended a public primary.

Nicole says all three schools have been “a nightmare”, citing a lack of understanding of Asperger’s Syndrome and Charlotte’s individual needs.

“They just look at her and think that there’s nothing wrong with her and she doesn’t need any support. But behind what looks normal to everybody else, she does need a lot of support and they don’t understand that. They don’t understand that if she’s overwhelmed or anxious she’s not taking in anything, she’s not learning anything.”

Another issue has been a tendency to group children with disability into one category.

“They don’t understand that there are differences, and that Charlotte has other comorbidities that other Asperger’s kids don’t have,” Nicole says.

“I asked the [private] school for some alone or ‘refocus time’ for Charlotte after outside play, as this was the most stressful part of her day. The teacher would round up children who had behavioural issues and include Charlotte, and they would go to the office and each face a corner of the wall and sit there for five to 10 minutes. The other kids were rolling around and making noises. Charlotte found this whole exercise very upsetting and I eventually put a stop to it.”

The family believes Charlotte has not received adequate support in her education and that teaching staff don’t have the necessary training to provide an enriching environment for her.

“The class would get so chaotic that she would just go to the toilet,” Nicole says of the private school.

“She said sometimes she would be under the table and no one would know that she’s disappeared.

“Charlotte is very compliant, well behaved and quiet so [the attitude seems to be] why would you devote any time to Charlotte when you’ve got 10 other kids running around.”

Another issue has been exclusion. Nicole cites an example where Charlotte was falling behind in maths but wasn’t able to join a group available for children with maths difficulties.

“Even in the playground – Charlotte struggles in the playground – but they have other activities that she could join in. But she wasn’t told about these groups. It’s almost like, ‘Well, it’s not for her, it’s for other kids’. And I don’t understand why.”

These negative experiences have taken a toll on the family, with Nicole worried she will lose her job because Charlotte attends school only three to four days a week at best. Advocating for her child’s safety has also been an exhausting task.

“At both schools, the private and public, it was just constant.”

“We’ve just had such a horrible journey. It’s just awful. It’s almost like because Charlotte’s different, she’s [viewed as] less.”

\*names have been changed.

## **Matthew's story**

Perth student Matthew\* was withdrawn from the kindergarten program at his first primary school after his mother Julie\* arrived to find him, then aged only four, screaming and pinned under a chair with the principal sitting on top.

Matthew, who was later diagnosed with autism and a high degree of sensory processing disorder, had been repeatedly suspended, with Julie receiving a phone call from the school within only the first three days of the program.

"The principal had no understanding of disability," she says.

"Within two weeks, and we're only talking about a few days of school here, they must have already restrained him at some stage. They didn't tell me."

The final restraint was "the last straw" for Julie. She says Matthew had a breakdown following the incident, and "ended up in emergency wanting to get 'a new brain', banging his head against walls and windows as he was told he was stupid".

Julie removed Matthew from the school but struggled to find another.

"[I tried] 37 schools – no one would take him."

Matthew spent a term solely at an education support centre co-located with a primary school, but when he had to move on to the mainstream school, "the principal told me he didn't want him there", Julie says.

She contacted WA political representatives and the school then accepted Matthew.

"The deal was I wasn't allowed to talk to the principal or have any conversation with him at all," Julie says. "I had to deal with the deputy."

After pre-school, Matthew was no longer allowed to attend the education support centre and would have to attend the mainstream school full-time in Year One. It was then the principal told Julie that there would be a new classroom structure in Year One, with 75 children in a mixed class, open rooms, teachers who would only be staying six months because they were going on leave, and regularly changing education assistants.

"I said, 'You're doing this so I won't come here, aren't you?'," Julie says.

"He said, 'No, we're just trying something new'.

"You can't put an autistic child in an open classroom with 75 kids because he's got sensory disorder as well. The noise would just be absolutely deafening to him."

Matthew moved to another school with a specific autism program but when he began Year Two, "it lasted two weeks and they suspended him and said he's not coming back".

Julie says this followed an incident where he was tackled to the ground and pinned by a sports teacher while sitting alone outside, and he began to fight the man.

“The story that the sports teacher gives is that ‘I gave him a loving embrace and we accidentally fell to the ground’.

“[Matthew is] very scared of people restraining him because it’s been done so many times for the wrong reasons.”

Now nine, Matthew is currently attending a special school environment where he has a private classroom as well as a joint classroom with other children with disabilities. He receives one-on-one support full-time, with a trained staff of five education assistants.

“It took us eight months to get him to get out of my car and to go to the classroom after what [the previous school] had done to him,” Julie says. “He was so frightened of school and so upset he would lash out at anyone.”

Matthew’s situation now is “much better”, she says, adding, “I know they mean well, which is a good start”.

“He really should be in mainstream and that’s where we need to aim ... but at the moment we’re just doing ‘gentle, gentle’ because it went so badly last year.”

Unable to work because she needs to be “on call” for Matthew when “anything goes wrong”, Julie is selling their house because she can’t afford to keep it.

“It shouldn’t have been that way,” she says.

“If they’d done the right thing by him when he first went into school, he would have been fine.”

Julie says the “devastating” effect of Matthew’s treatment at school led to him “lash out” at her when he felt unsafe, and the difficulty in finding support meant her only option was to call the police for help, “which never ends well”.

“Matthew is bright, talented and happy. He should never have been put through this in what I believed should have been a safe place for him.”

\*Names have been changed

## Max's story

Max\*, 8, has autism and has been repeatedly suspended from a Perth primary school this year despite only being allowed to attend two hours a day.

His mum Laura\* says the school tried to push Max out “for months”, treating him like a “complete criminal” and isolating him in an office without any peers.

Sadly, this was not Max's first experience of being isolated and restrained. He began his schooling at a Perth Catholic school where, as a five year-old, he was put in an office for up to two hours at a time while a staff member sat at the door with their back to him. His parents learned about this after insisting on the creation of a communication book documenting his day.

On the advice of Max's psychologist, they withdrew him from the Catholic school and he was enrolled at the public primary. But despite an encouraging start, Laura says Max was later deemed “too much of a challenge”.

“They started calling me every minute to pick him up, sometimes by 10am, and then from probably halfway through term one this year, they said to me, ‘He only can come in for two hours a day – nine ‘til eleven – that's it’,” she says.

The impact on the family was “huge” and they had to pay support workers to assist at home.

“I was home-schooling him basically, which was their job, and they'd ring me up and say, ‘Don't bring him to school today, NAPLAN's on. We can't have him distracting the other children’,” Laura says.

“And the thing is, he wasn't even in the classroom. At this point they'd put him in an office all by himself with a teacher's aide.”

Laura says the school would never tell her and her husband what led to Max's behaviour.

“We'd say to them, ‘What was the antecedent? The behaviour doesn't occur unless something's triggered it. What were the steps that led to that? What was requested of him, or how did it progress?’

“They could never tell us that, or they'd say, ‘It came out of the blue, there was no reason’.

“But there's never no reason, and that to us was a big sign of their lack of understanding of him as a whole person.”

The situation progressed, with Max receiving “suspension after suspension”. On one occasion, he used his elbow to smash a window after being shut in an office with an aide for continuing to throw Lego into a hallway.

“They knew ... at this school that one of the biggest anxiety provokers [for Max] was feeling trapped and caged in, and that would be enough to escalate him to a point of dysregulation where he'd just act out,” Laura says.

When the school rang her to pick Max up, she was told he had been suspended for property damage but not that he had been injured.

“So I'm aghast when I arrive and I see him bandaged up and the deputy principal's telling me to take him to the doctor, he might need stitches.”

Max's parents told the school they wouldn't withdraw him unless a better option could be found. The school consulted with the state education department and made alternative recommendations.

“[This school] was amazing,” Laura says. “They had kids just like Max who were high functioning, very intelligent, but with behavioural issues.”

The family knew it had a waiting list and so told his primary school that unless they could get a place at the alternative school they would stay put and increase his hours to full-time.

“We knew that they didn’t want that, because they have been trying to get him out for so long and reduce his hours.

“It’s just even ridiculous that you have to play these kinds of games.”

Max has received a temporary place at the new school and Laura says he is “a new child” since beginning there, making friends and looking forward to attending.

“He said to me, ‘None of the teachers follow me to the toilets Mum’,” she says.

“They treat him like a human.

“It reinforces even more how detrimental I feel the last school was for him.”

\*Names have been changed



## Thomas' story

Thomas\*, 9, has been home-schooled for the past two years after his public primary school in south-east NSW cut his hours from full-time to just two hours a day, two days a week.

His mum Zoe\* says that instead of being treated as a child in need of one-to-one educational support, Thomas, who has autism, was treated as a student that just wouldn't comply.

"I've got three pages of incident reports from the school and he's being disciplined, punished and sent home for things like disobedience, deliberately not following instruction, not doing as asked, refusing to comply," she says.

"He's verbal and he's intelligent so it's assumed that all those issues are choices.

"He's autistic – he doesn't do these things by choice."

Thomas experienced seclusion at the school, including being segregated in a small room in the library.

"They would lock him in there by himself all day with one teacher who would just watch him write stories," Zoe says.

"If he wanted to leave he needed permission, and the one time that he did try and get out because he didn't want to be in there, the teacher blockaded the door and he attacked the teacher and popped the teacher's shoulder out."

Zoe was told autism did not qualify for the funding of a full-time aide, despite his paediatrician, occupational therapist and "everybody that's ever had contact with him" determining that Thomas needs one-to-one assistance.

He was routinely sent out of class to the principal's office, which Zoe says made things worse because he learned that this was a way to escape an uncomfortable or upsetting environment.

The school then started sending him home "just about every second day", before moving him to a different class, which he didn't cope with.

"On top of that, they then said, 'Okay, we're going to cut him down to two hours a day, two days a week, and if you won't comply with this ... then we have no recourse other than to just continue suspending him – he's not allowed back'."

Zoe says Thomas was so anxious and depressed he was self-harming.

"His negative behaviours were increasing ten-fold. He was losing abilities that he had. He had gained new tics that we hadn't seen before. He had been bullied and attacked in the toilets by other students and nothing was done, yet if Thomas attacked somebody back after they had hit him ... Thomas is the one suspended and sent home.

"It just got worse and worse and worse, and it got to the point where I said, 'Okay, well, I'm sorry, we're not coming back. If you can't give him the education he's entitled to, we're not coming back'.

Zoe, who is autistic herself, has been home-schooling Thomas ever since. She paid \$800 a term for a complete education package she could deliver.

"Because I don't have the executive functioning skills or the time to sit down and write six months' worth of planning, and I was told, 'Well, that's not good enough'."

She describes having to constantly advocate for her child as exhausting and “completely demoralising”.

Zoe says that while some schools were happy to make “token, on-the-surface efforts” towards inclusion, “if that inclusion actually costs any actual time or money or ... staff being appropriately trained, then it’s not actually happening at all”.

“And they’ll just do everything they can to force you out.”

\*Names have been changed.

## Appendices

- A. Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation**
- B. Fact Sheet: What is inclusive education?**
- C. Fact Sheet: The benefits of inclusive education**
- D. Fact Sheet: Addressing ableism in education**
- E. Fact Sheet: Transformation to inclusive education: the next steps**
- F. Time for change: The state of play for inclusion of students with disability, results from the 2019 CYDA National Education Survey**
- G. Freedom of Information Request (FOI) information from state and territory education jurisdictions**

## **Appendix A. Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation**



# **Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation**

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For Children and Young People  
with Disability Australia

October 2019



Children and Young People  
with Disability Australia

### Suggested citation

Cologon, K. (2019) Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation. Report written by Dr Kathy Cologon, Macquarie University for Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA)

ISBN: ISBN-13: 978-0-646-80949-6

### Acknowledgements

Children and Young People with Disability and Dr Kathy Cologon would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which this report has been written, reviewed and produced, whose cultures and customs have nurtured and continue to nurture this land since the Dreamtime. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future. This is, was, and always will be Aboriginal land.

We would like to express our thanks to Associate Professor Bob Jackson, Professor Sally Robinson, and Dr Zinnia Mevawalla who provided peer reviews for this manuscript. The thoughtful, comprehensive and helpful reviews were useful in strengthening this work.



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Social Services**

This activity received grant funding from the Australian Government.

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Inclusive education involves valuing and facilitating the full participation and belonging of everyone in all aspects of our education communities and systems.





## CHAPTER ONE



# **Towards inclusive education: An introduction**



Inclusive education involves valuing and facilitating the full participation and belonging of everyone in all aspects of our education communities and systems.

No one is excluded as supports for inclusion are embedded within everyday educational practices.<sup>1</sup> Inclusive education is about everyone learning together, *in all our diversity*. This means that *everyone* has genuine opportunities to learn *together*, with support as needed, and all students are meaningfully involved in all aspects of the curriculum, thus making inclusion a *shared* experience.<sup>2</sup> There is no ‘type’ of student ‘eligible’ (nor ‘ineligible’) for inclusion – inclusion is about, with and for *all of us*. Inclusive education involves upholding the dignity of each student in belonging, participating and accessing ongoing opportunities, recognising and valuing the contribution that each student makes, and supporting every student to flourish.<sup>3</sup>

There is no ‘other’ in inclusion. At its core, inclusion requires recognising and acting upon the realisation that there is no ‘them’ and ‘us’. There is only ‘us’, and thus an ‘us’ to which, in our diversities, we all belong. This understanding of our shared humanity is fundamental to bringing about inclusive education.<sup>4</sup>

Recognising our shared humanity does not in any way infer ‘sameness’. Inclusion is not about pretending that we are all the same. A focus on sameness involves processes of assimilation, which are not only contrary to, but form a serious barrier to, inclusion.<sup>5</sup> Instead, inclusion is about valuing, celebrating and sharing our differences as we embrace every aspect of the complexity of human diversities and recognise that we are all equal in our ‘differentness’.<sup>6</sup>

To be inclusive requires directly and actively rejecting common myths of ‘normal’ or ‘typical’ ways of thinking, being and doing, and recognising that education needs to be open and responsive to the vast range of ‘differences’ among humans. This is not to deny the many shared ways of being, but rather to identify that there is never only one way – or one ‘right’ way – to develop or ‘be’. Rather than creating systems and practices for which each person must shape themselves or be *shaped* to fit – or else be excluded – education systems and pedagogies need to be transformed to be open to, value, and be shaped for the many ways of being human.

“

There is no ‘type’ of student ‘eligible’ (nor ‘ineligible’) for inclusion – inclusion is about, with and for *all of us*.

## Background and method

In 2013 Children and Young People with Disability Australia (then Children with Disability Australia) published an extensive systematic literature review examining the evidence base for inclusive education.<sup>7</sup> That review was intended to provide a firm basis from which to inform research-based advocacy and policy development. In sum, the findings were that while it was clearly established that all people have the right to an inclusive education, and that when inclusive education occurs the outcomes are positive for everyone involved, there remained many ongoing barriers to the realisation of this right in the lived experience of students and families.

Current efforts towards inclusion are impeded by a lack of understanding of inclusive education and frequent misappropriation and co-opting of the term. Additional barriers include negative and discriminatory attitudes and practices, the lack of a clear and genuine national commitment to inclusive education, insufficient support to facilitate inclusive education, and inadequate education and professional development in inclusive education for teachers and other professionals. Critical to addressing these barriers is recognising and disestablishing ableism at all levels of education systems and settings.<sup>8</sup> Ableism, which is examined in detail in chapter five, is a term increasingly used to describe the process by which people are excluded and viewed and treated as ‘not one of us’. The term ‘ableism’ is used in the same way as ‘racism’ and ‘sexism’ to describe the process of negatively stereotyping individuals or groups on the basis of a perceived ‘difference’ and, often, discriminating based on such stereotypes at individual and systemic levels.<sup>9</sup> Using the term ‘ableism’ creates a

space to enable the often-subconscious process of devaluing those of us who experience ‘disability’ to be called out and held up to conscious scrutiny as a starting point for disestablishing ableism.

This review of the research, in keeping with all other existing reviews and meta-analyses dating back over many decades<sup>10</sup>, reveals a consistent lack of evidence to suggest any benefit of segregated education. By contrast, a considerable body of research was identified demonstrating the benefits of inclusive education. Despite these well-known findings, which have been persistent for more than half a century, current research nationally and internationally shows that segregated education not only continues but is increasing.<sup>11</sup>

Building on the research base for inclusive education outlined in the first edition, this second edition consists of an extensive systematic literature review. It examines evidence across six decades and incorporates more than 400 research papers, relevant treaties and reports, to further explore the existing barriers and the possibilities for addressing these to bring about the realisation of inclusive education.

It should be noted that there are many further pressing issues that are important to inclusive education that fall outside the scope of this present edition. However, this is not to suggest that these matters are unimportant. There are a number of gaps in the literature identified within, and further research is urgently needed to address these gaps.

The research that is examined within this report addresses the outcomes of inclusive education for all students. This includes students with a wide range of disability labels, including students labelled with ‘severe’, ‘profound’ and ‘multiple’ ‘disabilities’. Given the frequent misperception that the research evidence does not concern ‘some’ students, it is important to make it clear at the outset that this report addresses the evidence regarding students across the full range of labels. Inclusive education is about *all* students, not only some.

It is also important from the outset to recognise the many students, families, teachers, educators, paraprofessional educators, principals, directors, education department staff and others who work tirelessly every day to support inclusive education. There are many challenges and raising the issues identified within the research should not be read as a criticism of individuals; rather, it is an attempt to draw to light important issues that require careful consideration if inclusive education is to become a reality in Australia.

### What has changed since we first did this work?

In the time since the publication of the first edition in 2013, there have been a range of relevant inquiries and reports within Australia, along with a host of recommendations and a number of relevant policy changes. Additionally, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has produced *General Comment 4 (GC4)*, which explains Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) on Inclusive Education.<sup>12</sup> The CRPD articulates the rights of people who experience disability and clearly states that these rights are not optional nor privileges. As outlined in chapter three, despite the frequent and ongoing confusion around the term, and loose interpretation and application<sup>13</sup>, ‘inclusive education’ has been unambiguously defined in GC4. The advent of GC4 is one of many efforts towards bringing inclusive education to a reality in the time since the first edition. Nonetheless, it unfortunately remains the case that the right to a full and inclusive education is not afforded to many children and young people who experience disability, and serious and ongoing violations of the rights of children and young people continue.<sup>14</sup> Given the positive impact of genuine inclusive education, this highlights the need for continued advocacy and policy change in this area.<sup>15</sup>

The once radical notion of inclusive education has been so ‘tamed’ and ‘domesticated’ that ‘special’ education is now often misrepresented as ‘inclusive education’.<sup>16</sup> And yet, in a simultaneous contradiction, it seems that the lines between proponents of segregated and inclusive education have been, perhaps even more boldly, drawn in the sand. However, there is no equality in segregation. The myth of ‘separate but equal’ was debunked through the civil rights movement in North America in the 1950s –

famously through successful litigation intended to end 'racially'-based segregated education in *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* (347 US 483, 1954). It is more than time to extend that recognition to all children and young people who experience disability, including all those constructed as disabled through disproportionate representation of people belonging to other minority groups within 'special' education.<sup>17</sup> For example, the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in special education.<sup>18</sup>

Nearly six years on from the publication of the first edition, the research evidence brings us to the same overall conclusion: inclusive education has positive benefits for everyone. And yet, barriers continue to prevent its realisation for many children and young people throughout Australia and across the world.<sup>19</sup> To bring about the promise of inclusive education requires substantial change. Inclusive education is not a process of relabelling past practices and systems. As Slee argues, "...inclusive education is a call for a reformulation of schooling wherein 'special' and 'regular' are jettisoned and the segregation of students with disabilities is seen as a relic of a bygone age".<sup>20</sup> The time for this change is upon us.

### An overview of this report

There are many key considerations in understanding inclusive education and the evidence base supporting it. In this report some of the most pressing issues are explored in light of the existing research literature. While it is not possible in one volume to address all the critical issues involved in the realisation of inclusive education, the focus areas in this report are intended to provide a clear understanding of what inclusive education is and why it is important, and to explore key factors in realising the right to education for all.

In this chapter, I have provided a brief rationale and overview to set the context for this report. In chapter two I present the research evidence regarding the outcomes of inclusive education. In the subsequent chapters, I engage with some of the key barriers that are currently preventing the realisation of inclusive education. To do so, in chapter three I begin with an in-depth consideration of common myths and confusions, and address what inclusive education actually means. I then explore this further in chapter four, in light of the current illusions of

inclusion and the impact of presenting segregation as inclusion. To address the key barriers to inclusion that are clearly identified within the research, conscious disestablishment of ableism is required. Consequently, in chapter five, I examine ableism in education and consider the implications in progressing towards genuine inclusion within and beyond education settings and systems. In chapter six I unpack the concepts of macro and micro-exclusion to support a deeper understanding of inclusion and exclusion in practice. Finally, in chapter seven, I draw together the research evidence to identify a series of policy recommendations and steps for moving forward towards the transformation required to bring about inclusive education in reality.

The report is developed sequentially, thus it works well to read from start to finish. However, each chapter is also presented in such a way as to enable it to be read independently. In this way it is my hope that you, the reader, can dip in and out as is most helpful to you at any given point in time. Inclusion is a journey; we never fully arrive as we can always become more inclusive. Bringing about genuine inclusive education is often challenging and takes commitment and ongoing efforts. At the same time, inclusion is lived out in everyday moments and, in that sense, is often easy and is also natural. Much like the 'project' of making a life out of our existence, engaging in the 'project' of inclusion requires starting from where we are now and moving forward, one step at a time. We can always be more inclusive, but we can also always find the ways in which we are, or are ready to be, inclusive right now. That is our starting point. From wherever you are starting, I hope you will find this report helpful in your journey towards inclusion.

- 1 UN General Assembly, 2016
- 2 *Ibid*
- 3 Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2014; Cologon, 2014a
- 4 Cologon, 2014b
- 5 Slee, 2001
- 6 Bevan-Brown, 2013; Cologon, 2014b; Lalvani, & Bacon, 2019
- 7 Cologon, 2013a
- 8 Ableism, which is examined in detail in chapter five, involves an 'othering' process through which a stigmatised 'them' is created in contrast to a superior 'us' through the construction of a 'normal' and valued person and an 'inferior other'.
- 9 Cologon, & Thomas, 2014
- 10 For example, see: Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth (ARACY), 2013; Calberg, & Kavale, 1980; Dunn, 1968; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016; Jackson, 2008; SWIFT Center, 2017; Wang, & Baker, 1985
- 11 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2017; Anderson, & Boyle, 2015; Graham, & Sweller, 2011; Guldberg, Parsons, MacLeod, Jones, Prunty, & Balfe, 2011; Shaw, 2017; Valle, Connor, Broderick, A. Bejoian, & Baglieri, 2011
- 12 UN General Assembly, 2016
- 13 D'Alessio, Grima-Farrell, & Cologon, 2018
- 14 Brede, Remington, Kenny, Warren, & Pellicano, 2017; Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), 2017; Poed, Cologon, & Jackson, 2017; UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and UNICEF, 2015
- 15 Cologon & Salvador, 2016; Iacono, Keefe, Kenny, & McKinstry, 2019; Mackenzie, Cologon, & Fenech, 2016
- 16 D'Alessio, Grima-Farrell, & Cologon, 2018
- 17 Annamma, 2018; Cooc & Kiru, 2018; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Graham, 2012; Hosp & Reschly, 2004
- 18 Graham, 2012
- 19 Filmer, 2008; Jelas, & Ali, 2014; UNESCO, 2013
- 20 Slee, 2018a, p. 82



## CHAPTER TWO



# The outcomes of inclusive education



*“Inclusive education can now be justified as an approach supported philosophically, in international declarations, and empirically through research on its efficacy.”<sup>21</sup>*

In this chapter, I outline the evidence base on the *outcomes* of inclusive education. When considering these outcomes there are a number of challenges. Discriminatory attitudes and practices pose serious barriers to research into inclusive education. Many research studies, purporting to examine inclusive education, in reality explore practices of segregation and exclusion<sup>22</sup> (micro or macro<sup>23</sup>). For that reason, in reviewing the research in this chapter, terms like ‘mainstream education’ are used. In progressing inclusive education there is a strong need to move to genuine and full inclusive education, and for this to be reflected in all research. Additionally, as a consequence of a myriad of factors, education settings frequently engage in reactive responses to the enrolment of students who experience disability, rather than proactively in processes of transformation for inclusion of all students.<sup>24</sup> Despite these issues, a considerable and growing body of research evidence supports inclusive education.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to positive outcomes for social justice and sense of community and belonging, research provides evidence of positive outcomes of inclusive education for social, academic, communication and physical development in students who do and do not experience disability. Inclusive education has also been found to have additional benefits for not only learning but also maintaining and generalising learning between and across settings compared with segregated education settings.<sup>26</sup>

The 2016 systematic review of the evidence for inclusive education by Harvard academic Thomas Hehir and his colleagues concluded “there is clear and consistent evidence that inclusive educational settings can confer substantial short- and long-term benefits for students with and without disabilities”.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, consistent with findings over more than half a century, in a recent study Cole and colleagues find clear academic benefits of inclusive education.<sup>28</sup>

Decades of research demonstrates that inclusive education has benefits for the academic, communication, positive behavioural and social development of students labelled with ‘severe’ and ‘multiple’ ‘disabilities’.

Additionally, in a 2017 meta-analysis, Szumski and colleagues found positive academic benefits of inclusive education for students who do not experience disability, at all levels of schooling.<sup>29</sup> For students who do not experience disability, research finds that inclusive education results in: enhanced learning opportunities and experiences; education that is more sensitive to differing student needs; growth in interpersonal skills and greater acceptance and understanding of human diversity; and increased flexibility and adaptability.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, inclusive education has benefits for teachers in the form of improved teaching practices, with all the benefits that entails.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, segregated schooling is not only continuing, but also increasing.<sup>32</sup>

Troublingly, there is a common belief that education is really only for ‘some people’, and thus that there are ‘some people’ who are ‘too disabled’ to be included. Unsurprisingly, this common misperception goes hand in hand with (and is often used as a justification for) widespread segregation of students labelled as having ‘severe’ and ‘multiple’ ‘disabilities’.<sup>33</sup> However, despite the misunderstandings and the associated discrimination, research evidence tells a different story. In fact, aside from the ethical and philosophical concerns regarding excluding students who have been categorised as ‘too disabled’ for inclusion, decades of research demonstrates that inclusive education has benefits for the academic, communication, positive behavioural and social development of students labelled with ‘severe’ and ‘multiple’ ‘disabilities’.<sup>34</sup>

Another common issue raised about inclusive education is the concern about the impact of including *all* students on the education of students who do *not* experience disability. However, contrary to common fears, research provides clear evidence of positive benefits of including everyone together, with no detrimental effects.<sup>35</sup>

As noted in chapter one, the research discussed in this report explores the outcomes of inclusive education for all students, including children and young people labelled with a wide range of disability labels or categorised with ‘severe’ and ‘multiple’ ‘disabilities’. Given the frequent misperception that the research evidence does not concern ‘some’ students, it is important to make it clear at the outset that this report addresses the evidence regarding students across the full range of labels. Inclusive education is about *all* students, not only some.

### Relationships, interaction and belonging

The importance of relationships between students and teachers, as well as amongst students, is well established, and known to affect social, emotional and academic outcomes.<sup>36</sup> Whether the result of micro or macro-exclusion, as Connor and Goldmansour write, “[w]ith segregation comes devaluation, a loss in cultural capital for individuals. This form of disempowerment actively disadvantages students who have been labelled as disabled”.<sup>37</sup>

Exclusion negatively affects children and young people who experience disability, their peers, and the adults who engage with them, resulting in marginalisation, stigmatisation and often bullying and abuse.<sup>38</sup> Students who experience disability have been found more likely to be socially isolated by their peers and at higher risk of being bullied than students who do not experience disability.<sup>39</sup> However, while a common assumption is that abuse and bullying occurs only in ‘mainstream’ settings, this is factually incorrect.<sup>40</sup> Research provides evidence that despite higher teacher-student ratios and greater supervision, the full range of bullying occurs in ‘special’ settings.<sup>41</sup> While there is some variation in individual studies<sup>42</sup>, particularly based on teacher or parent ratings, growing evidence suggests that children and young people who attend ‘special’ settings are more likely to experience bullying than their peers in ‘mainstream’ settings, and that inclusive education is a key factor in reducing or eliminating bullying.<sup>43</sup>

Inclusive education facilitates social development in children and young people who do and do not experience disability.<sup>44</sup> Research evidence suggests that genuinely inclusive education allows students to build and develop friendships that they might not have considered or encountered otherwise.<sup>45</sup> It also facilitates improved attitudes between students who do and do not experience disability.<sup>46</sup> Inclusive settings encourage higher levels of interaction than segregated settings,<sup>47</sup> which results in more opportunities for children and young people to establish and maintain friendships.<sup>48</sup> The more time a student spends within an inclusive setting, the greater the social interaction.<sup>49</sup> In turn, this leads to better outcomes for social and communication development.<sup>50</sup>

The growing body of research into the outcomes of inclusive education for social development has also found that inclusion results in a more positive sense of self and self-worth for students who do and do not experience disability.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps as a consequence of this, students educated in inclusive settings have also been found to be more likely to enrol in post-secondary education.<sup>52</sup> Inclusive education leads to a sense of belonging,<sup>53</sup> increased likelihood to be part of a school group,<sup>54</sup> and to a self-concept not only as a receiver of help, but also as a giver of help.<sup>55</sup> For students who do and do not experience disability, inclusive education has been shown to result in more advanced social skills.<sup>56</sup>

Teachers frequently cite ‘challenging behaviour’ as their biggest concern regarding fulfilling their role.<sup>57</sup> Given the importance of the role of teachers in relation to supporting positive behaviour, and the challenges that

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can be presented through behaviour, this is unsurprising. However, research investigating actual student behaviour compared with teacher concerns highlights a disconnect between the level of concern and the reality of classroom behaviour<sup>58</sup>. This appears, in part, to be attributed to the manufactured but unsubstantiated broader social ‘panic’ about ‘out of control’ behaviour of students in schools.<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, it has been reported in two studies from North America that the presence – though not genuine inclusion of – a disproportionate number of students labelled with severe emotional and behavioural disorders grouped within the same classroom can have a detrimental classroom impact.<sup>60</sup> Specifically in these studies, teachers reported higher levels of negative behavioural outcomes across the classroom.<sup>61</sup> However, this negative impact was found to be directly related to and mitigated by teacher factors.<sup>62</sup>

Overall, research provides evidence that inclusive education leads to improved behavioural development in students who do and do not experience disability, with less ‘challenging’ or ‘disruptive’ behaviour in inclusive settings<sup>63</sup> and students less likely to receive a “disciplinary referral”.<sup>64</sup> In a meta-analysis of the research on inclusive education, Szumski and colleagues found no negative outcomes of the presence of students labelled with ‘emotional and behavioural disorders’, despite the frequent hypotheses to the contrary.<sup>65</sup>

Children and young people who participate in inclusive education have been found to be more independent during and following schooling, including more likely to live independently post-school.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, students who participate in inclusive education have been found to develop qualities such as patience and trust, and to become more aware of and responsive to the needs of others than students in non-inclusive settings.<sup>67</sup> Inclusive education supports students in developing increased awareness and acceptance of diversity and understanding of individuality.<sup>68</sup>

### Academic outcomes

As Hehir and colleagues note:

*“There is strong evidence that students with disabilities benefit academically from inclusive education. The academic impacts of inclusion have been studied in many ways with many different populations of students around the world. Multiple systematic reviews of the scholarly research literature indicate that students with disabilities who were educated in general education classes academically outperformed their peers who had been educated in segregated settings.”<sup>69</sup>*

In regards to academic outcomes, again, research findings contrast with the common assumption that the higher teacher-student ratios, as well as some teachers being trained in ‘special’ education, would result in better academic outcomes in segregated ‘special’ schools or classes. In fact, research shows that students who experience disability who are educated in ‘mainstream’ settings demonstrate better academic and vocational outcomes when compared with students educated in segregated settings.<sup>70</sup> Research also demonstrates benefits for educational attainment, with students who are educated in ‘mainstream’ settings nearly five times more likely to graduate at the expected time than students in segregated settings.<sup>71</sup>

Students who experience disability who are educated in ‘mainstream’ settings have been found to score higher on achievement tests and perform closer to grade average than students in segregated settings.<sup>72</sup> Research provides evidence for better outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, it has been argued that inclusive education stimulates learning in that more time is spent on academic learning in ‘mainstream’ than segregated schools.<sup>74</sup> Students educated in ‘mainstream’ schools are given opportunities to engage at higher



academic levels and to achieve outcomes that may not otherwise be possible.<sup>75</sup> As noted above, students who attend ‘mainstream’ settings have enhanced educational attainment, increased post-secondary education, and are also more likely to be engaged in competitive employment.<sup>76</sup>

Students who do not experience disability have also been found to have equal or better academic outcomes in inclusive settings compared with students participating in non-inclusive settings.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, inclusive teachers engage all students in more higher-order thinking, questioning and dialogical interactions than non-inclusive teachers.<sup>78</sup> In inclusive settings, students who do and do not experience disability have been found to receive higher-quality instruction that is better suited to individual needs, particularly through small group work.<sup>79</sup>

### Outcomes for communication and language

Successful shared communication is at the core of participation in education.<sup>80</sup> However, people who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) are frequently excluded and subjected to demeaning assumptions.<sup>81</sup> These factors highlight the importance of transformation for inclusion in the area of communication.

Communication and language development in students who do and do not experience disability has been found to be enhanced through inclusive education.<sup>82</sup> Support for inclusive peer communication has been found to be particularly important.<sup>83</sup> Students in inclusive settings have been shown to increase independent communication, mastery of AAC strategies, and increased speech and language development when provided with appropriate support for inclusive education.<sup>84</sup>

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In inclusive settings, students who do and do not experience disability have been found to receive higher-quality instruction that is better suited to individual needs.

Enhanced communication and language leads to greater independence and initiation of interactions, and increased active participation.<sup>85</sup> Consequently, it appears that inclusive education supports communication and language development, which in turn supports greater inclusion. Appropriate support to develop and implement AAC strategies is essential to inclusive education for many people.<sup>86</sup>

Ensuring that ‘communication partners’ are supported to develop communication skills is essential for enabling shared communication.<sup>87</sup> As den Houting, writing about understandings of and attitudes towards neurodiversity, notes, “[p]roviding a non-speaking autistic person with an alternative method of communication may give them a voice, but they will only truly stop being disabled when others listen”.<sup>88</sup>

### Physical development

Inclusion within physical education is an important consideration for the implementation of inclusive education. The ableist foundations of physical education have been identified and strongly critiqued.<sup>89</sup> However, limited research has considered the outcomes of inclusive education for physical development. Nonetheless, existing research provides evidence to suggest that inclusive education contributes positively towards the physical development of students who experience disability. For example, students who experience disability who are educated in ‘mainstream’ settings show gains in motor development and have a higher degree of independence.<sup>90</sup> Inclusion in ‘mainstream’ education settings has been found to encourage participation and provide more opportunities to observe and learn through the ‘power of the peer’, as well as to learn through trial-and-error.<sup>91</sup> This may enhance opportunities for physical development. Inclusive education provides access to a broader range of learning activities, which can stimulate physical development and enhance students’ experiences.<sup>92</sup>

In research considering students’ perspectives on inclusion in physical activities, students report that when they are actually included this provides an entry point for play, leisure activities, and friendship and creates a sense of legitimate participation.<sup>93</sup> Research has explored the negative outcomes for students when they are excluded from physical education.<sup>94</sup> However, multiple international

“ The education of teachers to be equipped and prepared to teach all students – in a fully inclusive manner – is essential to inclusive education.

reviews have found that when students who experience disability are included in physical education and provided with appropriate support the outcomes are positive for all students involved.<sup>95</sup>

### The outcomes of inclusive education for teachers

It is not only the practices, but also the beliefs and attitudes of teachers and others, that have been found to be critical to preventing or facilitating inclusive education.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, the education of teachers to be equipped and prepared to teach all students – in a fully inclusive manner – is essential to inclusive education.<sup>97</sup>

Overall, research provides evidence that inclusive education results in higher quality education for students who do and do not experience disability.<sup>98</sup> However, the benefits of inclusive education are not only for children and young people. Research has found that through participation in inclusive education, teachers experience professional growth and increased personal satisfaction.<sup>99</sup> Additionally, developing skills to enable the inclusion of students who experience disability results in higher-quality teaching for all students and more confident teachers.<sup>100</sup>

Despite the positive outcomes of inclusive education for teachers, research also finds that teachers may hold a number of concerns about it, particularly in relation to inadequate support and resources, fear

or lack of confidence in teacher knowledge and competency, and concerns about positively supporting the behaviour of diverse groups of students.<sup>101</sup> Consequently, teachers are sometimes initially reluctant to participate in inclusive education and may feel that they are not equipped for the challenges involved. However, research has also found that teachers develop confidence in their ability to be inclusive, and increase their positive attitudes towards inclusion, through experience and support.<sup>102</sup>

Teachers often feel that inclusion will be a bigger challenge or struggle than it actually is in practice. As Kliever writes:

*“Two concerns are commonly voiced among professionals who express resistance to inclusion. This first is that the needs of children will not be met amid the complex dynamics of a general education setting. The second is that the needs of children with disabilities will require an excessive amount of directed resources that take away from the educational experiences of children without disabilities ... neither concern is valid in a thoughtfully structured, well-resourced classroom.”*<sup>103</sup>

### Families and inclusive education

There is a considerable body of research exploring the negative impact of exclusion on families. Research provides evidence demonstrating that families frequently experience stigmatisation and a host of barriers when they seek to have their children included – so much so that parents frequently experience the notion of ‘choice’ as a furphy.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, the experience of stigmatisation and exclusion is common for parents who experience disability.<sup>105</sup> Research involving families in Australia who have one or more children labelled ‘disabled’ finds that inclusive education is important to families and that while there are many barriers, when the families experience inclusive education this leads to:

*“...happiness, a positive outlook on life, progress and development for the family, feelings of pride and of being valued and simply that inclusion was a wonderful experience. The desire for respect for every child, for inclusion to be ‘ordinary’ and for their children to be viewed simply as children was important to the families.”*<sup>106</sup>

Families identify positive attitudes towards inclusive education, inclusive relationships and strengths-based approaches as essential to facilitating inclusive education.<sup>107</sup> Genuine collaboration and respectful partnerships have been found to facilitate inclusion<sup>108</sup>, and yet families frequently face a lack of responsiveness to their needs and wishes.<sup>109</sup> Some research suggests that when children are included this may support parents in feeling more confident to return to work.<sup>110</sup> Additionally, the experience of genuine inclusive education contributes to parents' psychological and economic well-being.<sup>111</sup> Inclusive education, when it does occur, is often the result of considerable parent advocacy and many families strongly desire inclusive education for their children. For families, the path to achieving this is often an unnecessarily difficult one.<sup>112</sup> It is frustrating for families to have to continually advocate for the inclusion of their child in the school and community<sup>113</sup>, despite inclusive education being a fundamental right for everyone, and particularly in light of the weight of evidence demonstrating the positive outcomes.

### A note on some research limitations

Many of the studies discussed in this chapter explore situations where a student has been 'included into' or 'integrated into' an existing setting, rather than reflecting a genuinely inclusive setting transformed to provide the best possible education for all of its students (chapter four will discuss this distinction further). Nonetheless, these examples demonstrate the positive outcomes that are possible when steps towards inclusive education are taken. Given that so much existing research compares integration and segregation, the lack of any research showing the superiority of segregation over 'mainstreaming' indicates that even poorly-done inclusion in the form of integration is still better. If the barriers currently inhibiting the realisation of genuine inclusion were to be addressed it seems likely that the outcomes would be even more positive. As transformation of education settings and systems occurs, ongoing research is required to further develop a clear understanding of the outcomes as education systems become more genuinely inclusive.

At the same time, in the face of the widespread positive outcomes of inclusive education, as outlined throughout this chapter, the exclusionary realities of current education systems and settings should be seriously questioned by policymakers and practitioners. There are a range of barriers that currently stymie the realisation of inclusion. One key and persistent issue is the plethora of misunderstandings of inclusion. In chapter three we move to unpacking these misunderstandings and clearly identifying the meaning of inclusive education as both a concept and pedagogy.

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21 Loreman, 2014, p. 460

22 Szumski, Smogorzewska, & Karwowski, 2017

23 Micro and macro-exclusion are described in detail in chapter five. Micro-exclusion refers to exclusionary practices within so-called inclusive settings or experiences. Macro-exclusion refers to segregation outside of 'mainstream' education settings or exclusion from any formal schooling.

24 Giangreco, & Suter, 2015

25 Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016; Szumski, Smogorzewska, & Karwowski, 2017; Sharma, Forlin, Deppeler, & Guang-Xue, 2013

26 Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Orsati, & Cosier, 2011

27 Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016, p. 2

28 Cole, Murphy, Frisby, Grossi, & Bolte, 2019

29 Szumski, Smogorzewska, & Karwowski, 2017

30 Ainscow, & Cesar, 2006; Dessemontet, & Bless, 2013; Farrell, Dyson, Polat, Hutcheson, & Gallannaugh, 2007; McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998; Odom, & Diamond, 1998; Purdue, Ballard, & MacArthur, 2001; Rouse, & Florian, 2006; Szumski, Smogorzewska, & Karwowski, 2017

31 Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016

32 Shaw, 2017

33 Browder, Spooner, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Harris, & Wakeman, 2008; Graham & Sweller, 2011; Kleinert, Towles-Reeves, Quenemoen, Thurlow, Fluegge, Weseman, & Kerbel, 2015; Kurth, Morningstar, & Kozleski, 2014; Morningstar, Allcock, White, Taub, Kurth, Gonsier-Gerdin, Ryndak, Sauer, & Jorgensen, 2016

34 For example, see: Boutot & Bryant, 2005; Browder, Spooner, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Harris, & Wakeman, 2008; Carter, Moss, Hoffman, Chung, & Sisco, 2011; Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012; Feldman, Carter, Asmus, & Brock, 2015; Fisher, & Meyer, 2002; Foreman, Arthur-Kelly, Pascoe, & King, 2004; Hunt, McDonnell, & Crockett, 2012; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2012; Ruppard, Allcock, & Gonsier-Gerdin, 2017

- 35 Szumski, Smogorzewska, & Karwowski, 2017
- 36 Downer, Sabol, & Hamre, 2010; Gregoriadis, & Grammatikopoulos, 2014; Hamre, & Pianta, 2001; O'Connor, & McCartney, 2007; Ostrosky, Laumann, & Hsieh, 2006; Thijs, Koomen, Roorda, & Hagen, 2011; Spilt, Koomen, & Mantzicopoulos, 2010
- 37 Connor, & Goldmansour, 2012, p. 31
- 38 Biklen, & Burke, 2006; Curcic, 2009; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2013; UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and UNICEF, 2015
- 39 Rossetti, 2014
- 40 Davis & Watson, 2000; Queensland Parents for People with a Disability (QPPD), 2003; Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011; Torrance, 2000
- 41 Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011; Torrance, 2000
- 42 For example, see: Humphrey & Hebron, 2015; Woods & Wolke, 2004
- 43 Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011
- 44 Baker-Ericzén, Mueggenborg, & Shea, 2009; Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009; Hanline & Correa-Torres, 2012; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016; Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Kliever, 1998; Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011; Schwab, 2015; Stahmer, Akshoomoff, & Cunningham, 2011; Stahmer, Carter, Baker, & Miwa, 2003; Stahmer & Ingersoll, 2004
- 45 Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016
- 46 Consiglio, Guarnera, & Magnano, 2015; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016
- 47 Antia, Jones, Luckner, Kreimeyer, & Reed, 2011; Baker-Ericzén, Mueggenborg, & Shea, 2009; Flewitt, Nind, & Payler, 2009; Fox, Farrell, & Davis, 2004; Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016; Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011; Theodorou, & Nind, 2010
- 48 Hollingsworth & Buysse, 2009; Palmer, Fuller, Arora, & Nelson, 2001; Stahmer, Carter, Baker, & Miwa, 2003
- 49 Antia, Jones, Luckner, Kreimeyer, & Reed, 2011
- 50 Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009; Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Stahmer, Carter, Baker, & Miwa, 2003
- 51 Diamond & Huang, 2005; Fitch, 2003; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016
- 52 Baer, Daviso, Flexer, Queen, & Meindl, 2011
- 53 Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016; Miller, 2009; Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011; Petriwskyj, 2010
- 54 Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016
- 55 Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016
- 56 Baker-Ericzén, Mueggenborg, & Shea, 2009; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016
- 57 Cologon, 2012; Graham & Spandagou, 2011; McMahon, & Harwood, 2016; Sullivan, Johnson, Owens, & Conway, 2014
- 58 *Ibid*
- 59 *Ibid*
- 60 Fletcher, 2010; Gottfried, 2014
- 61 *Ibid*
- 62 *Ibid*
- 63 Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016; Kliever, 1998; Mogharreban & Bruns, 2009; Stahmer, Akshoomoff, & Cunningham, 2011; Stahmer, Carter, Baker, & Miwa, 2003
- 64 Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016, p. 16
- 65 Szumski, Smogorzewska, & Karwowski, 2017
- 66 Baker-Ericzén, Mueggenborg, & Shea, 2009; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016; Stahmer, Akshoomoff, & Cunningham, 2011
- 67 Diamond & Huang, 2005; Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009; Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993; Stahmer, Carter, Baker, & Miwa, 2003; Nikolarazi, Kumar, Favazza, Sideridis, Koulousiou, & Raill, 2005
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- 69 Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016, p. 13
- 70 de Graaf, Van Hove, & Haveman, 2013; Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009; Giangreco, 2009; Kliever, 1998; Kliever, 2008; Myklebust, 2006; Peetsma, Vergeer, Karsten, & Roeleveld, 2001; Stahmer & Ingersoll, 2004; Tanti Burlo, 2010; Vakil, Welton, O'Connor, & Kline, 2009; Vianello, & Lanfranchi, 2009
- 71 Schifter, 2015
- 72 Cole, Murphy, Frisby, Grossi, & Bolte, 2019; Peetsma, Vergeer, Karsten, & Roeleveld, 2001; Vakil, Welton, O'Connor, & Kline, 2009
- 73 de Graaf, Van Hove, & Haveman, 2013; de Graaf & van Hove, 2015; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016; Kliever, 1998; Kliever, 2008; Peetsma, Vergeer, Karsten, & Roeleveld, 2001
- 74 de Graaf, Van Hove, & Haveman, 2013; Kliever, 1998; Kliever, 2008



- 75 Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009; Fox, Farrell, & Davis, 2004; Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993; Jordan, Glenn, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010; Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009
- 76 Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016
- 77 Dessemontet, & Bless, 2013; Farrell, Dyson, Polat, Hutcheson, & Gallannaugh, 2007; Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson, & Kaplan, 2007; Kliewer, 1998; Kliewer, 2008; McGregor, & Vogelsberg, 1998; Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011; Odom & Diamond, 1998; Purdue, Ballard, & MacArthur, 2001; Szumski, Smogorzewska, & Karwowski, 2017
- 78 Jordan, Glenn, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010
- 79 Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009
- 80 Cologon, & Mevawalla, 2018
- 81 Light & McNaughton, 2015
- 82 Baker-Ericzén, Mueggenborg, & Shea, 2009; Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009; Fisher & Shogren, 2011; Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993; Hart, & Whalon, 2011; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016; Iacono, Chan, & Waring, 1998; Johnston, McDonnell, Nelson, & Magnavito, 2003; Justice, Logan, Lin, & Kaderavek, 2014; Kliewer, 1998; Kliewer, 2008; Peetsma, Vergeer, Karsten, & Roeleveld, 2001; Stahmer, Akshoomoff, & Cunningham, 2011; Stahmer, Carter, Baker, & Miwa, 2003
- 83 Hart & Whalon, 2011; Kliewer, 1998; Stahmer, Carter, Baker, & Miwa, 2003
- 84 Fisher & Shogren, 2011; Iacono, Chan, & Waring, 1998; Johnston, McDonnell, Nelson, & Magnavito, 2003; Kliewer, 1998; Kliewer, 2008; Stahmer & Ingersoll, 2004
- 85 Johnston, McDonnell, Nelson, & Magnavito, 2003; Stahmer & Ingersoll, 2004
- 86 Hanline, & Correa-Torres, 2012; Iacono & Cologon, 2014
- 87 Kent-Walsh, Murza, Malani, & Binger, 2015
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## CHAPTER THREE

# Defining inclusive education

*“It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept and celebrate those differences.”<sup>114</sup>*

As clearly identified in chapter two, there are important benefits of inclusive education for everyone. However, in working towards inclusion for all, it is essential to clarify common misunderstandings of inclusive education that form barriers to its realisation. In this chapter I draw on the current literature to outline such misunderstandings, contrasted with a clear and internationally-accepted definition of inclusive education.

As noted in chapter one, inclusive education involves valuing and facilitating the full participation and belonging of everyone in all aspects of our education communities and systems. No one is excluded; supports for inclusion are embedded within everyday educational practices.<sup>115</sup> Inclusive education is about everyone learning together, *in all our diversity*. This means that everyone has genuine opportunities to learn *together*, with support as needed, and all students are meaningfully involved in all aspects of the curriculum – thus making inclusion a *shared* experience.<sup>116</sup> There is no ‘type’ of student ‘eligible’ (nor ‘ineligible’) for inclusion – inclusion is about and for *all of us*. Inclusive education involves upholding the dignity of each student in belonging, participating and accessing ongoing opportunities, recognising and valuing the contribution that each student makes, and supporting every student to flourish.<sup>117</sup>

When inclusion is misconstrued as assimilation (as is the case with integration), it becomes about changing or ‘fixing’ *students* to ‘fit’ within existing structures, systems and practices.<sup>118</sup> Assimilation ends up focussing on who is, or who can be changed to be, a close enough ‘fit’. Inclusion, instead, can be understood as ‘fitting’ educational opportunities, settings, experiences and systems to the full diversity of students and embracing and celebrating diversity as a positive and rich learning resource.

Assimilation is not inclusion, instead it is *exclusion* and needs to be recognised as such. When the term ‘inclusion’ is co-opted and misused to represent exclusion and segregation it becomes about entrenching the idea that there is a ‘them’ and an ‘us’ – an ‘us’ to which only some people are eligible to belong. There is nothing inclusive about segregation.

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Acknowledging that inclusive education is about all of us underlines the importance of ensuring that none of us are excluded.

Acknowledging that inclusive education is about all of us underlines the importance of ensuring that none of us are excluded. Exclusion is a disempowering process through which we are constructed as an ‘Other’, and by inference as a ‘lesser’ or ‘inferior’ Other.<sup>119</sup> Paradoxically, the very need to focus on inclusion naturally implies exclusion, thus to understand inclusive education it is important to consider who is included and into what, and likewise who is excluded, from what, and why. Or as Best, Corcoran and Slee put it: “Who’s in? Who’s out? Who decides? What are we going to do about it?”<sup>120</sup>

### Inclusion and ‘dis-belonging’

Efforts towards inclusion need to be undertaken with a clear awareness of the risks, and potential paradox, of identifying any one group of people as ‘the excluded’ or ‘the included’. The notion of ‘dis-belonging’ highlights the problematic and entrenched assumption that has come to underpin the word ‘inclusion’, whereby the association between inclusion and the experience of disability results in “taken-for-granted assumptions that the ‘natural’ position of [people who experience disability] is one of dis-belonging”.<sup>121</sup> Additionally, the use of the term ‘inclusion’ can slip easily and rapidly into a marker of the “‘boundaries’ of who is and is not normal (i.e. eligible to be ‘included’) and who is ‘different’”.<sup>122</sup> This can result in exclusionary approaches whereby ‘special’ practices and programs are developed for ‘special’ students, rather than a focus on transforming existing education practices, programs and systems to be inclusive of *all* students and all forms of diversity.<sup>123</sup> As explored in chapter five, ableism involves this devaluing and dehumanising process from which consciously or subconsciously a ‘them’ and ‘us’ is created whereby some people are constructed as

an ‘Inferior Other’, as lesser, as undesirable or undesirably ‘different’, as diminished, as needing to be ‘fixed’ or changed, as sub-human.

These assumptions of dis-belonging and ‘difference’ live in the ableist ‘underlife’. As in, the seemingly invisible but heavily present ableist beliefs, attitudes and accepted ‘truths’ that – often subconsciously – guide our thoughts, actions and social systems, with considerable implications for the legislation, policy and practice that is consequently accepted. The assumption that children and young people who experience disability may be better placed in a ‘special’ education setting and the acceptance of the parallel systems of segregated ‘special’ and ‘mainstream’ education is a key example of the playing out of these unquestioned ableist beliefs. Indeed, as Hodge and Runswick-Cole write, “[b]y definition the term mainstream places some children outside these services with the presumption that their requirements can only be met within some minority specialist provision”.<sup>124</sup> In direct contrast to such presumptions, inclusive education involves transforming “...ordinary settings so that they can respond to the totality of the student requirements, rather than viewing education as ameliorating individual ‘needs’”.<sup>125</sup> It is a shift that would result in an *assumption of inclusion*, rather than perpetuating the ongoing ‘question mark’ that hangs over the heads of many students whereby their eligibility to participate in their education setting and experiences is conditional and always, though often subtly, under review.

“ The fundamental role that education plays in creating paths for genuine participation in all other aspects of life underscores the significance of inclusion or exclusion in education.

In this report, the discussion of inclusive education is focused on the inclusion of children and young people who experience disability. This is not intended to suggest that inclusive education is only about people who experience disability, nor to unthinkingly reproduce dis-belonging, but it is an essential discussion because those of us who experience disability are frequently excluded from many aspects of society – including within education. Additionally, as Erevelles contends, segregated schooling engenders this dis-belonging.<sup>126</sup> Given that segregation on the basis of ‘disability’ is, arguably, the last remaining ‘respectable’ form of segregation in schooling, it needs to be directly and urgently addressed as a matter of civil rights.

It follows then that since by its very definition inclusive education is about everyone, it should not be necessary to specifically recognise the right of people who experience disability to an inclusive education – after all, *all people are people*. However, “for some people these rights are conceived as natural, while for others these same rights are conceived as ‘privileges’”.<sup>127</sup> People who experience disability are the largest minority group in the world.<sup>128</sup> People who experience disability are also amongst the most excluded.<sup>129</sup> Even within anti-oppression and anti-bias movements and pedagogy, disability is frequently left unaddressed.<sup>130</sup> Consequently, particular attention to ending violations of the rights of people who experience disability is required.

As Slee writes, “[e]xclusion resides deep in the bones of education”.<sup>131</sup> This has wide-reaching implications for people who experience disability who are frequently excluded as a consequence of the ease with which ‘disability labels’ form a path to creating a ‘them’. While labels in and of themselves are not always or necessarily problematic – and can instead be used as powerful positive identity markers and advocacy tools – unfortunately in practice labels are frequently used to pathologise individuals and to justify exclusion. The fundamental role that education plays in creating paths for genuine participation in all other aspects of life underscores the significance of inclusion or exclusion in education.<sup>132</sup>



## The national and international imperative for inclusion

There has been sustained and growing interest in inclusive education nationally and internationally for some time now.<sup>133</sup> The World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, and the *1990 World Declaration on Education for All*, made at the conclusion of the conference<sup>134</sup>, played an important role in highlighting the exclusion of many students worldwide and progressed international discussions around inclusion and inclusive education.<sup>135</sup> This, along with the *Salamanca Declaration 1994*, the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in 2000, the *Biwako Millennium Framework 2002*, and international conventions, particularly the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989* and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*, along with national initiatives such as the *2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (currently under review), amongst others, provide the backdrop to current research, policies and practices regarding inclusive education.

Despite this sustained and widespread interest, inclusive education has continued to be a vexed issue and it sometimes seems there are as many definitions of inclusive education put forward as there are people using the term. However, as outlined in chapter one, the CRPD provides an overarching international, and legally binding, definition. Additionally, GC4 on Article 24 of the CRPD outlines in detail the meaning of inclusive education, thus while the individual *experience* of inclusion and exclusion may differ, the CRPD no longer leaves room for individual *opinion* to determine the definition. The application of the CRPD in legislation, policy and practice also creates an important opportunity to identify and address current situations where exclusion and segregation are being masqueraded as ‘inclusion’.

Article 24 of the CRPD clearly identifies the right of every person who experiences disability to participate fully in an inclusive, quality education on an equal basis with people who are not labelled disabled. Specifically, this involves the right to inclusive education at all levels of education, intended to support “the full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity”.<sup>136</sup> Additionally, the

“ Inclusive education cannot mean education within a segregated education class or setting... all forms of segregation and integration constitute exclusion ”

realisation of the right to education requires ensuring accommodations will be made and support will be provided to “facilitate effective education ... consistent with the goal of full inclusion”.<sup>137</sup>

GC4 on Article 24 of the CRPD further explicates the meaning of inclusive education as “a process of systemic reform” and structural change in which change takes place with the intention of creating genuinely participatory and equitable learning experiences.<sup>138</sup> Inclusive education involves enabling all people to access general education settings and providing quality education on an equal basis with all people in the community in which they live.<sup>139</sup> Additionally, inclusive education does not merely involve the presence of people who do and do not experience disability within the same location but rather requires support to be provided *within* the ‘general’ education system to ensure that each person has access to opportunities to maximise academic and social development.<sup>140</sup> Inclusive education “values the well-being of all students, respects their inherent dignity and autonomy, and acknowledges individuals’ requirements and their ability to effectively be included in and contribute to society”.<sup>141</sup>

Importantly, the CRPD definition of inclusion also goes on to outline that no form of segregation or integration constitutes inclusive education. This distinction is key to defining what inclusive education is, and to clarifying ongoing, problematic and pervasive confusions that serve to perpetuate segregation. It is made explicitly clear in GC4 that inclusive education cannot mean education within a segregated education class or setting and that all forms of segregation and integration constitute *exclusion* and entail disability-specific discrimination.<sup>142</sup>

As explained in GC4:

- “Segregation occurs when the education of students with disabilities is provided in separate environments designed or used to respond to a particular impairment or to various impairments, in isolation from students without disabilities.
- Integration is the process of placing persons with disabilities in existing mainstream educational institutions with the understanding that they can adjust to the standardized requirements of such institutions.”<sup>143</sup>

And, in contrast to both segregation and integration, inclusion is defined as follows:

- “Inclusion involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and the environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences. Placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without accompanying structural changes to, for example, organization, curriculum and teaching and learning strategies, does not constitute inclusion. Furthermore, integration does not automatically guarantee the transition from segregation to inclusion.”<sup>144</sup>

### The national legislative implications

Having ratified the CRPD, Australia is committed and legally obliged to respect, protect and fulfil the rights articulated within this treaty, including the right to inclusive education. Thus “to adopt appropriate legislative, administrative, budgetary, judicial, promotional, and other measures toward the full realization of the right”, including provision of assistance and services as required to bring about inclusive education.<sup>145</sup> This requires acting upon the long-held recognition that inclusive education is a right for every person – it is neither conditional, nor a privilege reserved for only some of us.<sup>146</sup>

In its 2018 combined second and third periodic report under the CRPD, the Australian Government noted its commitment to inclusive education from early childhood through to adulthood, consistent with the CRPD.<sup>147</sup> However, in relation to the fundamental core of Article 24 of the CRPD, for which phasing out all forms of segregated education is necessary, the Australian Government goes on to state that:

*“In respect of the Committee’s comments urging States Parties to ‘achieve a transfer of resources from segregated to inclusive environments’, Australia’s view is that a State Party will meet its obligations under article 24 through an education system that allows for funding of different education modalities so students with disability are able to participate in a range of education options including enrolment in mainstream classes in mainstream schools with additional support, specialist classes or units in mainstream schools and specialist schools.”<sup>148</sup>*

As Bacchi outlines, while policy is generally perceived as the means for guiding positive action, it not only represents intended action but also inaction.<sup>149</sup> In this instance, for example, what the Australian governments intend to do, as well as intended inaction in key areas.

Policy is politically driven and both reflects and informs the dominant culture within any given context.<sup>150</sup> Policy and culture play a critical role in facilitating inclusive education.<sup>151</sup> As Johnstone and Chapman argue, “[p]olicy serves to legitimise, sanction, encourage, and disseminate desired practice”.<sup>152</sup> Problematically then, alongside common misunderstandings of inclusive education, the fact that the conflation of ‘special’ education and inclusive education continues on official levels, with examples of all forms of segregation being misrepresented as inclusion, is therefore unsurprising. The presenting of state ‘inclusion’ awards to segregated schools in Queensland and Victoria, as has been the case in past years, is but one example.<sup>153</sup> Additionally, it is not uncommon when asking about inclusive education to be pointed to segregated education settings, and particularly to special units, as examples of the efforts of a government on this front, despite the reality that these examples in no way represent inclusion. The current emphasis on increasing segregated placements by the NSW State Government<sup>154</sup> and in 2019 budget announcements by the Queensland State Government

(contrary to its inclusion policy) is an example of this concerning trend.<sup>155</sup> The increasing segregation nationally puts Australia out of step with other nations, for example with North America, where segregation is decreasing.<sup>156</sup>

### How should we live – together

Strong philosophical and moral arguments have been made for many decades regarding the importance of and right to inclusive education for all people under all circumstances. While this argument of inclusive education as a *moral* right is sometimes questioned,<sup>157</sup> the fact remains that inclusive education is a universal *human* right. Additionally, when identifying and recognising the full humanity of every person, arguments against inclusive education as a moral right fail to be convincing.

Montaigne, an influential 16th century French philosopher, engaged in an in-depth exploration of questions about how, as people, we can live ethical lives and make choices with integrity. For Montaigne, this question of honour was integral to the ongoing and essential question of ‘how should we live?’. When considering inclusion, the question then becomes “how should we live *together*”.<sup>158</sup> At its core, inclusive education is about how, as human beings, we wish to live with each other. Or as Slee suggests, inclusive education “invites us to think about the nature of the world we live in, a world that we prefer and our role in shaping both of these worlds”.<sup>159</sup> This requires active and ongoing recognition and embracing of our shared humanity. It also requires a conscious rejection of the ongoing temptation to seemingly ‘make easy’ what is hard by dehumanising those of us, who by the nature of some form of stigmatisation,

can easily be (mis)constructed as an ‘Inferior Other’, from which point all manners of segregation and abuse begin to be justified. Efforts to address this ableist dehumanisation are needed at every level of society.

### Expectations, attitudes and beliefs

Misinformation and (ableist) low expectations combine to continually limit opportunities for people who experience disability.<sup>160</sup> In contrast to common belief, children notice ‘difference’ from a very young age.<sup>161</sup> Research provides evidence demonstrating that at very young ages children demonstrate internalised cultural preferences, prejudices and social hierarchies reflective of the communities in which they live, including making unsolicited prejudiced statements about community members.<sup>162</sup> In research involving children aged between two and six years of age, Watson provides evidence of ableist enculturation demonstrated through children’s conversations and behaviours as they construct people who experience disability as tragic and pathologised ‘others’.<sup>163</sup> The development of these entrenched prejudices from early in the childhood years creates a vicious cycle that inhibits social cohesion. Fostering inclusion throughout the childhood years has the potential to break this cycle<sup>164</sup>, thus making formal schooling an important focus area for developing inclusion. However, the views and behaviours of children and young people are highly influenced by adult views and behaviours and thus adults need to take seriously the need for change in themselves.<sup>165</sup> As discussed above, inclusive education is about every student’s right to be a valued member of society and to be provided with equal opportunities to actively participate in and contribute to all areas of learning.<sup>166</sup> In conflict with this, inclusion is often misunderstood as an ‘added extra’ or a ‘special effort’ born out of kindness or charity.

Inclusive education requires recognising impairment as one of many forms of human diversity, and welcoming and, as noted earlier, viewing diversity as a rich resource rather than a problem.<sup>167</sup> Inclusive education, therefore, creates a situation where all people can be valued and experience a sense of belonging and where all people have genuine opportunities to flourish.<sup>168</sup>

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Efforts to address this ableist dehumanisation are needed at every level of society.

### Inclusion for democratic citizenship

Inclusive education requires ongoing engagement with removing barriers to active involvement and participation in shared learning and full and valued membership in all aspects of the community.<sup>169</sup> This requires all participants within an education setting to be open to listening and learning together – and this includes listening and learning together with children and young people.<sup>170</sup> Sapon-Shevin brings into perspective the bigger picture of inclusion, of which inclusive education is one key component:

*“[I]nclusion is not about disability, nor is it only about schools. Inclusion is about social justice. What kind of world do we want to create and how should we educate children for that world? What kinds of skills and commitments do people need to thrive in a diverse society?”<sup>171</sup>*

Inclusive education, then, is one aspect of the realisation of democratic social values.<sup>172</sup> Respect for difference, collaboration, valuing families and community, and viewing all students as active and valued participants who have the right to be heard and provided with equitable access to education, are all factors identified by Australian educators as essential to inclusive education for all students.<sup>173</sup>

### Family perspectives

Inclusive education is also about engaging inclusively with families.<sup>174</sup> In an inclusive community, families and the roles they play are valued. However, it is not the responsibility of an excluded person and their family to create change for inclusion, but rather inclusion is a shared community endeavour.<sup>175</sup> Families who experience disability have identified the lived experience of inclusive education as belonging, participation, opportunity and recognised contribution.<sup>176</sup> Additionally, families have identified inclusion as being accepted as “just one of the group”, as something that families have to work towards, and as something that is increasing over time.<sup>177</sup> However, families also identify many challenges in working with education settings towards the goal of inclusive education.<sup>178</sup> As discussed in chapters two and six, while the continuation of segregated education is often presented as important to enable family ‘choice’, this notion is not only problematic in light of the fundamental human right to inclusive education, but has been revealed as a ruse through family experiences that demonstrate time and again the pressure on families to segregate, and extensive experiences of gatekeeping.<sup>179</sup>

In research in Italy, where all students have been educated together since all special schools were closed and segregated education ended in 1977, one final-year high school student shared his understanding of inclusion: “Inclusion is about the whole of life – the way we live together as people for the whole of life”.<sup>180</sup> This understanding of inclusive education as one aspect of broader inclusion in society draws our thinking towards an understanding that inclusive education is an ongoing process.<sup>181</sup> When a student enrolls in an education setting, this is the beginning (not the endpoint) of the processes of inclusion.<sup>182</sup> Placing a student who experiences disability into a ‘mainstream’ setting without undertaking transformation for inclusion does not change understandings of ‘disability’ or ‘difference’ and can simply transfer the idea of ‘special’ students from a segregated setting to being segregated within a ‘mainstream’ setting.<sup>183</sup> As families who experience disability have identified, in addition to presence, genuinely belonging – with all that belonging entails – is fundamental to inclusion.

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Inclusion is often misunderstood as an ‘added extra’ or a ‘special effort’ born out of kindness or charity.

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Translating values into action requires engaging with inclusive education as a very practical, everyday process.

### Transformation for inclusion

Bringing about inclusive education is about transformation. It “requires developing and putting into action inclusive values, policies and practices... to engage in education for social justice and democracy, with a focus on reducing or removing oppression within and beyond education experiences and systems”.<sup>184</sup> Translating values into action requires engaging with inclusive education as a very practical, everyday process. As Mogharreban and Bruns write, “[i]nclusion is not simply an intellectual ideal; it is a physical and very real experience”.<sup>185</sup>

Ferguson argues that bringing about inclusive education requires considering “[h]ow teachers understand the nature of knowledge and the student’s role in learning, and how these ideas about knowledge and learning are manifested in teaching and classwork”.<sup>186</sup> As such, inclusive education can be understood as ongoing critical engagement with flexible and student-centred pedagogy that caters for and values diversity, and holds high expectations for all people.<sup>187</sup> Bringing about inclusive education is about identifying and addressing exclusion wherever it occurs in policy and practice.<sup>188</sup> Simultaneously, inclusive education is about belonging and becoming, *together*.<sup>189</sup> Inclusive education requires recognising that we are all equally human and putting this recognition into action.

Ending segregation of students by location (within or between education settings) is a critical first step towards inclusive education. However, inclusive education requires much more than the co-location of students. As well as an end to all forms of segregation, it also involves:

- all students being welcome and valued, and the contribution of each student being recognised. This includes building inclusive relationships and engaging in critical reflection on attitudes;
- ensuring that all educational experiences are set up in ways to facilitate the equitable and genuine participation and belonging of every student;
- all necessary supports (for students and teachers) are provided and embedded inclusively within everyday practices;
- additional staff (for example, additional educators or paraprofessionals) working inclusively across the setting, without directly or indirectly ‘othering’ or segregating students;
- ensuring that there are no segregated (separate) groups, units, classes or settings for any student or group of students. This includes avoidance of all forms of streaming or ability grouping;
- facilitating the genuine participation of every student within the same learning activities, for example, all students working together within the same lessons without separate lessons or curricula based on student labels;
- making sure that all students are meaningfully involved in all aspects of learning; and
- ensuring that all students are supported to flourish.



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- 118 Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2011; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Chung, Lee, & Goh, 2008; Colibaba, Gheorghiu, Colibaba, & Munteanu, 2013; Cologon, 2014b; Curcic, 2009; Lalvani, 2013; Rietveld, 2010; Slee, 2001
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- 120 Best, Corcoran, & Slee, 2018, p. 4
- 121 Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011, p. 2123
- 122 Paugh & Dudley-Marling, 2011, p. 831
- 123 Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2011; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Cologon, 2010; Cologon, 2014b; Cologon & D'Alessio, 2015; Sharma, Forlin, Deppeler, & Guang-Xue, 2013; Slee, 2011
- 124 Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013, p. 311
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- 126 Erevelles, 2011
- 127 D'Alessio, 2011, p. 141
- 128 World Health Organisation (WHO), 2011
- 129 Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016; Hobson, 2010; UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and UNICEF, 2015
- 130 Agosto, White, & Valcarlos, 2019; Lalvani & Bacon, 2019
- 131 Slee, 2018a, p. 1
- 132 Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016
- 133 Cummings, Sills-Busio, Barker, & Dobbins, 2015; Reupert, Deppeler, & Sharma, 2015; Slee, 2018b
- 134 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 1990
- 135 Miles & Singal, 2010
- 136 United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006, Article 24, para 1a
- 137 *Ibid*, Article 24, para 2e
- 138 UN General Assembly, 2016, para 11
- 139 United Nations, 2016
- 140 *Ibid*
- 141 UN General Assembly, 2016, para 10b
- 142 Cukalevski & Malaquias, 2019
- 143 UN General Assembly, 2016, para 11
- 144 *Ibid*
- 145 Jonsson, 2007, p. 118
- 146 D'Alessio, 2011; Degener, 2016; Kliewer, 1998
- 147 Australian Government, 2018
- 148 *Ibid*, p. 40
- 149 Bacchi, 1999
- 150 *Ibid*
- 151 Arduin, 2015; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Cologon, 2013b; Cologon, 2014b; Cologon & D'Alessio, 2015; D'Alessio, 2011; Kasa-Hendrickson & Kluth, 2005; McDonald & Tufue-Dolgoy, 2013
- 152 Johnstone & Chapman, 2009, p. 131
- 153 For example, see: Queensland Government, 2018; Queensland Government, 2016; Victorian Government, 2018; Victorian Government, 2017
- 154 NSW Government, 2018
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- 157 Gordon, 2013
- 158 Cologon, 2014b, p. 14
- 159 Slee, 2011, p. 14
- 160 Cologon, 2012
- 161 Cologon, Mevawalla, Niland, Artinian, Salvador, & Wright, In press; Lalvani & Bacon, 2019; Watson, 2018
- 162 Connolly, Smith, & Kelly, 2002; Lalvani & Bacon, 2019; Mevawalla, In press; Watson, 2018
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- 165 Ainscow, 2007; Beckett, 2009; Lalvani & Bacon, 2019; Srinivasan, 2017; UNESCO, 2013
- 166 Armstrong & Barton, 2008; Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2011; Cologon, 2014b; Cologon & Salvador, 2016; Cologon & Mevawalla, 2018; Lalvani & Bacon, 2019; Mackenzie, Cologon, & Fenech, 2016; McCullough, 2009; Naraian, 2011; Purdue, Gordon-Burns, Gunn, Madden, & Surtees, 2009; Theodorou & Nind, 2010; UNESCO, 2013; UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and UNICEF, 2015
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- 169 Curcic, 2009; Frankel, Gold, & Ajodhia-Andrews, 2010; Lalvani & Bacon, 2019; Theodorou & Nind, 2010; Vakil, Welton, O'Connor, & Kline, 2009
- 170 Macartney & Morton, 2011
- 171 Sapon-Shevin, 2003, p. 26
- 172 Barton, 1997; Opertti, Walker, & Zhang, 2014; Slee, 2011
- 173 Carlson, Hemmings, Wurf, & Reupert, 2012; Cologon, 2010; Mackenzie, Cologon, & Fenech, 2016; Wright, 2017
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- 175 Mayer, 2009
- 176 Cologon, 2014a
- 177 Neely-Barnes, Graff, Roberts, Hall, & Hankins, 2010, p. 251
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- 180 Cologon, 2013b
- 181 Booth, & Ainscow, 2011; Cologon, 2014b; Curcic, 2009
- 182 Armstrong & Barton, 2008); Beckett, 2009; Berlach & Chambers, 2011; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Booth, Ainscow, & Kingston, 2006; Chung, Lee, & Goh, 2008; Cologon, 2010; Cologon, 2013b; Cologon, 2014b; Cologon, 2014c; Curcic, 2009; D'Alessio, 2011; de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011; Humphrey, 2008; Klibthong, 2013; Komesaroff & McLean, 2006; McLeskey & Waldron, 2007; Petriwskyj, 2010; Rietveld, 2010
- 183 Cologon, 2014b; Curcic, 2009; Jelas, & Ali, 2014
- 184 Cologon, 2014b, p. 4
- 185 Mogharreban & Bruns, 2009, p. 407
- 186 Ferguson, 2008, p. 113
- 187 Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2011; Grenier, 2010; Petriwskyj, 2010
- 188 Bevan-Brown, 2013
- 189 Cologon, 2013b



## CHAPTER FOUR



# Illusions of inclusion



*“Exclusion by any name remains exclusion.”<sup>190</sup>*

In direct contrast to being included, with all of the benefits of inclusive education as outlined in chapter two, segregation or exclusion is experienced as a stigmatising mark of being a ‘lesser’ or ‘inferior’ person.<sup>191</sup> As discussed in chapter three, exclusion is a process of dehumanisation resulting in the construction of an ‘Inferior Other’ – the ‘them’ in the consequent ‘them and us’. Both macro and micro-exclusion are currently rampant across and beyond Australia.<sup>192</sup> Indeed, misappropriation of the term ‘inclusion’ and misguided attempts to globalise narrow and exclusionary notions of inclusive education have, at times, posed a danger to pre-existing inclusive cultural beliefs and practices.<sup>193</sup>

### Macro-exclusion

In its most extreme form, macro-exclusion in education involves denial of any formal education opportunities. While this form of macro-exclusion is ongoing<sup>194</sup>, macro-exclusion more commonly occurs when a student is excluded from ‘mainstream’ education and segregated into a ‘special’ school or ‘special’ class/unit for all or part of the day, the week or the year.

Macro-exclusion is a clear form of segregation that is straightforward to identify. However, the frequent misunderstandings of the term ‘inclusive education’ lead to a situation where exclusion is often called, or misappropriated as, ‘inclusion’.<sup>195</sup> Many genuine efforts towards inclusive education have been and continue to be made, in response to the national and international attention to the importance of inclusive education over the past decades. In many instances, however, the terms ‘special education’ or ‘special needs education’ have been replaced with the term ‘inclusive education’, without any actual change in policy or practice.<sup>196</sup>

### Micro-exclusion

When exclusion occurs within ‘mainstream’ settings that claim to be inclusive, this results in ‘micro-exclusion’.<sup>197</sup> One common form of micro-exclusion is where a student is present within a ‘mainstream’ setting, but is separated from the group and the curriculum, often through the provision of ‘inclusion support’ that (usually unintentionally) isolates the student educationally, socially and even physically.<sup>198</sup>

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Segregation or exclusion is experienced as a stigmatising mark of being a ‘lesser’ or ‘inferior’ person.

Micro-exclusion forms one of the biggest barriers to inclusive education. As I have written elsewhere:

*“Micro-exclusion is where, for example, a child is enrolled in a mainstream setting but is segregated into a separate area of the classroom or school for all or part of the day; or where a child is only permitted to attend for part of the day. Other examples of micro-exclusion are where a child is present but not given the opportunity to participate in the activities along with the other children in the setting or is present but viewed as a burden and an unequally valued member of the class or setting. This is not inclusion.”<sup>199</sup>*

Micro-exclusion is more insidious and much less often recognised than macro-exclusion, but it is critical to address. So, for example, a student might be attending a ‘mainstream’ education setting, but if the student is not fully valued and supported to participate within the experiences of the settings along with their peers, then the student is *not actually included*.

*“Micro-exclusion occurs when children are placed into a mainstream education context, but are segregated or excluded within the classroom/school activities or community. For example, when children are given separate activities (often with different staff) that are not connected with what the rest of the group is doing, or when they are removed from the class for particular lessons. Micro-exclusion also occurs when someone is not fully included as a valued member of the classroom community (often as a consequence of other forms of micro-exclusion)... micro-exclusion commonly occurs when integration is misunderstood as inclusion.”<sup>200</sup>*

### Misunderstanding integration as inclusion

Micro-exclusion can occur when people misunderstand inclusion as a continuation of ‘special’ education but in a ‘mainstream’ context. As discussed in chapter three, conflating integration and inclusion is a common misunderstanding of inclusion.<sup>201</sup> Integration involves a student attending a ‘mainstream’ education setting, some or all of the time, with some adaptations or accommodations intended to make this attendance possible, but without change to the setting.<sup>202</sup> However, inclusion goes “beyond access and support to incorporate curricular and pedagogic differentiation supporting children’s sense of belonging and being valued”.<sup>203</sup>

While the deficit focus of integration is unintentional, integration is constructed on the deficit-based assumption that there is a ‘problem’ within the student that is preventing inclusion and that it is ultimately the student who needs to change, rather than the environment or pedagogy. For integration, minor adjustments are made to enable a student who is perceived as ‘close enough’ to ‘fit’ within an existing mainstream setting. Consequently, integration remains conditional and does not involve or require critical reflection on beliefs and practices to bring about inclusive educational experiences for all students.

### The assimilation muddle

The notions of assimilation inherent within concepts and approaches to integration are present more broadly within education and thus the misunderstanding of inclusion as being about assimilation is also very common. Assimilation is about making everyone ‘the same’. In contrast, inclusion is about celebrating and embracing diversity and ‘difference’. As noted in chapters one and three, when inclusion is mistakenly viewed as assimilation, it becomes about changing or ‘fixing’ students to ‘fit’ within existing structures, systems and practices.<sup>204</sup> This way of thinking leads to the problematic idea whereby inclusion is misunderstood as being conditional and dependent on students being ‘the same enough’ or ‘close enough’ to the mythical ‘normal’ to meet certain requirements to be included.<sup>205</sup>

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Assimilation is about making everyone ‘the same’. In contrast, inclusion is about celebrating and embracing diversity and ‘difference’.

This confusion of inclusion as assimilation is a significant barrier to inclusion and stems from the myth of the ‘normal’ person.<sup>206</sup> This is the false idea that there is such a thing as a ‘normal person’ and that this is the ideal that all people need to aspire – or be moulded – to be. The very notion of assimilation is exclusionary and assumes that a student’s inclusion, and the value of that student, is dependent on being ‘normal’ or ‘normal enough’. In reality, inclusive education involves acknowledging that *all* students are unique individuals and that there is no such thing as ‘normal’. “[I]t is through valuing and enjoying difference that inclusion can be achieved.”<sup>207</sup>

Unpacking micro-exclusion highlights the fact that inclusion is not a product or a program or a type of setting – it is a process. Frequent claiming of micro (and even macro) exclusion as inclusion creates significant barriers to, and confusion about, inclusion. Lack of understanding of what inclusion is, and subsequent unwarranted fear of inclusion, are also significant barriers. At the core of this is the lingering idea – perpetuated by the continuing presence of segregated settings and the insidious creep of the neo-liberal agenda and illusions of ‘choice’<sup>208</sup> – that inclusion is *optional*, rather than the right of every person.

## Micro-exclusion through paraprofessional ‘support’ for inclusion

As noted above, micro-exclusion often occurs through well-intended but problematic use of ‘support’ for ‘inclusion’. GC4 on the CRPD specifically outlines that:

*“Any support measures provided must be compliant with the goal of inclusion. Accordingly, they must be designed to strengthen opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in the classroom and in out-of-school activities alongside their peers, rather than marginalize them.”*<sup>209</sup>

There are many different and important forms of support for inclusion that are currently implemented in education settings. One of the most common forms of inclusion support is the employment of a paraprofessional educator. Indeed, as Rutherford notes “aides are often regarded as the ‘solution to inclusion’, the resource upon which students’ entry to the (compulsory) education system depends”.<sup>210</sup>

While the employment of a paraprofessional educator is a common form of support for inclusion, there are many different terms used interchangeably in different locations and settings for this role. These include learning support assistant, additional educator, teaching assistant, teacher’s aide, paraeducator, special teacher’s assistant, instructional assistant, educational assistant and classroom assistant. A paraprofessional educator is an assistant and not a qualified teacher.

As explored further in chapter seven, in research involving parents, teachers, students and paraprofessional educators it is argued that, with careful planning, preparation and implementation, paraprofessional support may assist in facilitating inclusive education. In particular, it is contended that specific planning around the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessional educators and teachers can result in improved educational experiences and increased student involvement in the curriculum.<sup>211</sup> Paraprofessional educators report the belief that their support can be beneficial in providing teachers with another adult to discuss and reflect on ideas and problem-solving within the everyday.<sup>212</sup> Research provides evidence that, working in close partnership with the teacher, paraprofessional support may be implemented in such a way that it is beneficial for organising the learning

environment, preparing or adapting materials in ways that can benefit all students, and providing general assistance to support the teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom.<sup>213</sup> Unobtrusive, discreet support from a paraprofessional educator to further scaffold what is being taught by the teacher may allow for student autonomy and facilitate inclusion.<sup>214</sup>

However, in contrast, research provides substantial evidence that the current approaches to paraprofessional support can impede or even prevent, rather than facilitate, inclusion. Indeed, despite the frequent use of paraprofessional educators, serious concerns have been raised regarding whether this is actually beneficial for bringing about inclusive education. As Giangreco points out, there is insufficient data to support the employment of paraprofessional educators; they are often expected, but not qualified, to teach; there is a substantial amount of research showing the detrimental effects of the common practice of one-to-one paraprofessional support; current approaches to decision-making are inadequate and often place an undue burden on paraprofessional educators; and assigning a paraprofessional educator to a classroom or student does not address the substantial change required to actually bring about inclusion in practice.<sup>215</sup>

“When inclusion is mistakenly viewed as assimilation, it becomes about changing or ‘fixing’ students to ‘fit’ within existing structures, systems and practices.

Over-reliance on paraprofessional educators, who often become a replacement for, rather than assistant to, the teacher, has been identified as a major issue with the use of paraprofessional support.<sup>216</sup> This prevents inclusion in grade-appropriate educational experiences with peers and results in education decisions being made by unqualified or underqualified personnel, rather than by the teacher.<sup>217</sup> Consequently, paraprofessional educators end up being required to provide academic support in subjects they are unskilled in and students receive most of their education from the paraprofessional educator rather than the classroom teacher.<sup>218</sup> This results in poor quality educational experiences, is an inappropriate and unfair expectation of paraprofessional educators, and leads to teachers and students becoming highly (and unnecessarily) dependent on paraprofessional educators, with negative outcomes for students and for peer relationships.<sup>219</sup>

#### Negative impact on quality of education

Current approaches to paraprofessional support have been repeatedly found to have detrimental outcomes on educational quality. Conroy argues that:

*“By increasing the use of paraprofessionals in the classroom, administrators have shifted the responsibility for teaching the most unique and complex learners to the least trained and lowest paid workers rather than making fundamental changes in general and special education to meet the needs of all students.”<sup>220</sup>*

Teachers are reported to be less engaged with the student when there is a paraprofessional educator assigned to that student.<sup>221</sup> Consequently, students have limited access to quality, or even adequate and appropriate, teachers and learning opportunities.<sup>222</sup> Where some shared teaching occurs, students have reported a mismatch of information whereby the teacher and the paraprofessional educator would provide conflicting information.<sup>223</sup> Additionally, due to the common approaches to the ways in which paraprofessional educators are expected to work, students often develop ‘learned helplessness’.<sup>224</sup>

Unsurprisingly then, in addition to the lack of positive outcomes and absence of empirical evidence to demonstrate that the use of paraprofessional

educators in the classroom is effective, research provides evidence that paraprofessional support can have a negative impact on student performance. For example, research in primary and secondary schools has found that students receiving paraprofessional support made less progress than students considered to have similar ‘support needs’ who were receiving little or no formal support at all.<sup>225</sup>

#### The impact of paraprofessional presence on peer relationships

It has long been recognised that the model of one-on-one paraprofessional educator support is detrimental to educational outcomes and social engagement. Additionally, research provides evidence that when paraprofessional support is in place, students with disability labels are often physically separated from the rest of the students in the classroom.<sup>226</sup> Unsurprisingly then, the presence of a paraprofessional educator has been found to reduce time with peers.<sup>227</sup> Additionally, having paraprofessional support can influence other students’ perceptions of the capabilities of the student who experiences disability.<sup>228</sup>

Students who experience disability report feeling isolated, stigmatised and rejected by their peers when they have a paraprofessional educator working with them.<sup>229</sup> For example, in research with students’ who have visual impairments who are attending Australian secondary schools, Whitburn found that students who received paraprofessional support compared themselves negatively with their peers.<sup>230</sup> Broer and colleagues argue that on account of the way that paraprofessional support is often implemented, “students are denied typical opportunities to develop peer relationships and a sense of self that is so important for social-emotional maturation”.<sup>231</sup> It has been found that peers often address the paraprofessional educator rather than the student and students who work with paraprofessional educators are often actively teased or rejected by their peers.<sup>232</sup>

#### Student perspectives on paraprofessional support

Too much support from paraprofessional educators can lead to lack of autonomy for students.<sup>233</sup> Students report finding the presence of a paraprofessional educator invasive.<sup>234</sup> For example, some students likened paraprofessional support to having a mother around all the time and reported that it inhibited peer engagement



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Underpinning micro and macro-exclusion is the idea that people who experience disability are in some sense ‘lacking’ or less human than those who are not labelled disabled.

and prevented romantic relationships.<sup>235</sup> Research exploring student perceptions on paraprofessional support finds that students who had paraprofessional educators working with them report beliefs that they are not ‘worthy enough’ to have the teacher’s attention and help.<sup>236</sup> Additionally, students expressed a desire for more independence, finding it ‘embarrassing’ to have the constant presence of the paraprofessional educator.<sup>237</sup> At the same time, students express sympathy, concern and appreciation for the paraprofessionals involved in their lives.<sup>238</sup>

### Transformation, not just trading places

It is clear that exclusion can occur in classrooms claiming to be inclusive.<sup>239</sup> Experiences of exclusion, whether micro or macro, have considerable negative impacts on peer interactions and understandings. In such situations, Rietveld notes that people who experience disability are “likely to internalise the messages that they are inferior, incompetent and undesirable peer group members, which in turn is likely to negatively impact on their motivation to seek inclusion, thus interfering with their learning of culturally-valued skills”.<sup>240</sup>

The misappropriation of the term ‘inclusion’ or ‘inclusive education’ by those actually committed to perpetuating systems of ‘special’ education poses a serious barrier to the realisation of inclusive education.<sup>241</sup> The term ‘special education’ is inherently ‘othering’ and suggests exclusion rather than equal participation.<sup>242</sup> From this (mis)understanding of ‘inclusion’ situations of micro-exclusion occur and are justified. Consequently, “[t]he purpose of inclusion must not be simply to replicate special education services in the general education classroom”.<sup>243</sup>

More blatant segregation occurs in macro-exclusion whereby students are educated in segregated ‘special’ schools or ‘special’ classes or units, rather than together with all peers who do and do not experience disability. If a setting is actually inclusive then “[c]hildren with disabilities are not segregated in the classroom, at lunchtime or on the playground”.<sup>244</sup>

It has long been argued that:

*“Inclusive education is part of a human rights approach to social relations and conditions. The intentions and values involved are an integral part of a vision of the whole society of which education is a part. Therefore the role education plays in the development of an inclusive society is a very serious issue. It is thus important to be clear in our understanding that inclusive education is not about ‘special’ teachers meeting the needs of ‘special’ children ... it is not about ‘dumping’ pupils into an unchanged system of provision and practice. Rather, it is about how, where and why, and with what consequences, we educate all pupils.”*<sup>245</sup>

This means that bringing about inclusive education requires transformation.<sup>246</sup> It requires a deeply thoughtful, reflective and ongoing commitment to enacting change towards inclusion and thus towards a better education for all. One key element is moving beyond conceptualising needs as ‘special’ or ‘additional’. As humans we all have needs. While the ways in which these needs can be or are met vary from one person to another, this does not make our needs ‘special’ or ‘additional’ – they are simply human needs. As I have written elsewhere, “terms like ‘children with special rights’ and ‘children with additional needs’ infer that some children want more than their basic needs and rights. Of course in reality, people who experience disability are fighting for ... basic human rights and needs to be met – not for anything extra”.<sup>247</sup>

### The contributions and challenges of ‘special’ education

Segregated – or ‘special’ – education began approximately a century ago as a then-revolutionary idea that students who experienced disability could and should receive some form of formal education (prior to which most students who experienced disability were denied any formal education). In the decades that followed, gradually questions were raised about whether segregation was necessary and whether it provided the best educational

opportunities. Following the introduction of the 1992 *Disability Discrimination Act*, it became unlawful across Australia for any setting to discriminate against a person on the basis of disability. However, unfortunately, discrimination continues despite national and international law.

As D'Alessio argues, inclusive education "requires the abandonment of special educational stances which focus on compensatory approaches to individual 'needs', to embrace a pedagogy of inclusion and a commitment to the rights of all to belong".<sup>248</sup> This involves abandoning the myth of 'normal' and the associated ableist idea of 'making normal' people who experience disability.<sup>249</sup> From this perspective, a contemporary understanding of inclusive education is possible. However, underpinning micro and macro-exclusion is the idea that people who experience disability are in some sense 'lacking' or less human than those who are not labelled disabled.<sup>250</sup> This fundamentally ableist view must be addressed in order to understand and bring about inclusive education.

Slee writes that:

*"... traditional special education sustains ableist assumptions about disability through longstanding practices of categorisation and separation of children according to deficits. Exclusion is attributed to individual student impairment rather than to the disabling cultures and practices of schooling"*<sup>251</sup>

In the face of ongoing and increasing segregation in education,<sup>252</sup> the legal requirement to transition to a fully inclusive education system is challenging to implement, but absolutely necessary. While the option to exclude remains, both macro and micro-exclusion will flourish and continue to stymie the impetus for the transformation required to achieve genuine inclusive education. Australia needs to move away from parallel systems of 'special' and 'mainstream' education towards shared schools for *everyone*.

- 190 Slee, 2018a, p. 55
- 191 Biklen & Burke, 2006; Rietveld, 2010; Slee, 2004
- 192 Chowdhury, 2011; Jelas & Ali, 2014; Kalyanpur, 2011; Klibthong, 2013; Lilley, 2013; Lilley, 2015; Sharma & Ng, 2014; Sukbunpant, Arthur-Kelly, & Dempsey, 2013
- 193 Miles, Lene, & Merumeru, 2014
- 194 For example: Pirrie, Macleod, Cullen, & McCluskey, 2011
- 195 Sukbunpant, Arthur-Kelly, & Dempsey, 2013
- 196 Florian, 2010; Slee, 2018a; Slee, 2018b
- 197 D'Alessio, 2011
- 198 Cologon, 2014b
- 199 Cologon, 2016
- 200 Cologon & D'Alessio, 2015, p. 185
- 201 Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011, p. 2123; Cologon, 2014b
- 202 Cologon, 2014b, p. 10
- 203 Petriwskyj, 2010, p. 346
- 204 Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2011; Colibaba, Gheorghiu, Colibaba, & Munteanu, 2013; Cologon, 2014b; Curcic, 2009; Lalvani, 2013; Rietveld, 2010
- 205 Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013; Jelas & Ali, 2014
- 206 Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011, p. 2123; Cologon, 2014d
- 207 Cologon, 2012, p. 1158
- 208 Armstrong, 2017; Best, Corcoran, & Slee, 2018; Slee, 2018a
- 209 UN General Assembly, 2016, para 34
- 210 Rutherford, 2012, p. 760
- 211 Conroy, 2007; Devlin, 2008
- 212 Patterson, 2006
- 213 Conroy, 2007; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Rutherford, 2012; Stockall, 2014; Whitburn, 2013
- 214 Brock & Carter, 2015; Conroy, 2007; Lane, Carter, & Sisco, 2012; Whitburn, 2013
- 215 Giangreco, 2010
- 216 Burdick & Causton-Theoharis, 2012; Devlin, 2008; Giangreco & Broer, 2007; Giangreco, 2010; Patterson, 2006; Rutherford, 2012; Saddler, 2014; Webster & Blatchford, 2019
- 217 Breton, 2010; Giangreco & Broer, 2007; Giangreco, 2010; Webster & Blatchford, 2019
- 218 Giangreco & Broer, 2007; Giangreco, 2010; Rutherford, 2012; Saddler, 2014; Webster & Blatchford, 2019

- 219 Burdick & Causton-Theoharis, 2012; Conroy, 2007; Devlin, 2008; Giangreco & Broer, 2007; Giangreco, 2010; Rutherford, 2012; Suter & Giangreco, 2009; Whitburn, 2013
- 220 Conroy, 2007 p. 47
- 221 Conroy, 2007; Giangreco, 2010; Rutherford, 2012; Webster & Blatchford, 2013; Webster & Blatchford, 2015; Webster & Blatchford, 2019
- 222 Brock & Carter, 2015; Conroy, 2007; Martin & Alborz, 2014; Rutherford, 2012; Saddler, 2014; Suter & Giangreco, 2009; Werts et al., 2004; Westover & Martin, 2014; Webster & Blatchford, 2013; Webster & Blatchford, 2015; Webster & Blatchford, 2019
- 223 Broer et al., 2005
- 224 Broer et al., 2005; Conroy, 2007; Saddler, 2014
- 225 Webster & Blatchford, 2019; Saddler, 2014
- 226 Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005; Burdick & Causton-Theoharis, 2012; Conroy, 2007; Devlin, 2008; Giangreco & Broer, 2007; Rutherford, 2012; Webster & Blatchford, 2013; Webster & Blatchford, 2015
- 227 Brock & Carter, 2015; Broer et al., 2005; Burdick & Causton-Theoharis, 2012; Conroy, 2007; Devlin, 2008; Giangreco & Broer, 2007; Giangreco, 2010; Suter & Giangreco, 2009; Webster & Blatchford, 2013; Webster & Blatchford, 2015; Whitburn, 2013
- 228 Broer et al., 2005
- 229 Broer et al., 2005; Rutherford, 2012; Stockall, 2014; Webster & Blatchford, 2019; Whitburn, 2013
- 230 Whitburn, 2013
- 231 Broer et al., 2005, p. 425
- 232 Broer et al., 2005; Conroy 2007; Westover & Martin, 2014
- 233 Suter & Giangreco, 2009; Webster & Blatchford, 2013; Webster & Blatchford, 2015; Webster & Blatchford, 2019; Whitburn, 2013
- 234 Rutherford, 2012; Whitburn, 2013
- 235 Broer et al., 2005
- 236 Broer et al., 2005; Rutherford, 2012
- 237 Broer et al., 2005
- 238 Rutherford, 2012
- 239 D'Alessio, 2011; Curcic, 2009; Purdue, Ballard, & MacArthur, 2001; Rietveld, 2010
- 240 Rietveld, 2010, p. 27
- 241 Allan, 2010; Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011; D'Alessio, 2011; Lalvani, 2013
- 242 Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2011
- 243 McLeskey & Waldron, 2007, pp.162-163
- 244 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2013, p. 29
- 245 Barton, 1997, p.234
- 246 Giangreco & Suter, 2015; Slee, 2018a
- 247 Cologon, 2014d, p. 59
- 248 D'Alessio, 2011, p. 141
- 249 Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011; Connor & Goldmansour, 2012; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2011
- 250 Ainscow, 2007; Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011; Biklen & Burke, 2006; Rietveld, 2010
- 251 Slee, 2018b, p. 14
- 252 Anderson & Boyle, 2015; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2017; Graham, & Sweller, 2011; Guldberg, Parsons, MacLeod, Jones, Prunty, & Balfe, 2011; Shaw, 2017; Valle, Connor, Broderick, Bejoian, & Baglieri, 2011



## CHAPTER FIVE

# Uncovering ableism in education



As outlined in the previous chapter, despite the research evidence and the considerable efforts of so many people, segregation and exclusion in education is flourishing.<sup>253</sup>

The guises and modes of justification for segregation continue to become simultaneously more insidious, more sophisticated and – perhaps ironically – more blatant. Weary and wearying phrases such as “inclusive education is a good idea, BUT...” or “I do believe in inclusion, BUT...” power on. So powerful are these ways of thinking and so insidious is the stigmatisation that leads to the perception of ‘respectable’ exclusion of so many children and young people, that somehow inclusive education becomes perceived as the territory of opinion and preference, rather than a universal and fundamental human right with the support of research evidence and ethical considerations. The question is, why? So many people for so many years have worked to bring inclusive education to a reality. Both ‘mainstream’ teachers and proponents of ‘special’ education alike are almost universally caring, well-meaning and hardworking people who are all seeking positive outcomes for students who experience disability. The failings of our education systems are not wished for or intentional. There is much good will. However, thriving in the underlife is rampant and unchecked ableism thwarting efforts towards inclusion at every turn.

The ableist perpetuation of exclusion and segregation is, at its core, based on the myth of the ‘normal person’. This notion of a ‘normal person’ necessarily results in a division of people into ‘normal’ – which is then taken to be ‘human’ – and the inferred ‘Other’, which is constructed as ‘abnormal’.<sup>254</sup> From an ableist viewpoint, therefore, a student who experiences disability is negatively constructed as ‘abnormal’ and the myth of the ‘normal student’ is an example of ableist thinking. This difficult to shake belief is so deeply entrenched at the basis of so many approaches to and beliefs about education. The resulting parallel myth is that of the pathologised ‘special educational needs child’.<sup>255</sup> Our education systems are built around the notion of this mythical creature and success or failure in schooling depends in very large part on how close to or far from ‘passing’ for ‘normal’ a person can be. Echoing Foucault<sup>256</sup>, the power of this myth is incessantly reproduced as we continue to seek to shape, tame and discipline ourselves and each other. This endeavour leads to misery not only for people constructed by ableist inference, as ‘subnormal’ or ‘abnormal’, but also for people constructed as ‘normal’ who must perpetually

seek to live up to this notion and who, as Goodley, Liddiard and Runswick-Cole argue, are inevitably plunged “into emotional turmoil”.<sup>257</sup>

Extensive and elaborate processes of sorting, classifying, categorising and labelling create an illusion of legitimacy to the myth of the ‘normal person’. For example, as Slee unpacks, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, now in its fifth edition, “attempts to standardize *post hoc* – it forms a shaky science that becomes the basis for the classification and management of students who trouble, or are troubled by, the cultures, structures and operation of a school system”.<sup>258</sup> Under globalised neoliberal reforms to education, these collective fictions are shrouded in the continuing spin-off of further myths characterised by a “punitive and paternalistic benevolence”, from which some of us, who are cast as ‘sub-normal’, ‘defective’ or in some sense ‘less than’, are conditionally ‘accepted’ into the margins of society, thus commencing on a journey of a life apart.<sup>259</sup> These ‘collective fictions’ enable tolerance, acceptance, or even promotion of segregation and the continuation of exclusionary systems of schooling.<sup>260</sup>

### Ableism: enculturated exclusion

Purdue and colleagues write that inclusive education involves “all children, families and adults’ rights to participate in environments where diversity is assumed, welcomed and viewed as a rich resource rather than seen as a problem”.<sup>261</sup> However, in a culture where disability is commonly viewed as a tragic within-person characteristic, this is challenging to achieve. As noted above, ableism is a dehumanising process in which we create a ‘them’ and ‘us’ whereby some people are constructed as an ‘Inferior Other’, as less, as ‘different’, as undesirable, as pitiable, as needing to be ‘fixed’ or changed, as sub-human.<sup>262</sup> Ableism plays out insidiously in everyday situations. The sense that an interaction or relationship between a person who does and a person who doesn’t experience disability is somehow benevolent on the part of the non-disabled person; the frequently unquestioned inaccessibility of places, events and materials; patronising interactions such as the often cited congratulatory remarks that a person who experiences disability may receive from strangers for simply being out and about – these are all examples of ableism. So too is the internalised ableism where a person views themselves as inferior or lesser due to impairment. Like racism, sexism and homophobia, for example, ableism results in stigma, including discrimination. From an ableist perspective, disability is

cast as diminished state of being. However, ableism remains little recognised, so much so that Hodge and Runswick-Cole suggest that “[t]he practices of ableism are negotiated and agreed without ever being overtly recognised and acknowledged”.<sup>263</sup> Ableism involves discrimination and exclusion based on legitimising the notion of the ‘Inferior Other’ and the idea that ‘fixing’ or changing a ‘broken person’ is a benevolent and necessary act as a response to the ‘tragedy’ and ‘deficit’ of disability. “Like racism, ableism directs structural power relations in society, generating inequalities located in institutional relations and social processes.”<sup>264</sup> These discriminatory inequalities have powerful implications in terms of barriers to genuine inclusion in education.<sup>265</sup>

The myth of ‘normal’ – and therefore the myth that there is a ‘perfect’ way to be – paves the way for ableism. At the core of ableist thinking is the belief “that impairment (irrespective of ‘type’) is inherently negative which should, if the opportunity presents itself, be ameliorated, cured or indeed eliminated”.<sup>266</sup> Ableist thinking results in a view of disability as a tragic within-person difference and creates an understanding of some people as ‘normal’ compared to a less ideal ‘Other’.<sup>267</sup> This myth of a ‘normal’ student is central to exclusionary approaches to education, in which all children and young people are compared to a mythical ‘normal’ student and frequently found (or pathologised as) ‘lacking’.<sup>268</sup> Therefore, the focus becomes about ‘fixing’ or ‘curing’ a person (or preventing or eliminating existence), rather than recognising that as humans we are all unique and impairment is simply one aspect of human diversity.<sup>269</sup> In contrast, a social model understanding of disability, as promoted within the disabled persons’ movement, recognises that a person who experiences disability is whole and unbroken, but is disabled by the unaccommodating and ableist views, practices, systems and structures of society.<sup>270</sup>

Ableism is easily absorbed uncritically, as we demonstrate to children and young people – through micro and macro-exclusion in education and more broadly through commonly-accepted beliefs and practices, all forms of media and resources, and the design and creation of places and spaces – that some people are ‘Inferior Others’ and thus create a subclass of ‘disabled’.<sup>271</sup> Acceptance of the myth of

‘normal’ is so powerful and widespread that the idea that children and young people who experience disability should be permanently engaged in the pursuit of ‘becoming normal’ is seldom even challenged.<sup>272</sup> This social oppression impacts negatively on the “psycho-emotional well-being of people categorised as ‘impaired’ by those deemed ‘normal’”.<sup>273</sup> The depth of enculturation of ableism is such that those of us who experience disability can blame ourselves, rather than oppressive systems and structures, for ableist oppression and develop self-loathing and dislike of other people who experience disability and consequently accept or even promote segregation.<sup>274</sup> Hodge and Runswick-Cole argue: “Disabled children will not always be able to articulate their experience of ableism. They may assume that the fault lies in them because of their impairment rather than in disabling environments”.<sup>275</sup> Additionally, research involving students who do not experience disability demonstrates strong deficit-based perceptions of disability as impairment.<sup>276</sup>

“Ableism is deeply and subliminally embedded within the culture”<sup>277</sup> and rapidly internalised by people who do and do not experience disability.<sup>278</sup> Children are particularly at risk of this internalisation.<sup>279</sup> While the research about inclusive education with students who experience disability is still limited, extant research is reflective of the effects of internalised ableism as students resign themselves, accept or even perceive as benevolent, their own segregation.<sup>280</sup> Additionally, segregation creates a situation where many students grow up without peers who they are aware experience disability, thus creating an unspoken ‘othering’. By contrast, research provides evidence of positive attitude development between peers when students are educated together.<sup>281</sup>

It is not possible to bring about inclusive education in reality whilst engaging in ableist, and therefore deficit-based, views and practices.<sup>282</sup> However, due to the lack of awareness of ableism and its impacts, for most people ableist beliefs operate at a subconscious level. From a more hopeful perspective, Bacon and Causton-Theoharis observe that “if all parties learn to view disability as a positive identity category, medicalising, dehumanising, and deficit-oriented discourse and practices are unlikely to prevail”.<sup>283</sup> Recognising ableism, and identifying ableist views and practices, is a critical first step in a process that has been paralleled to emerging from racist to anti-racist views.<sup>284</sup>

Acceptance of the notion that children and young people can be excluded from ‘mainstream’ education because they are labelled ‘disabled’ “amounts to institutional discrimination”<sup>285</sup> and is an example of ableist views playing out in practice. Research provides evidence that, even for those who view inclusive education as optimal for all students, “interpretations of ‘all’ rendered certain students inappropriate candidates”.<sup>286</sup> This preparedness to exclude children and young people based on categories or labels of disability demonstrates ableist discrimination at the individual level. This, along with the examples of micro-exclusion explored in chapter four, would not be acceptable from a non-ableist viewpoint. Lack of awareness of ableism, and of the role people and institutions play in constructing disability, creates the conditions to perpetuate discrimination<sup>287</sup> and therefore ableism.<sup>288</sup>

Inclusive education is only possible when ableist views and practices are critically examined. As Connor and Goldmansour write:

*“...students should learn with, and from, each other – coming to know true diversity in terms of physical, cognitive, sensory, and emotional differences. In this way, artificial notions of ‘normalcy’ that have served to diminish and devalue ‘disabled’ children for so long can begin to change. As microcosms of society, classrooms must come to reflect, exemplify, and engage with actual diversity.”*<sup>289</sup>

Thus, inclusive practice within classrooms not only *requires* the disestablishment of ableism, but inclusive education also *provides* the ideal conditions from which to address the disestablishment of ableism in society as a whole. This process holds the potential for the realisation of inclusive education and the creation of the conditions in which all children and young people can flourish.

253 Tomlinson, 2017; Slee, 2018a

254 Campbell, 2012

255 Rutherford, 2016; Slee, 2018a; Slee, 2018b

256 In his 1979 work *Discipline and Punish* Michel Foucault discusses the 19th century culture of ‘policing’ ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’, resulting in an internalised ‘disciplinary gaze’ from which we monitor our own bodies to reflect a particular way of being that we have been enculturated to believe is ‘normal’ and ‘acceptable’ or ‘desirable’. This lens is strongly reflected in the identification and framing of ableism.

257 Goodley, Liddiard, & Runswick-Cole, 2018, p. 209

258 Slee, 2018a, p. 54

259 Tomlinson, 2017, p. 4

260 Slee, 2018a

261 Purdue, Gordon-Burns, Gunn, Madden, & Surtees, 2009, p. 807

262 Campbell, 2009; Cologon & Thomas, 2014; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013

263 Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013, p. 322

264 McLean, 2008, p. 607

265 Carrington, Mercer, Iyer, & Selva, 2015; Lalvani, 2013; Lalvani & Bacon, 2019; Wright, 2017

266 Campbell, 2009, p. 154

267 Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013; Leiter, 2007; Loja, Costa, Hughes & Menezes, 2013; McLean, 2008

268 Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011; Rutherford, 2016

269 Cologon, 2013b; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013

270 Oliver & Barnes, 2010; Tregaskis, 2002

271 Beckett, 2014; Slee, 2004

272 Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013; Lalvani & Bacon, 2019; Rutherford, 2016

273 Thomas, 2012, p. 211

274 Campbell, 2009; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013

275 Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013

276 Beckett, 2014

277 Campbell, 2009, p. 153

278 *Ibid*

279 Reeve, 2004

280 Hodge & Runswick-Cole 2013

281 Consiglio, Guarnera, & Magnano, 2015

282 Cologon & Thomas, 2014; Macartney, 2012; Sharma, Moore, & Sonawane, 2009; Rietveld, 2014

283 Bacon & Causton-Theoharis, 2012, p. 696

284 McLean, 2008

285 Booth & Ainscow, 2011, p. 43

286 Lalvani, 2013, p. 24

287 Booth & Ainscow, 2011

288 Broderick, Hawkins, Henze, Mirasol-Spath, Pollack-Berkovits, Clune, Skovera, & Steel, 2012; Harpur, 2012

289 Connor & Goldmansour, 2012, p. 31



## CHAPTER SIX

- **Broken promises  
and further barriers  
to inclusion**



*“Rights promise much but often give very little in reality”<sup>290</sup>*

The tragic reality of the current failure to uphold the right to inclusive education for every student is the personal toll for students and families when inclusion is promised but not delivered.<sup>291</sup> Indeed, false promises of inclusive education, where none is actually offered and instead micro – and even macro – exclusion is dressed up as ‘inclusion’, pose a serious threat to inclusive education and come at a high individual cost. Additionally, the perpetuation of misunderstandings of inclusion create situations where students are devalued and receive totally unacceptable educational experiences.

On the basis of student and family perspectives, Margrain and Farrugia argue that “policy and discourse are not enough to ensure inclusion. Professionals, including teachers, school leaders and wider community advocates, need to take stronger action to support inclusion, to minimise exclusion, and to foster partnership with families”.<sup>292</sup> Student and family experiences of inclusive education are diverse. However, research provides evidence that many families frequently encounter considerable resistance and extensive gatekeeping practices when they seek an inclusive education for a student who experiences disability.<sup>293</sup> Additionally, even when students ‘make it through the school gate’, often the student is not included in reality and therefore is not welcome and does not experience belonging, genuine participation and opportunities, and having their contribution recognised and valued.<sup>294</sup> Students and families express considerable distress and negative psychosocial impacts as a consequence of these exclusionary experiences and, despite the ongoing mantra of ‘parent choice’, can be left feeling that they have no option other than segregated education.<sup>295</sup> Students and families may be left feeling that inclusive education has failed them, or is a failure. In fact, what they have experienced is *not* inclusive education. These instead are tragic examples of *exclusion* that are misrepresented to students and families as inclusion not working.

As detailed in chapters three and four, misunderstandings of inclusion form a major barrier to the realisation of the right to an inclusive education. Underpinning (as well as reaching far beyond) these misunderstandings, as outlined in chapter five, is ableism. Because ableism is rife and rarely recognised, common ableist views –

“ The perpetuation of misunderstandings of inclusion create situations where students are devalued and receive totally unacceptable educational experiences.

including tragedy and deficit-based perspectives on disability – frequently lead to ableist actions, including within education.<sup>296</sup> Consequently, alongside other anti-bias approaches such as those directed at addressing racism, sexism and homophobia, efforts towards inclusive education need to be intentionally anti-ableist, and founded upon non-ableist understandings of inclusive education. Addressing attitudinal and structural barriers is therefore essential.

Booth and Ainscow argue that:

*“Learning and participation are impeded when children encounter ‘barriers’. These can occur in an interaction with any aspect of a school: its buildings and physical arrangement; school organisation, cultures and policies; the relationship between and amongst children and adults; and approaches to teaching and learning. Barriers may be found, too, outside the boundaries of the school within families and communities, and within national and international events and policies.”<sup>297</sup>*

Exploring further the barriers to inclusive education, in this chapter I will address additional research regarding the impact of beliefs and attitudes.

### **Ableist cultures**

Students’ attitudes and choices are significantly shaped by the attitudes of their family and communities.<sup>298</sup> Research provides evidence to suggest the presence of negative community views about inclusion and a lack of awareness of disabling processes.<sup>299</sup> Ableist attitudes are frequently uncritically presented in books, toys, television, movies, social and other media.<sup>300</sup> A lack of support for students who are learning about inclusion has also been identified.<sup>301</sup>

Stemming from consciously or subconsciously ableist beliefs and practices, negative attitudes towards, and fears about, inclusion have been found to be major barriers to inclusive education. In a considerable body of research from across the world, the beliefs and attitudes of teachers, and others, have been found to be critical to preventing or facilitating inclusive education.<sup>302</sup> As previously noted, research finds that teachers hold a number of concerns about inclusive education, particularly in relation to inadequate support and resources, fear or lack of confidence in teacher knowledge and competency, and concerns about positively supporting the behaviour of diverse groups of students.<sup>303</sup>

The environment and culture of an education setting influences the ways in which teachers interact with students who experience disability, as well as teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education.<sup>304</sup> While much of the research focuses on the attitudes of classroom teachers, school, preschool, and centre leaders play a key role in creating the culture of a setting. Graham and Spandagou<sup>305</sup> found that principals' perceptions of inclusion are formed by their own understandings of inclusion, as well as the context of the school they are in. "The process is reciprocal: context influences perceptions, perceptions influence attitudes and, in return, attitudes influence the context."<sup>306</sup> In Graham and Spandagou's research, principals expressed clearly ableist views, making a strong distinction between students who were viewed

as 'normal' and those who, by inference, were viewed as 'sub-normal'. Unsurprisingly, this impacted negatively on attitudes towards inclusive education.<sup>307</sup> These findings are consistent with evidence of negative attitudes of staff in administrative positions within every level of the education system.<sup>308</sup>

### Support and resourcing for inclusive education

Concerns regarding inadequate resources and limited support for inclusive education have been widely reported.<sup>309</sup> Issues of inadequate teacher education for inclusion, a subsequent lack of confidence, skills and knowledge, and issues regarding misunderstandings of and misuse of paraprofessional support sit alongside concerns about inadequate teacher-student ratios and insufficient support staff. These concerns are intensified when difficulties are encountered with collaboration or due to limited leadership for inclusion. Insufficient time for teachers to prepare educational experiences, rigid curricula, one-size-fits-all approaches and the negative impacts of the neo-liberal agenda in education are also key issues. Additionally, limited access to materials and learning resources are identified. Concerns are also raised regarding limited information available to support teachers and families in working together towards inclusive education. In addressing these concerns, a key issue is the need for careful redistribution of the existing resources. The current inequitable distribution of resources within the Australian education system is a barrier to inclusive education.<sup>310</sup> While increased resourcing for inclusive education is clearly needed, this does not necessarily require additional resourcing overall, in that the extensive resources that are currently directed towards segregated education settings can be redirected to support transformation to genuine inclusive education for all. This is an important part of the process of transitioning from the current parallel systems of education to an inclusive system, as required under international law (see chapter three for further discussion).

The representation of students who experience disability in education materials is also an area of concern. The deficit-based and stereotypical representation or absence of representation in materials including books, posters, toys, television, movies, social and other media, as noted above, perpetuates ableism and forms a barrier to inclusive education.<sup>311</sup>

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Negative attitudes towards, and fears about, inclusion have been found to be major barriers to inclusive education.

In addressing these barriers, care needs to be taken not to (re)produce ableist approaches. An emphasis on resources without consideration of the structure and culture within a setting may result in deficit-based thinking that undermines the very meaning of inclusive education.<sup>312</sup> Additionally, lack of resources is often used as an excuse for not allowing students who experience disability to participate or enrol in an education setting.<sup>313</sup> Providing support for teachers is essential to facilitating inclusion. However, the provision of support needs to be approached from an understanding of inclusive education and an active desire to resist ableism.

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290 Runswick-Cole & Goodley 2015, p. 173

291 Brede, Remington, Kenny, Warren, K., & Pellicano, 2017; Margrain & Farruga, 2018

292 Margrain & Farruga, 2018, p. 107

293 Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), (2017); Lilley, 2013; Poed, Cologon, & Jackson, 2017; Wills, Morton, McLean, Stephenson, & Slee, 2014

294 Brede, Remington, Kenny, Warren, & Pellicano, 2017; Cologon, 2014a; Runswick-Cole, 2008

295 Brede, Remington, Kenny, Warren, & Pellicano, 2017; Cologon, 2014a; Lilley, 2013; Runswick-Cole, 2008

296 Cologon & Thomas, 2014

297 Booth & Ainscow, 2011, p. 40

298 Diamond & Huang, 2005; Hollingsworth & Buysse, 2009

299 Beckett, 2009; Diamond & Huang, 2005; Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009; Fox, Farrell, & Davis, 2004; Frankel, Gold, & Ajodhia-Andrews, 2010; Mayer, 2009

300 Beckett, 2009; Bond, 2013; Cologon, 2013c; Diamond & Huang, 2005; Ellis, 2015; Hodgkinson, 2012; Lalvani & Bacon, 2019; Martinez-Bello & Martinez-Bello, 2016; Salvador, 2017

301 Rietveld, 2010

302 Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007; Berlach & Chambers, 2011; Carlson, Hemmings, Wurf, & Reupert, 2012; Carrington, Mercer, Iyer, & Selva, 2015; Cologon, 2012; Curcic, 2009; Emam & Mohamed, 2011; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Graham & Spandagou, 2011; Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011; Hsieh, Hsieh, Ostrosky, & McCollum, 2012; Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Kalyanpur, 2011; Kasa-Hendrickson & Kluth, 2005; Lalvani, 2013; Price, 2009; Sharma, Moore, & Sonawane, 2009; Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2012; Thaver & Lim, 2014; Varcoe & Boyle, 2014; Villa, Van Tac, Muc, Ryan, Thuy, Weill, et al., 2003

303 Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Carrington, Mercer, Iyer, & Selva, 2015; Cologon, 2012; Emam & Mohamed, 2011; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Forlin, Keen, & Barrett, 2008; Hemmings, & Woodcock, 2011; Hsieh, Hsieh, Ostrosky, & McCollum, 2012; Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Kim, 2013; Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2008; Suculoğlu, Bakkaloğlu, Karasu, Demir, & Akalin, 2013; Thaver & Lim, 2014; Varcoe & Boyle, 2014

304 Kasa-Hendrickson & Kluth, 2005

305 Graham & Spandagou, 2011

306 *Ibid*, p. 226

307 *Ibid*

308 Frankel, Gold, & Ajodhia-Andrews, 2010; Hurley & Horn, 2010; Purdue, Gordon-Burns, Gunn, Madden, & Surtees, 2009

309 Beckett, 2009; Biklen & Burke, 2006; Brown, Packer, & Passmore, 2013; Cologon, 2012; Deng & Poon-McBrayer, 2012; Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009; Frankel, Gold, & Ajodhia-Andrews, 2010; Hemmings, & Woodcock, 2011; Horrocks, White, & Roberts, 2008; Huang, & Diamond, 2009; Jordan, Glenn, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010; Kalyanpur, 2011; Kim, 2013; Klibthong, 2013; McDonald & Tufue-Dolgoy, 2013; Mogharreban & Bruns, 2009; Morris & Sharma, 2011; Petriwskyj, 2010; Petriwskyj, 2010; Purdue, Gordon-Burns, Gunn, Madden, & Surtees, 2009; Selvaraj, 2015; Strogilos, 2012; Suculoğlu, Bakkaloğlu, Karasu, Demir, & Akalin, 2013; Sukbunpant, Arthur-Kelly, & Dempsey, 2013; Theodorou & Nind, 2010; Zhang, 2011

310 Granite & Graham, 2012

311 Beckett, 2009; Bond, 2013; Cologon, 2013c; Diamond & Huang, 2005; Ellis, 2015; Hodgkinson, 2012; Lalvani & Bacon, 2019; Martinez-Bello & Martinez-Bello, 2016; Salvador, 2017

312 Purdue, Gordon-Burns, Gunn, Madden, & Surtees, 2009

313 *Ibid*





## CHAPTER SEVEN

# **‘Un-othering’: transformation towards inclusion**

In sum, it is clear that the extant research provides strong support for inclusive education. At the same time, it is equally clear that there are currently significant barriers that need to be addressed in order to make inclusive education a reality for all.

In this final chapter I will draw together research to consider some of the key issues that need to be addressed in working towards inclusive education, concluding with policy recommendations.

As noted at the start of this report, it is important to recognise the many students, families, teachers, paraprofessional educators, principals, education department staff and others who work tirelessly every day to support inclusive education. There are many challenges and raising the issues identified within the research literature should not be read as a criticism of individuals, but rather as an attempt to draw to light important issues that require careful consideration if inclusive education is to become a reality in Australia – and as a support to all efforts towards genuine inclusion.

Ending the option to exclude by transitioning from parallel systems of ‘special’ and ‘mainstream’ education to an inclusive education system for all is a necessary, long overdue and fundamental step. In Australia, this requires serious state and federal government commitments to inclusive education, and associated legislation, policy, and appropriate provision and distribution of funding. A key and straightforward starting point is to ensure no further segregated settings (schools, preschools, classes, centres, or ‘units’) are created. Transitioning from the current segregated parallel ‘special’ and ‘mainstream’ settings to inclusive settings is essential but is also more complex and needs to be done with considerable care.

To avoid simply relocating students whilst maintaining ableist micro-exclusion, more than co-location is required. Without a paradigm shift away from ableist understandings of human diversity, misunderstandings of inclusive education as deficit-based ‘special’ education will persist.<sup>314</sup> This means that any genuine efforts towards transformation for inclusion necessarily require actively working towards a culture of inclusion within and beyond education settings and systems, including directly working to identify and disestablish ableism in all forms and at all levels.

Within this transition, it is important to ensure that the highest possible quality of education is provided to every student at all times. Inclusive education is quality education and is a necessary precursor to this goal.

As explored in the next section of this chapter, there are considerable attitudinal barriers to the culture shift required. From within ‘special’ education, despite the lack of research evidence to support the notion (see chapter two), barriers include the contradictory concern that ending segregated education will reduce the opportunity for quality education and a fear that it will render those who have dedicated their lives to ‘special’ education redundant. Within ‘mainstream’ settings these barriers include fear of not being able to provide quality education for all children, alongside an ableist misunderstanding, perpetuated by the current option to exclude, that children who have been ascribed disability labels are ‘intruders’ in ‘mainstream’ settings and might ‘better belong elsewhere’. Reflecting on these issues not only raises the matter of the culture shift required, but also the practical considerations needed for transformation towards inclusive education.

In the remainder of the chapter, a range of aspects of the research are explored with the intention of supporting these processes of change. Before engaging with these, though, it is important to acknowledge both the magnitude of this change and the fact that it happens little by little in everyday exchanges. A necessary starting point is always to consider the existing strengths within any given system or setting. It is from what we already know we can do well that we can move forward to address what it is we need

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A key and straightforward starting point is to ensure no further segregated settings (schools, preschools, classes, centres, or ‘units’) are created.

to do better. Additionally, it is important to start with a clear vision of where we are heading, why, and what steps are needed to get there. From here, we can engage in an ongoing iterative cycle of planning and review – implementing, observing, reflecting, and then planning again. Examples from research and practice can assist in getting a clearer picture of this process in action.<sup>315</sup> In getting started, it may be helpful to:

- document a clear vision and shared set of values for working towards inclusion
- create a 'space' to work together to build a shared understanding and collaborative starting point, and provide resources and support to enable this
- identify current strengths and enablers (practical and attitudinal)
- identify current barriers (practical and attitudinal)
- document what change is needed:
  - what will this change 'look like' when it has happened?
  - will this change be consistent with inclusive values?
- build on current strengths and acknowledge current barriers, identify the steps that might enable the process of transformation from 'where we are' to 'where we are going'
- determine what support, knowledge and skills are needed to enable these steps
- identify where this support and learning can come from

- choose a starting point (small and bigger) and begin
- take action, document, observe, reflect, review and continue this cycle.

In the remainder of this chapter the research evidence is examined to identify some key factors that may facilitate this transformation towards inclusive education. While ongoing research is required, there are a number of areas for which the research provides a strong basis to progress this transformation.

### Attitudes and beliefs about inclusive education

Discussion has long been held about the *potential* of education to bring about social change.<sup>316</sup> As explored in chapter two, research provides evidence to demonstrate that as people we are not born prejudiced, however, we develop and demonstrate prejudice early in childhood as we are enculturated into the dominant ways of thinking and being.<sup>317</sup> In fact, research provides evidence that as early as two years of age, children's conversations and behaviours demonstrate ableist enculturation<sup>318</sup>, and by the age of three, children will identify people or groups of people they 'like' or 'dislike' on the basis of symbols of conflict or stigma.<sup>319</sup> By age six, children will make unsolicited prejudiced statements consistent with internalised cultural preferences.<sup>320</sup> Awareness of the processes of enculturation emphasises the importance of working with children from young ages to foster a culture of inclusion and actively seeking to break the cycle of entrenched ableism. However, these childhood processes of enculturation are unlikely to change until attitudes begin to change amongst adults within and beyond education systems, including across the community and within media and government.<sup>321</sup>

If the adults seeking to foster a culture of inclusion have not examined their own attitudes and practices, they are likely to perpetuate the cycle of ableism, ultimately preventing the realisation of inclusive education. The importance of listening and learning together with children and young people is therefore particularly pertinent.<sup>322</sup>

While it is common to advocate for 'disability awareness' as part of the efforts towards a culture of inclusion, this tends to be interpreted to mean awareness of characteristics associated with disability labels. A critical aspect of working towards inclusion does in fact involve a form of 'disability awareness' – that is, disability equity education. This involves developing awareness of ableism and working to resist dominant negative and normative

“ If the adults seeking to foster a culture of inclusion have not examined their own attitudes and practices, they are likely to perpetuate the cycle of ableism, ultimately preventing the realisation of inclusive education. ”

narratives or understandings of impairment or ‘disability’.<sup>323</sup> It entails processes of engaging in developing critical understandings of disability and our shared humanity. Disability equity education involves using or developing resources or pedagogies that represent impairment as a valued form of human diversity. This process of learning therefore involves developing understandings to recognise all people who experience disability as full, whole, capable, valued, contributing, diverse and active beings. It challenges the ‘othering’ of people with disability and the notion of an ‘us versus them’ by recognising that there is no ‘them’ – we are all ‘us’. Supporting students and teachers to engage in disability equity education opens possibilities for actively reducing the barriers that result in the experience of disability for many people.<sup>324</sup>

Openness to learning through mistakes and ongoing development as a teacher has also been found to be critical, along with working collaboratively with parents and other teachers.<sup>325</sup> Level of parental education has been found to influence attitudes towards inclusion.<sup>326</sup> These findings are consistent with a growing body of research demonstrating the importance of teacher attitudes for bringing about inclusive education.<sup>327</sup> It is important to note that research provides evidence to suggest that differences in teachers’ attitudes result in differences in teaching practices overall, not just related to students who experience disability.<sup>328</sup>

In longitudinal research, Jordan and colleagues provide evidence to demonstrate that when teachers take on the attitude and belief that they are responsible for and have a valuable role to play in the education of *all* students (specifically including students who experience disability), these teachers engage with *all* students more often and at higher cognitive levels.<sup>329</sup> Consequently, “inclusive teachers are more engaged and proactive educators”.<sup>330</sup> This means that teachers need to be committed to the education of all students in their groups or classes.<sup>331</sup> Differences in teachers’ beliefs result in differences in teaching practices overall, not just related to students who experience disability.<sup>332</sup> These findings contribute to the recognition of the importance of teacher attitudes towards inclusive education, in order to bring about the best possible education for all students – whether or not students experience disability. Indeed, a reciprocal relationship forms between attitudes and practice, in which inclusive attitudes create the conditions for engaging in inclusive practice, in turn resulting in more inclusive attitudes.

The attitudinal transformation required for inclusive education is premised on the disestablishment of ableism. To disestablish ableism in education, Hehir<sup>333</sup> argues that it is necessary to:

- acknowledge that ableism exists within our systems of education
- actively seek to unravel the effects ableism is having (deconstructing dominant ableist practices)
- welcome and embrace impairment as one of the many and valuable aspects of human diversity (along with diverse cultural backgrounds and genders, for example)
- avoid negative stereotyping and eliminate patronising approaches and representations
- actively seek to incorporate and celebrate multiple modes of participation
- debunk the myth that ‘special’ education (segregated education) is superior to education of all students together
- develop an understanding of and willingness to engage with principles of universal design for learning
- provide appropriate support within ‘mainstream’ settings when needed to ensure equitable access to education (e.g. providing and/or teaching braille, assistance with setting up AAC systems)
- ensure that the education of allied support providers (e.g. teachers of the D/deaf, braille teachers and allied health therapists) enables the provision of adequate support to teachers in developing key skills (fluent signing, knowledge of how to teach braille, etc), as well as supporting recognition of and resistance to ableism, and includes the ability to collaborate with teachers to support inclusive education
- apply principles of universal design for learning.

As explored throughout, perpetuation of the ‘special’ education paradigm, rather than resulting in inclusive education, further entrenches ableist thinking and practices. Transformation of education systems, policies and practices is required. This involves critical engagement with all aspects of education settings and systems, including examining the environment and addressing the physical arrangement of rooms, and ensuring that when students are arranged into groups that these do not create micro-exclusion (e.g. ability grouping or streaming) and instead are flexible and heterogeneous groups.<sup>334</sup> Additionally, it is essential

“ Teachers who receive education about inclusive education have been found to be more likely to have positive attitudes towards students who experience disability.

to ensure that the classroom teacher remains responsible to and for all students and that teachers, educational leaders and allied professionals work effectively and collaboratively to support inclusive education.<sup>335</sup> Consideration of inclusive approaches to assessment are essential to reveal student capabilities (rather than using inadequate or inappropriate methods of testing), as well as careful consideration of the approaches to communicating assessment processes and outcomes.<sup>336</sup> A strong emphasis on developing positive relationships, culture and climate within the classroom is also fundamental.<sup>337</sup>

Fostering positive attitudes at all levels and within all processes is a major component of inclusive education. In addition to openness and willingness to bring about inclusive education and active resistance to ableist practices (and alongside concerted efforts towards universal approaches to learning and teaching), teachers and school leaders require support to adapt the environment and materials as required for the participation of individual students.<sup>338</sup> This requires a combination of resources and the support of allied professionals. While all support needs to be implemented carefully to avoid creating micro-exclusion, as discussed earlier, this support is at least as important in inclusive as in segregated education. Teachers need to be supported to develop strategies for communication and participation as required, thus teachers of the Deaf and braille teachers, as well as allied health professionals, for example, play an important role in working together with students, teachers and families to support inclusive education.<sup>339</sup>

Teachers and other professionals often benefit from support to develop understanding about roles and responsibilities in the education of students who experience disability.<sup>340</sup> As illustrated through the examination of the research evidence regarding the role of paraprofessional educators, careful consideration of and communication about the roles of all professionals is essential to avoid creating situations of micro-exclusion.<sup>341</sup>

Regular collaboration with all members of the education team, including parents, and allied support professionals is required.<sup>342</sup> This involves allied professionals working with teachers and families, rather than with students directly. At times it may be appropriate for support to be provided in a 'push-in' model of learning, where a support staff member is directly involved within classroom practice, rather than a traditional (and always exclusionary) 'pull-out' model.<sup>343</sup> However, any such 'push-in' support needs to be implemented in a genuinely inclusive manner and as part of a universal approach to education for all. This means ensuring that intended support does not end up constituting micro-exclusion. Consulting students regarding the support they need and how they believe this is best implemented is essential within this process.<sup>344</sup>

Addressing the changes required to meet these recommendations requires action at many levels – one key aspect is teacher education.

### Teacher education for inclusive education

Teacher attitudes influence the implementation of inclusive practices in the classroom.<sup>345</sup> Teacher education is directly related to teacher attitudes.<sup>346</sup> Given the importance and implications of teacher attitudes<sup>347</sup>, and the relationships between ableism and negative views towards inclusive education, McLean argues that engaging professionals in processes of examining their beliefs and attitudes, and disestablishing ableist views, is an ethical obligation for teacher education.<sup>348</sup> Additionally, what teachers do in the present can create change 'for the better'.<sup>349</sup>

Inadequate, or severely inadequate, teacher education for inclusion is a major barrier to inclusive education.<sup>350</sup> Forlin finds that teacher education for inclusion "in most regions has been tokenistic at best and non-existent at worst".<sup>351</sup> Furthermore, it is not only the pre-service education that teachers receive, but also ongoing professional development that needs to focus on inclusive education.<sup>352</sup> This is essential because education contexts (and broader contexts) change frequently, because inclusive education



is an ongoing process, and because there are many teachers currently in service who have had limited education in terms of inclusive education and require professional development to further develop their skills and understandings.<sup>353</sup> For this reason, research finds that less experienced teachers (who have been more recently educated) are more likely to hold positive attitudes towards inclusive education.<sup>354</sup> Recognising that teachers' understanding of education grows as they gain experience is also relevant in terms of acknowledging the need for pre-service as well as ongoing teacher education for inclusion.

Despite the current and serious issues in teacher education for inclusion, nationally and internationally, it has been found to have positive impacts on teacher attitudes.<sup>355</sup> Teachers who receive education about inclusive education have been found to be more likely to have positive attitudes towards students who experience disability.<sup>356</sup> However, as outlined in chapter six, research provides evidence of widespread concerns about inclusive education on the part of teachers. Lack of teacher education and support has been identified as a barrier to inclusive education.<sup>357</sup> Despite the positive attitudes of more recently graduated teachers, research also provides evidence to suggest that many new teachers consider their teaching education to have been inadequate to prepare them to teach inclusively, with more sustained and intensive education for inclusion required.<sup>358</sup> Positively though, research also finds that pre-service and in-service teacher education for inclusion can alleviate these concerns and facilitate positive attitudes towards inclusive education, as well as supporting the development of teacher skills and confidence in bringing about inclusion in practice.

“ This unexamined perpetuation of the myth of ‘normal’ reduces the quality of education for all students since it does not take into account any aspects of human diversity.

As noted earlier, the notion that there is a ‘special’ way to teach ‘special’ students is in itself an ableist view.<sup>359</sup> This ableist thinking results in categorising some students as unacceptable for inclusion.<sup>360</sup> By inference, this view suggests – incorrectly – that there is *one* way to teach all students *except* students who experience disability. The uncritical absorption of the myth of ‘normal’ creates the conditions where teachers are able to view students who experience disability as ‘Other’ and this process results in a lack of confidence (and sometimes unwillingness) to teach all students.<sup>361</sup> Additionally, this unexamined perpetuation of the myth of ‘normal’ reduces the quality of education for *all* students since it does not take into account *any* aspects of human diversity and thus teaching is not optimal for any student. The notion that there is one way to teach any group of students is both problematic and untrue, as it denies the individuality of all students and the diversity within any group, thus inclusive teachers are flexible and responsive and better teachers of any student.<sup>362</sup>

Moving beyond the myth of the ‘normal’ student creates the conditions to improve the education of all students. While many teachers express considerable anxiety about inclusive education<sup>363</sup>, confidence grows with experience of inclusion.<sup>364</sup> However, teachers require support to prepare them for this experience.

As noted above, teacher education has been found to lead to more inclusive attitudes.<sup>365</sup> However, some studies show only minimal change<sup>366</sup> and the majority of pre-service teachers feel unprepared for inclusive education<sup>367</sup>. The traditional approach to teacher education in which teachers are taught about disability categories, often in a week-by-week fashion, serves to reinforce the myth of the ‘normal’ and ‘sub-normal’ student<sup>368</sup>, thus perpetuating ableism and impeding the opportunity to develop inclusive attitudes. Instead, anti-ableist teacher education is required.

It is necessary for teacher education to equip teachers with both the awareness and the skills and knowledge to implement strengths-based approaches to inclusive education and to develop flexibility and creativity in providing multiple ways to learn and engage.<sup>369</sup> This strengths-based approach is important not only in relation to students, but also in collaborating with other adults. Learning processes for successful and positive collaboration with families, and other important people involved in the lives of students, is an important aspect of teacher education for inclusion.<sup>370</sup> Furthermore,



collaborative learning between professionals has been found to be an effective approach to increasing and improving inclusive practices.<sup>371</sup>

While there are a range of misunderstandings and confusions about the meaning and processes of differentiation and universal approaches to curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and the provisioning of the environment, there is a growing body of research investigating the use and outcomes of such approaches.<sup>372</sup> This research is of direct relevance to recent policy development in Australia. The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on Students with Disability (NCCD), which came into effect in 2018, now forms the basis for funding support across education settings in Australia.<sup>373</sup> Under the NCCD, all teachers are required to engage in Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice (QDTP) in order to facilitate the inclusion of all students, and to meet the requirements of the *Disability Standards for Education*.<sup>374</sup> QDTP is understood as an approach to teaching that is responsive to all students and that can be “reasonably expected as part of quality teaching or school practice”.<sup>375</sup> Under the NCCD, additional funding is provided to support teachers in undertaking further levels of adjustments, which are categorised as: Supplementary Adjustments, Substantial Adjustments and Extensive Adjustments. However, additional funding is not provided for engaging in QDTP and instead it is expected as a foundation of teaching for all.<sup>376</sup> This means that to meet current Australian Government teacher requirements, all teachers need to be equipped to take a universal approach to accessibility and participation in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and the provisioning of the environment in order to facilitate QDTP.

Teacher education for inclusion needs to be based on understanding the importance of relationships, particularly in regards to positive approaches to supporting behaviour development.<sup>377</sup> Additionally, teachers need support to understand that inclusion is an ongoing process.<sup>378</sup> The idea of inclusion as a ‘work in progress’ can facilitate teachers’ willingness to adapt strategies and ideas as they build relationships with students and families and learn more about the processes of teaching and about each individual student with whom they work.<sup>379</sup>

From the research it is clear that key elements of teacher education that result in more positive attitudes towards, and understanding of, inclusive education include:

- teacher education based on an anti-bias, rights-based approach to inclusive education for all students<sup>380</sup>
- education for critical reflection and critical consciousness to facilitate inclusive attitudes<sup>381</sup>
- support for teachers to develop skills in identifying, challenging and addressing barriers to inclusion<sup>382</sup>
- teacher education that enables teachers to develop an understanding of ableism, recognise ableist values and practices, and seek to disestablish ableist attitudes, including consideration of representation of people who experience disability<sup>383</sup>
- support to move beyond deficit thinking entrenched within the ‘special’ education paradigm towards a strengths-based approach to education that welcomes and celebrates diversity<sup>384</sup>
- learning about and developing a rights-based understanding of inclusive education<sup>385</sup>
- engaging in critical reflection about beliefs and practices<sup>386</sup>
- building confidence for inclusive education through reflective practice on developing knowledge of flexible pedagogy<sup>387</sup>
- engaging with critical disability studies to develop understanding of the social construction of disability and the role of the teacher in reducing ableism<sup>388</sup>
- developing an understanding of diversity as a resource rather than a ‘problem’ and learning to presume competence and hold positive expectations of all students<sup>389</sup>
- learning about available supports for facilitating inclusive education<sup>390</sup>
- critical engagement with resources and inclusive approaches to provisioning the environment<sup>391</sup>
- developing an understanding of the importance of building relationships with students to facilitate inclusion<sup>392</sup>

- developing an understanding of the importance of listening to people who experience disability, including children and young people, and drawing on the disability rights movement in striving towards inclusive education<sup>393</sup> (and within this, providing opportunities for respectful engagement with people who experience disability and their families<sup>394</sup>)
- establishing strategies for ongoing collaboration with other teachers, including the provision of a ‘theoretical toolbox’ to assist with engaging in ongoing critical thinking and critical reflection<sup>395</sup>
- learning about effective approaches to using support for inclusive education, particularly awareness of common pitfalls and important practices for collaborating with paraprofessionals, and alternative approaches to support<sup>396</sup>
- support for developing understanding of and skills for engaging in differentiation and universal approaches to curriculum, pedagogy, the environment and assessment.<sup>397</sup>

When teachers perceive a culture of exclusion or feel that they are not supported through policy, and when they experience the effects of a lack of support, this can have a detrimental impact on their attitudes towards inclusive education.<sup>398</sup> One key area of policy is teacher education for inclusive education. This requires providing education in disability studies and inclusive education as an essential component of teacher education and ongoing professional development for all teachers and all other professionals involved in supporting inclusive education. Consistent with international obligations under the CRPD, the delivery of this teacher education needs to include *at least* one compulsory, semester-long subject dedicated solely to inclusive education. This needs to be undertaken alongside embedded approaches to ensuring all aspects of teacher education address inclusion. Additionally, ongoing professional development for in-service teachers is required.

### Paraprofessional support for inclusion

As discussed in chapter four, despite substantial concerns about common approaches to using paraprofessional support for inclusive education<sup>399</sup>, in research involving parents, teachers, students and paraprofessional educators it is argued that with careful planning, preparation and implementation, paraprofessional support may help facilitate inclusion. It has also been argued that

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It is clear that current policies are inadequate for the realisation of inclusive education.

specific planning around the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessional educators and teachers can result in improved educational experiences and increased student involvement in the curriculum.<sup>400</sup> Paraprofessional educators report the belief that their support can be beneficial in providing teachers with another adult to discuss and reflect on ideas and problem-solving within the everyday.<sup>401</sup>

Research provides evidence that, working in close partnership with the teacher, paraprofessional support may be implemented in such a way that it is beneficial for organising the learning environment, preparing or adapting materials in ways that can benefit all students, and providing general assistance to support the teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom.<sup>402</sup> Unobtrusive, discreet support from a paraprofessional educator to further scaffold what is being taught by the teacher may allow for student autonomy and facilitate inclusion.<sup>403</sup> Indeed, in research with 16 young adults labelled with intellectual disabilities, Broer and colleagues found that students reported that at times paraprofessional educators were able to assist by providing useful explanations to clarify teacher instruction.<sup>404</sup>

When paraprofessional educators are from the same community or cultural backgrounds as families, or have experienced similar life situations, Appl reports that paraprofessional support has been found to bring together families and professionals when many different professionals are involved in the lives of the student and family.<sup>405</sup> Paraprofessional support can be useful for assistance with small group learning and supervision of students, including assistance with emergencies and classroom management.<sup>406</sup>

“ Research provides substantial evidence that the current approaches to paraprofessional support can impede, rather than facilitate, inclusion.

When adequate education and professional development is provided and careful and ongoing collaboration with the teacher is in place, paraprofessional educators report beliefs that they can provide effective support for inclusive education.<sup>407</sup> However, suggestions that further education for paraprofessionals is the key strategy needed require cautious examination given the risk that this may serve to legitimise the problematic tendency for teachers to inappropriately transfer teacher responsibility for students to the paraprofessional.<sup>408</sup>

Overall, it is clear that the common strategy of employing paraprofessional educators to support the education of students who experience disability may hold some promise. However, by contrast (as outlined in chapter four), research provides substantial evidence that the current approaches to paraprofessional support can impede, rather than facilitate, inclusion. Consequently, careful, comprehensive and research-based policy-making is required.

### Policy and practice for inclusive education

*“Inclusive education is an example of a policy initiative that is socially just, but requires significant commitment and knowledge to implement.”<sup>409</sup>*

In relation to policy, two key matters of concern are raised in the research literature. Firstly, policies are frequently inadequate (or non-existent) and misunderstandings of inclusive education are evident in many policies that purport to be about inclusion.<sup>410</sup> Secondly, while many policies do outline inclusive approaches, there is a need for stronger links between policy and practice.<sup>411</sup> Indeed, what is stated in policy and legislation is not necessarily reflective of implemented practice.<sup>412</sup>

Regarding the first of these two key issues, it is clear that current policies are inadequate for the realisation of inclusive education. To bring inclusive education to a reality, policy transformation is required. Critically, policy makers need to engage with inclusive education as a fundamental human right for every person, and thus to shift from inclusive education as a choice – or an optional extra – to inclusive education as everyday practice for all.<sup>413</sup>

Concerning the links between policy and practice, inclusive education policies are common nationally and internationally. However, the translation of these policies into practice is limited and many barriers to genuine realisation of inclusive education have been identified.<sup>414</sup> Fragmentation between policy and practice is an issue that requires thoughtful consideration in undertaking policy-making to bring about inclusive education.<sup>415</sup>

## Policy recommendations

Building on the research literature, there is scope for a coordinated framework for inclusive education in all Australian education settings. Cognisant of the importance of policy transformation and a coherent approach between policy and practice, the following research-based recommendations are provided with a view to working towards the realisation of genuine inclusive education:

### 1 Develop and implement a National Action Plan for Inclusive Education to ensure a successful transition from parallel systems of education to one inclusive system of education

Conduct a comprehensive review of policy and practice at all levels of the education system and develop a national plan with measurable actions and robust monitoring and accountability to ensure the rights of students who experience disability are upheld, consistent with Australia's obligations under the CRPD, and in keeping with the definition of inclusive education outlined in GC4. There must be no confusion or conflation of inclusion with any forms of exclusion including assimilation, integration or remediation. Careful attention needs to be paid to how the evidence-base on inclusive education is translated to policy, practice and funding systems in order to create an achievable plan for the transition from parallel 'special' and 'mainstream' education systems to one education system for all. This includes a reallocation of current funding to ensure that the distribution of education funds fully and equitably supports the transition and ongoing successful functioning of a genuinely inclusive education system.

### 2 Ensure that no new segregated settings (schools, pre-schools, centres, units or classrooms) are created

As part of the review, the educational practices and culture of segregated schools should be specifically examined, with a view to defining policy and funding arrangements that are consistent with Australia's obligations and contemporary theory. This needs to include a clear plan to ensure a positive transition of current students to a fully inclusive education system. A key initial step in moving towards this is to cease the creation of new segregated settings.

### 3 Ensure the full recognition of human rights

From the above review, define clear expectations for inclusive education in Australian schools. As part of the review process, conduct a robust review, in consultation with organisations of persons with disability, of the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* and implement the recommendations in the new standards. The expectations need to ensure that there is no implicit hierarchy of students and that no students can be considered 'too disabled' for inclusive education. As such, it needs to be explicit that there are no exceptions to the fundamental human right to inclusive education. Expanding the current data collection practices to include recording and transparent reporting of the numbers of students who do not qualify for an adjustment, who are prevented from enrolling in their local education settings, and of all use of restrictive practices, suspension and expulsion is required. Transparent and disaggregated reporting of educational attainment and completion rates is also required.

### 4 Foster a culture of inclusion

Addressing ableism within and beyond education settings and systems is essential to facilitating inclusive education. This includes the need for policy to engage the broader community with anti-ableist education and disability equity education.

### 5 Introduce compulsory, comprehensive and ongoing teacher education for inclusion

Ongoing pre-service and in-service professional development for educators on inclusive education (not to be confused with 'special' education) is essential (including developing awareness regarding ableism and the provisions of the CRPD). Within pre-service teacher education, the CRPD requires at least one compulsory core (semester-long) subject in every teacher education program that is solely dedicated to inclusive education. This approach is complemented, but not replaced, by an embedded approach throughout the curriculum. At least one subject dedicated to critical disability studies, free of ableism and underpinned by a disability equity education approach, is also recommended.

### 5 Build the foundations for successful collaboration for inclusion

Inclusive education practice should become an integral part of education for all allied health and education leaders and other education support professionals. Additionally, teachers and allied professionals require support for collaborating for inclusion. This includes addressing the considerable policy gap regarding the use of paraprofessional support. Information and support for families to assist with the currently complex and often very frustrating process of advocating for inclusive education is also essential.

### 6 Ensure flexible and responsive curriculum and assessment approaches

The role of differentiation in teaching practice is clearly identified in the implementation of the NCCD. Further development of policy to ensure differentiated, universal approaches to curriculum, pedagogy, environments and assessment is required, with space needed for flexible and responsive approaches. Clear consideration of the impacts of high-stakes student achievement testing is also required.

### 7 Listen to students

Ongoing commitment to direct, accountable and regular consultation with students who experience disability and their families is required across all aspects of policy-making and implementation for inclusive education.

### 8 Prioritise disability equity education

Further development of the diversity approach within the *Australian Curriculum* and the *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* is needed to incorporate disability equity education, including awareness-raising regarding ableism and educational practice.



## Conclusion

As evident in this review, it is now well established that inclusive education is a positive and necessary progression for education systems the world over. Inclusive education is recognised as a fundamental human right. The research demonstrates the positive outcomes of inclusive education. However, the evidence is also clear that there are many barriers to inclusive education that are still prevalent. More than 20 years ago, Barton argued that,

*“it is because of the offensiveness of existing injustices and barriers that we must not on the one hand underestimate the degree of the struggle involved if our vision of an inclusive society is to be realized, or on the other hand fail to recognize the importance of establishing effective working relationships with all those involved in removing oppression and discrimination.”*<sup>416</sup>

This has not changed. It is clear, therefore, that bringing inclusive education to a reality for all is an urgent ethical and educational imperative. However, this does require transformation, starting with recognising and actively working to disestablish ableism at every level of our education systems, and within society more broadly. As with the social movements that have come before, this is not an easy task and many of us will necessarily feel uncomfortable as we encounter our own ableism and the ableism that abounds in our society. This discomfort is necessary and important to bring about transformation. However, we need to support each other in solidarity as we take on this challenge. Being genuinely inclusive involves ongoing commitment and continual critical reflection. This is not always easy, but it is a worthy challenge when we consider what kind of world we wish to live in *together*.

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## **Appendix B. Fact Sheet: What is inclusive education?**

## 1

# What is inclusive education?

Inclusive education is about everyone learning, growing and flourishing – **together** – in all our diversity. Inclusive education recognises **the right of every child and young person** – without exception – to be included in general education settings. It involves adapting the environment and teaching approaches to ensure genuine and valued full participation of all children and young people. It embraces human diversity and welcomes all as **equal** members of an educational community.



All children and young people in Australia have the right to an **inclusive education**, but a lack of understanding of what this means, combined with frequent misuse of the term, can stop this becoming a reality.

## Inclusive education:

- values and supports the full participation of all children together within mainstream educational settings
- creates a situation where all children and young people can be valued, experience a sense of belonging and where they are encouraged to reach their full potential in all areas of development
- is free from discriminatory beliefs, attitudes and practices
- welcomes and values diversity as a resource rather than a problem, and recognises impairment as one of many forms of human diversity
- requires the transformation of educational systems, settings, policies and practices to provide the best possible education for all
- involves an ongoing process of removing barriers to active involvement and shared learning
- requires recognising that we are all equally human and putting this into action in everyday, practical ways
- is also about engaging inclusively with families.

## Inclusive education is **not**:

- changing children and young people to fit within current exclusionary systems
- an 'added extra' or 'special effort' born out of kindness or charity
- simply being present in a mainstream classroom – this is only a starting point

- allowing a student to attend school on a conditional basis (e.g. only allowing attendance for part of the school day or if an aide/parent/caregiver is present)
- participating in a different curriculum with a different teacher/aide
- segregating students into 'special' schools, classes or units, or in the classroom or playground.

## Busting some common myths

### ***Myth 1: Inclusive education is only for some students***

Inclusive education is not a 'favour' or 'privilege' for some of us; it is a human right for all, which benefits everyone. Inclusive education is not about 'fitting in' students who can 'keep-up' with a one-size-fits-all curriculum. On the contrary, inclusive education is about creating educational opportunities and settings that enable everyone to flourish. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiation are key approaches to quality education for all.

### ***Myth 2: Students with intellectual disability or complex disability cannot be included in general education settings***

All students – without exception – have the right to be included. We know from research evidence that inclusive education is good for everyone, including those of us who are labelled as having severe and complex or multiple and profound disability. In Italy, special schools were closed and segregated education ended in 1977 and there are other examples throughout the world – Australia is lagging behind.

### ***Myth 3: Inclusive education leads to poorer educational outcomes for students who do not experience disability***

Substantial research evidence demonstrates that inclusive education results in higher quality education for *all* students, with no negative educational outcomes. There are considerable benefits of inclusive education for students who do not experience disability, as well as for those who do. These benefits include increased quality of teacher engagement, as well as educational, social and behavioural outcomes.

### ***Myth 4: A school or early childhood service cannot include a student because it does not have enough resources***

Families frequently encounter considerable resistance and gatekeeping by schools and early childhood services when they seek an inclusive education for a student who experiences disability. Students and families express significant distress and negative psychosocial impacts as a consequence of these exclusionary experiences. Despite the ongoing mantra of 'parent choice', they can be left feeling that they have no option other than segregated education. Educational leaders play a key role in creating a culture of inclusion. Inclusive education is a legal right for every child and young person and support is available for every school and every early childhood setting.

### ***Myth 5: Inclusive education can occur in segregated settings***

The term 'inclusive education' has been co-opted by many. Separating children and young people on the basis of disability is the last remaining 'respectable' form of segregation in schooling. However, segregated education, where students attend in isolation from their peers without disability (in segregated schools, classes or units), is not inclusive education.

### ***Myth 6: Inclusion is when a student attends a 'mainstream' school but they are withdrawn from the class for 'special' education or units***

Withdrawing a child or young person from the classroom for a 'special' class or unit for part of the day, week or year is not inclusive education. If the student is not supported to genuinely and fully participate alongside their peers, then the student is not actually included. If the student is separated from the group through the provision of 'support', this isolates the student educationally, physically and socially, with a wide range of detrimental outcomes.

### ***Myth 7: Students who experience disability have better educational outcomes in specialist settings***

Despite the logic of this myth, given the smaller class sizes, the common presence of specialist resources and teacher training, research across six decades now clearly demonstrates that it is not true. Students who experience disability have equal or better educational outcomes in general education settings, and genuine inclusive education leads to better educational outcomes for everyone.



## **Appendix C. Fact Sheet: The benefits of inclusive education**

## 2

## What are the benefits of inclusive education?

Inclusive education is about everyone learning, growing and flourishing – **together** – in all our diversity. Inclusive education recognises **the right of every child and young person** – without exception – to be included in general education settings. It involves adapting the environment and teaching approaches to ensure genuine and valued full participation of all children and young people. It embraces human diversity and welcomes all as **equal** members of an educational community.



Research evidence **overwhelmingly** supports inclusive education. As well as positive outcomes for social justice and a sense of community and belonging, there are benefits for learning outcomes and for the social, behavioural and physical development of children and young people who do and do not experience disability. Below is a summary of just some of the benefits of inclusive education.

### Benefits for students who experience disability:

- better academic and vocational outcomes than their peers in non-inclusive settings
- greater social interaction, resulting in more opportunities to establish and maintain friendships
- increased independent communication and speech and language development, in turn supporting greater inclusion and active participation
- a sense of belonging and a self-concept of not just being a receiver of help but also a giver of help
- access to a broader range of play and learning activities, which can stimulate physical development and enhance children's experiences.

### Benefits for all students:

- a more positive sense of self and self-worth
- improved behavioural development, with less 'challenging' or 'disruptive' behaviour
- greater independence
- greater social development and the opportunity to develop friendships they may not have considered or encountered otherwise
- enhanced communication and language development

- the development of qualities such as patience and trust, as well as greater awareness and responsiveness to the needs of others
- an increased awareness and valuing of diversity, and understanding of individuality
- higher quality education and care
- higher quality instruction that is better suited to individual needs.

Children and young people who do not experience disability have also been found to benefit academically from inclusive education, with equal or better outcomes than their peers in non-inclusive settings.

### Benefits for teachers and educators:

- professional growth
- higher quality of engagement with students
- increased personal satisfaction
- greater confidence in their ability as an educator.

### Benefits for families and the community:

- greater psychological and economic wellbeing for parents
- parents may feel more supported and confident to return to work
- a more inclusive school community
- greater community cohesion and the breaking down of discriminatory beliefs and ableist practices.



This fact sheet is drawn from the 2019 report *Towards inclusive education: a necessary process of transformation*. It was written by Dr Kathy Cologon, Department of Educational Studies, Macquarie University for Children and Young People with Disability Australia.

For more information and to read the full report, visit [www.cyda.org.au](http://www.cyda.org.au)



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## **Appendix D. Fact Sheet: Addressing ableism in education**

## 3

## Addressing ableism in education

Inclusive education is about everyone learning, growing and flourishing – **together** – in all our diversity. Inclusive education recognises **the right of every child and young person** – without exception – to be included in general education settings. It involves adapting the environment and teaching approaches to ensure genuine and valued full participation of all children and young people. It embraces human diversity and welcomes all as **equal** members of an educational community.



**Ableism** is a term increasingly used to describe the process by which people are excluded, viewed and treated as ‘not one of us’. Ableism is used in the same way as ‘racism’ and ‘sexism’ to describe the process of negatively stereotyping individuals or groups on the basis of a perceived ‘difference’ and, often, discriminating based on such stereotypes at individual and systemic levels.

Barriers to inclusive education prevent children and young people who experience disability from learning and participating fully, with far-reaching and lifelong implications. Major barriers include negative attitudes and stigma around ‘difference’ and ‘disability’, inadequate education and professional development for teachers and specialist support staff, and systemic barriers, such as inadequate funding and support from education authorities. Underpinning these barriers is ongoing ableism.

### Overcoming ableist attitudes

There continues to be considerable discussion of the potential of education to bring about social change, with emphasis placed on the importance of working with children, from an early age onwards, to break the cycle of entrenched ableism. However, if adults have not examined their own attitudes and practices, they are likely to perpetuate that cycle and ultimately prevent inclusive education being realised.

Children and young people’s attitudes and choices are shaped significantly by the attitudes of their family and community. There is also a growing body of research demonstrating **the importance of teacher attitudes**. Research finds that positive teacher attitudes are a key to inclusive practice, creating the necessary conditions for engaging in inclusive education.



Many teachers express considerable anxiety about inclusive education but confidence grows with experience of inclusion. To bring about inclusive education, we must make critical disability studies and inclusion an essential part of teacher education and ongoing professional development. **Educating all teachers to be inclusive teachers is an essential undertaking.**

**The culture of a school or educational setting** influences peer interactions and the way teachers interact with children and young people who experience disability. School principals, directors and other educational leaders play a key role in creating this culture. Unfortunately, evidence shows underlying ableist practices prevalent in education in Australia. While there are some promising developments towards inclusion, negative attitudes and a lack of motivation from education departments and providers to do all that is necessary to facilitate inclusive education are ongoing concerns. Addressing attitudes towards inclusive education **at all levels** and within all processes is a major component of working towards inclusion.

## Breaking down the barriers to inclusion

### Responses needed to tackle ableism include:

- ongoing consultation with people who experience disability
- including all children from a very young age to break the cycle of entrenched ableism
- community advocacy about language use and representations of disability within media and popular culture
- engaging with critical disability studies and efforts to remove ableist policies and practices at all levels of the education system
- redistributing current funding based on *need* rather than on categories and labels of 'disability' or on school setting type (e.g. addressing the inequitable funding for specialist and general schools)
- sufficient compulsory pre-service teacher education in inclusive education and critical disability studies and ongoing professional development in these areas
- support for all teachers to teach all children and young people, not 'special' teachers for 'special' students.



This fact sheet is drawn from the 2019 report *Towards inclusive education: a necessary process of transformation*. It was written by Dr Kathy Cologon, Department of Educational Studies, Macquarie University for Children and Young People with Disability Australia.

For more information and to read the full report, visit [www.cyda.org.au](http://www.cyda.org.au)



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## **Appendix E. Fact Sheet: Transformation to inclusive education: the next steps**

## 4

# Transformation to inclusive education: the next steps

Inclusive education is about everyone learning, growing and flourishing – **together** – in all our diversity. Inclusive education recognises **the right of every child and young person** – without exception – to be included in general education settings. It involves adapting the environment and teaching approaches to ensure genuine and valued full participation of all children and young people. It embraces human diversity and welcomes all as **equal** members of an educational community.



**Leadership** is required to bring about the substantial change needed to facilitate inclusive education, ensuring that every child and young person can fully and genuinely participate, and have the contribution they make recognised.

Educators need to be supported to think outside the square, and false assumptions and low expectations regarding the capabilities and behaviours of children and young people who experience disability need to be challenged. The rejection and disestablishment of ableism, and transformation at all levels of education, are needed to uphold the rights of all children and young people – this requires committing to an ongoing process of becoming inclusive.

Reflecting on these issues not only raises the matter of the cultural shift required, but also the practical considerations for transformation towards inclusive education. It is important to acknowledge both the magnitude of this change and the fact that it happens little by little within everyday exchanges. A necessary starting point is always to consider the existing strengths within any given system or setting. It is from recognising what we already do well that we can move forward to address what we need to do better. Additionally, it is important to start with a clear vision of where we are heading, why, and what steps are needed to get there. From here, we can engage in an ongoing, iterative cycle of planning and review – implementing, observing, reflecting, and then planning again.

## Recommended next steps

- **Develop and implement a National Action Plan for Inclusive Education to ensure a successful transition for parallel systems of education to one inclusive system of education**

Conduct a comprehensive review of policy and practice at all levels of the education system and develop a national plan with measurable actions and robust monitoring and



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accountability to ensure the rights of students who experience disability are upheld, consistent with Australia's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and in keeping with the UN's definition of inclusive education. There must be no confusion or conflation of inclusion with any forms of exclusion, including assimilation, integration or remediation. Careful attention needs to be paid to how the evidence-base on inclusive education is translated to policy, practice and funding systems in order to create an achievable plan for the transition from parallel 'special' and 'mainstream' education systems to one education system for all. This includes a reallocation of current funding to ensure that the distribution of education funds fully and equitably supports the transition and ongoing successful functioning of a genuinely inclusive education system.

- **Ensure that no new segregated settings (schools, preschools, centres, units or classrooms) are created**

As part of the review, the educational practices and culture of segregated schools should be specifically examined, with a view to defining policy and funding arrangements that are consistent with Australia's obligations, the research evidence, and contemporary theory. This needs to include a clear plan to ensure a positive transition of current students to a fully inclusive education system. A key initial step in moving towards this system is to cease the creation of new segregated settings.

- **Ensure the full recognition of human rights**

From the above review, define clear expectations for inclusive education in Australian schools. As part of the review process, conduct a robust review, in consultation with organisations of persons with disability, of the Disability Standards for Education (2005) and implement the recommendations in the new standards. These expectations also need to ensure there is no implicit hierarchy of students and that no students can be considered 'too disabled' for inclusive education. As such, it needs to be explicit that there are no exceptions to the fundamental human right to inclusive education.

- **Foster a culture of inclusion**

Addressing ableism within and beyond education settings and systems is essential to facilitating inclusive education. This includes the need for policy to engage the broader community with anti-ableist education and disability equity education.

- **Introduce compulsory, comprehensive and ongoing teacher education for inclusion**

Ongoing pre-service and in-service professional development for educators on inclusive education (not to be confused with special education) is essential (including developing awareness regarding ableism and the provisions of the CRPD). Within pre-service teacher education, the CRPD requires at least one compulsory core (semester-long) subject in every teacher education program that is solely dedicated to inclusive education. This approach is complemented, but not replaced, by an embedded approach throughout the curriculum. At least one subject dedicated to critical disability studies, free of ableism and underpinned by a disability equity education approach, is also recommended.

- **Build the foundations for successful collaboration for inclusion**

Inclusive education practice should become an integral part of education for all allied health and education leaders and other education support professionals. Additionally, teachers and allied professionals require support for collaborating for inclusion. This includes addressing the considerable policy gap regarding the use of paraprofessional support. Information and support for families to assist with the currently complex and often very frustrating process of advocating for inclusive education is also essential.

- **Ensure flexible and responsive curriculum and assessment approaches**

The role of differentiation in teaching practice is clearly identified in the implementation of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on Students with Disability (NCCD). Further development of policy to ensure differentiated, universal approaches to curriculum, pedagogy, environments and assessment are required, with space needed for flexible and responsive approaches. Clear consideration of the impacts of high-stakes student achievement testing is also required.

- **Listen to students**

Ongoing commitment to direct, accountable and regular consultation with students who experience disability and their families is required across all aspects of policy-making and implementation for inclusive education.

- **Prioritise disability equity education**

Further development of the diversity approach within the *Australian Curriculum*, the *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, and the *My Time Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia*, and all State/Territory based frameworks is needed to incorporate disability equity education, including awareness-raising regarding ableism and educational practice.

**Appendix F. Time for change: The state of play for inclusion of students with disability, results from the 2019 CYDA National Education Survey**





# **Time for change: The state of play for inclusion of students with disability**

**Results from the 2019 CYDA National Education Survey**

**Children and Young People with Disability Australia**

**October 2019**

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**Acknowledgements:**

Children and Young People with Disability Australia would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which this report has been written, reviewed and produced, whose cultures and customs have nurtured and continue to nurture this land since the Dreamtime. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future. This is, was and always will be Aboriginal land.

We thank the families and young people with disability who completed this survey.



Australian Government  
Department of Social Services

This activity received grant funding from the Australian Government.

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## Executive summary

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) is the national representative organisation for children and young people with disability aged 0–25 years. CYDA has an extensive national membership of more than 5000 young people with disability, families and caregivers of children with disability, and advocacy and community organisations.

CYDA's purpose is to systemically advocate at the national level for the rights and interests of all children and young people with disability living in Australia.

Research evidence overwhelmingly supports inclusive education. As well as positive outcomes for social justice and a sense of community and belonging, there are benefits for learning outcomes and for the social, behavioural and physical development of children and young people who do and do not experience disability.

Inclusive education is about everyone learning, growing and flourishing – **together** – in all our diversity. Inclusive education recognises **the right of every child and young person** – without exception – to be included in general education settings. It involves adapting the environment and teaching approaches to ensure genuine and valued full participation of all children and young people. It embraces human diversity and welcomes all as **equal** members of an educational community.<sup>1</sup>

CYDA conducted a National Education Survey between August and September 2019 to provide important information on the experience of children and young people with disability in their school education. There were 505 young people with disability and families and caregivers of children with disability who responded to the survey.

The survey had representation from all states and territories, all age groups and from metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Australia. The majority of respondents were from families of students with disability (97%), with the balance of respondents being students with disability.

The results of the survey show that students with disability are routinely excluded in their education, with many being segregated from 'mainstream' schools and classrooms, not attending school full-time, refused enrolment and excluded from school activities. Suspensions and expulsions are also familiar practices, showing the lack of understanding and support for students with disability.

While the majority of students receive some specific support at school because of their disability or learning difference, there are many families who are out-of-pocket for supports and equipment to enable the student to participate in education. Many students do not have a personalised individual education plan in place.

Families did **not** believe:

- students with disability received adequate support in their education
- that they were communicated with regularly about the student's learning progress
- that teachers had high expectations of the student, or
- that teachers had the required training to provide a supportive and enriching education environment.

Students with disability experience unacceptably high levels of abuse and violence at school, including bullying and restrictive practices such as restraint, seclusion or both of these.

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<sup>1</sup> Children and Young People with Disability Australia (2019) Fact Sheet 1, 'What is inclusive education?'

This report should be read in conjunction with:

- *Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation*, written by Dr Kathy Cologon, Macquarie University, a report prepared for Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA)
- CYDA Fact Sheets
  - 'What is inclusive education?'
  - 'The benefits of inclusive education'
  - 'Addressing ableism in education'
  - 'Transformation to inclusive education: the next steps'

The findings from the 2019 CYDA Education Survey show it is time for transformational change in our education system to ensure the inclusion of students with disability. Sadly, the prevalence of educational segregation and exclusion, lack of support for students, school cultures that are not inclusive of children with disability and their families, and the alarming rates of abuse and violence, highlight that education systems are failing children and young people with disability.

The Disability Royal Commission presents an opportunity for Australia to right its wrongs and start providing children with disability the inclusive education they are entitled to – it is their human right.

### **Key findings of the 2019 Education Survey:**

#### **Educational segregation and exclusion**

- 24.2% of students with disability were enrolled in segregated education in either dual enrolment with a special school or attending a special school
- Another 15.5% of students who attended a 'mainstream' school were separated from their peers, either on a full-time basis in a special unit or withdrawn to the special unit for instruction in combination with attending a 'regular' class
- 12.5% of students with disability have been refused enrolment
- 16.6% of students with disability do not attend school full-time
- 14.7% of students with disability were suspended in the last year and 1.8% were expelled in the last year
- 40.2% of students with disability have been excluded from events or activities at school in the last year

#### **Support for students with disability at school**

- 79% of students with disability received some specific support at school because of a disability or learning difference
- 60% of students with disability received additional specific funding because of their disability or learning difference
- 77.6% of students with disability are NDIS participants
- 15.1% of students with disability are using their NDIS funding to assist in accessing and participating in education
- 57.2% of families are out-of-pocket for a range of supports or equipment and have paid personally to enable a student with disability to access and participate in education



### **School cultures for inclusion**

- 17.8% of students with disability did not have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) in place and 9.1% of families didn't know if an IEP was in place
- 36.4% of families were not involved in the development of the IEP
- 52.1% disagreed that teachers and support staff had the training required to provide a supportive and enriching education environment for students with disability
- 48.9% disagreed that the student received adequate support in their education
- 34.7% disagreed that there was regular communication with the family/caregivers about the student's learning progress
- 29.7% disagreed that teachers and support staff had high expectations of the student and their learning
- 23.4% disagreed that family/caregivers of the student were made to feel welcome at school
- 18.2% disagreed that the student was made to feel welcome at the school

### **Abuse and violence**

- 47.9% of students with disability experienced bullying at school in the last year
- 30.9% experienced restraint or seclusion in the last year and 11.1% experienced both restraint and seclusion
- 21.0% of students with disability experienced restraint in the last year and the most common form was physical restraint, followed by psycho-social, mechanical and chemical restraint
- 21.0% of students with disability experienced seclusion in the last year and the settings for seclusion included solitary confinement with and without supervision in a room, classroom or staff office

## Introduction

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) is the national representative organisation for children and young people with disability aged 0 to 25 years. CYDA has an extensive national membership of more than 5000 young people with disability, families and caregivers of children with disability, and advocacy and community organisations.

CYDA's purpose is to systemically advocate at the national level for the rights and interests of all children and young people with disability living in Australia, and it undertakes the following to achieve this:

- listening and responding to the voices and experiences of children and young people with disability
- advocating for children and young people with disability for equal opportunities, participation and inclusion in the Australian community
- educating national public policy-makers and the broader community about the experiences of children and young people with disability
- informing children and young people with disability, their families and caregivers about their citizenship rights and entitlements
- celebrating the successes and achievements of children and young people with disability.

Research evidence overwhelmingly supports inclusive education. As well as positive outcomes for social justice and a sense of community and belonging, there are benefits for learning outcomes and for the social, behavioural and physical development of children and young people who do and do not experience disability.

Inclusive education is about everyone learning, growing and flourishing – **together** – in all our diversity. Inclusive education recognises **the right of every child and young person** – without exception – to be included in general education settings. It involves adapting the environment and teaching approaches to ensure genuine and valued full participation of all children and young people. It embraces human diversity and welcomes all as **equal** members of an educational community.<sup>2</sup>

CYDA conducted a national education survey in August–September 2019 of 505 young people with disability and families and caregivers of children with disability, to explore the experiences of inclusive education in Australia. This report can be read in conjunction with:

- *Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation*, written by Dr Kathy Cologon, Macquarie University, a report prepared for Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA)
- CYDA Fact Sheets
  - 'What is inclusive education?'
  - 'The benefits of inclusive education'
  - 'Addressing ableism in education'
  - 'Transformation to inclusive education: the next steps'

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<sup>2</sup> Children and Young People with Disability Australia (2019) Fact Sheet 1, 'What is inclusive education?'

The survey had representation from all states and territories, all age groups and from metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Australia (Table 1). The majority of respondents were from families of students with disability (97%), with the balance of respondents being students with disability. Cultural diversity was reflected in the survey respondents, with 9% of students from a non-English-speaking background and 3.2% Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander.

**Table 1. Demographic characteristics of students with disability (n=505)**

	Number	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	343	67.9%
Female	153	30.3%
Prefer not to say or not specified	9	1.4%
<b>Language and cultural background</b>		
Aboriginal	15	2.9%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	1	0.2%
Non-English-speaking background	46	9.1%
<b>State/territory</b>		
VIC	141	27.9%
NSW	119	23.6%
WA	85	16.8%
QLD	82	16.2%
SA	47	9.3%
ACT	15	3.0%
TAS	12	2.4%
NT	4	0.8%
<b>Location</b>		
Metropolitan area	335	66.3%
Regional area	121	24.0%
Rural area	44	8.7%
Remote area	5	1.0%
<b>Age of student</b>		
4-6 years	50	9.9%
7-9 years	129	25.5%
10-12 years	127	25.2%
13-15 years	111	22.0%
16-18 years	61	12.1%
18 -25 years	27	5.4%
<b>Type of school</b>		
Government	330	65.4%
Non-government (e.g. faith-based, private school)	122	24.2%
Home schooling	15	3.0%
Distance education or e-learning	5	1.0%
Does not attend school	18	3.6%
Other	15	3.0%

## Educational segregation and exclusion

### Segregated education

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) definition of inclusion in education explains that no form of segregation or integration constitutes inclusive education.<sup>3</sup> Among CYDA's survey responses, the majority of children (67.3%) were attending school in a general education setting (Table 2). However, there were 24.2% who were experiencing segregated education in either dual enrolment with a special school or attending a special school.

**Table 2. School setting of survey respondents (n=505)**

School setting	No	Percentage
'Mainstream' school (e.g. the local primary or secondary school)	340	67.3%
Special school	97	19.2%
Dual enrolment (e.g. between a 'mainstream' and special school)	25	4.9%

Additionally for students who attended a 'mainstream' school, 15.5% (75) were separated from their peers on a full-time basis, either in a special unit or withdrawn to the special unit for instruction in combination with attending a 'regular' class with their peers. As defined by the CRPD, "segregation occurs when the education of students with disabilities is provided in separate environments designed or used to respond to a particular impairment or to various impairments, in isolation from students without disabilities".<sup>4</sup> Therefore, providing inclusive education does not involve withdrawing students from 'regular' classes and placing them in special units or classes.

### Enrolment barriers

The experience of schools 'gatekeeping' is a well-known issue. Schools are required to comply with the *Disability Discrimination Act* (2005), which requires students with disability to be able to enrol and participate in education on the same basis as their peers.

Despite this, 12.5% (63) of students with disability have been refused enrolment. Survey respondents were asked to provide more information about their experience. The thematic analysis (Table 3) shows a mix of government and non-government schools refusing enrolment. Reasons provided for exclusion included schools advising families they lacked the necessary supports and resources, and many students had been denied enrolment on multiple occasions.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General comment No. 4 (2016) Article 24: Right to inclusive education

<sup>4</sup> UN CPRD (2016) Gen Comment No 4.

**Table 3. Enrolment barriers (n=63)**

Type of school refusing enrolment	No	Percentage
Government	32	50.8%
Non-government (private school, faith-based)	16	25.4%
Distance education	1	1.6%
Reasons to refuse enrolment	No	Percentage
Lack of support/resources	14	22.2%
Pushed out, threatened	3	4.8%
School out of catchment	2	3.2%
Refused enrolment for year 10	1	1.6%
Times student has been refused enrolment	No	Percentage
Once	31	49.2%
Twice	6	9.5%
Multiple times	7	11.1%

Feedback from families about their children being refused enrolment:

"I applied to 36 schools in WA, have attended four, which two have removed him and three would not meet his needs and assaulted him" – family of a child aged 7–9 years, special school, rural WA.

"School unable to accommodate student not toilet trained despite being part of disability. Schools didn't appear resourced or confident to accept borderline level 3 autism" – family of a child aged 4–6 years, special school, regional NSW.

"Was previously enrolled at a different mainstream school, was requested to either provide full-time aide or remove her from classroom as not enough resources available to cope" – family of a child 10–12 years, mainstream school, metropolitan VIC.

### Part-time attendance at school

A total of 16.6% (84) of students with disability were not attending school full-time. Survey respondents were asked to provide more information about the number of hours per week the student was attending school (Table 4). Of those attending part-time, 29.8% were attending 15 hours or less and 32.1% were attending between 16 and 30 hours per week.

**Table 4. Part-time school attendance hours (n=84)**

Number of hours per week children and young people with disability attend school	No	Percentage
1-5 hours	6	7.1%
6-10 hours	10	11.9%
11-15 hours	9	10.7%
16-20 hours	4	4.8%
21-25 hours	14	16.7%
26-30 hours	9	10.7%



## Comments from families about their child not attending full-time schooling:

"Just been forced out of mainstream into a segregated special needs unit at a different primary school this term. Currently allowed to do longer days – 25 hours a week. Up until last week it was only 10 hours a week and his start at the new placement was delayed so he was away from school altogether for seven weeks before that" – family of a child aged 10–12 years, mainstream school with special unit, regional ACT.

"10 hours max (not our choice) but I get called to pick my son up nearly daily in the two hours he's there" – family of a child aged 7–9 years, mainstream school with a special unit, metropolitan WA.

"Between 15 and full-time depending on how many times I am called to pick her up early or if she is suspended" – family of a young person aged 13–15 years, special school, regional NSW.

"Trying to get full hours x 5 days. School indicated that if he will come to this school, he will be only allowed to attend 9am to 11am" – family of a child aged 4–6 years, does not attend school, metropolitan QLD.

## Suspensions and expulsions

A total of 14.7% (74) of students with disability were suspended in the last year. Additional information about the suspensions was provided (Table 5). Many students had been suspended multiple times.

**Table 5. Suspensions information (n=74)**

Reason for suspension	No	Percentage
Behaviour	24	32.4%
Physical	14	18.9%
<b>Times student has been suspended</b>		
Once	21	28.4%
Twice	8	10.8%
Three to five times	4	5.4%
Six to nine times	4	5.4%
Multiple times (did not specify)	15	20.3%

## Comments from families about suspensions included:

"Suspended 60 out of 150 days in the first three terms last year. Went on part time hours. First week back this year he was suspended for four days and last week of second term he was suspended for four days" – family of a young person aged 13–15 years, mainstream school with special unit, metropolitan NSW.

"Suspended six times in six months for 'behaviour' issues and 're-direction' issues, only once for aggressive issues. They push and push until he is completely overwhelmed and then they wonder why he won't comply, then they suspend him, once for three days – he was six years old" – family of a child aged 7–9 years, mainstream school, metropolitan SA.

"Suspended for actions out of their control that broke school rules" – family of a young person aged 13–15 years, mainstream government school, metropolitan WA.

"Suspended for having meltdowns in class when staff not following protocols provided by myself developed with OT, speech therapist, psychologist, psychiatrist and Autism SA behaviour specialist" – family of a young person aged 13–15 years, mainstream school, rural SA.

There was 1.8% (9) of students with disability expelled in the last year. Comments from families about expulsions included:

"Student meeting for expulsion was set up with support from the department. We pulled son out of school in preference to expulsion to avoid further school-caused trauma" – family of a child aged 10–12 years, metropolitan VIC.

"Expelled from last school last year. Supports were not put in place and school did not like us as her parents asking for them" – family of a young person aged 13–15 years, mainstream school, metropolitan QLD.

## Exclusion from events or activities at school

A total of 40.5% (203) of students with disability were excluded from events or activities at school in the last year. The most common forms of exclusion were from excursions, sports, and special events such as incursions, carnivals, surveys and NAPLAN testing (Table 6).

**Table 6. Types of activities students with disability excluded from (n=203)**

Type of events or activities where student with disability has been excluded	No	Percentage
Excursions	32	15.8%
Sports	25	12.3%
Special events and activities; for example, incursions, carnivals, surveys and NAPLAN tests	22	10.8%
Class	20	9.9%
No reason specified but generally excluded from most or all activities	18	8.9%
Camps	16	7.9%
Excluded as punishment for behaviour, disability, sickness	11	5.4%
Suspension	8	3.9%
Assemblies	7	3.5%
Recess and lunch breaks	3	1.5%
Work experience	1	0.5%
After-school care	1	0.5%

Comments from families about the exclusion of their children included:

"Excursions, carnivals, faith-based masses at other schools, but all of which we found out after the fact" – family of a young person aged 13–15 years, mainstream school, rural NSW.

"The principal at times forgets to include the support unit kids in activities. Or they are always separated from the mainstream kids by default" – family of a child aged 10–12, mainstream school with a special unit, metropolitan NSW.

"Did not gain leadership for year 12 despite achieving standing ovation after speech delivery and receiving the majority of votes – numbers were changed apparently as they felt that he would be unpredictable and therefore the role may be too stressful" – family of young person aged 18–25 years, mainstream school, regional NSW.

"Excluded from all activities at school, does not even get to interact with any other children" – family of a young person aged 13–15 years, mainstream school, regional VIC.

## Support for students at school

### Educational support and funding

Survey respondents were asked a range of questions about the educational support and funding provided for students with disability. Overall, 79% (401) of students with disability received specific support at school because of a disability or learning difference.

The most common types of support provided to students with disability is curriculum modification, followed by an individual support worker, behavioural support and specific aides and equipment (Table 7).

**Table 7. Types of support provided to students with disability (n=505)**

Type of support	No	Percentage
Curriculum modification	151	29.9%
Individual support worker	76	15.1%
Behavioural support	35	6.9%
Specific aides and equipment	33	6.5%
Supervision	13	2.6%
Social support	10	2.0%
Assistance with personal care	9	1.8%
Access to specialist allied health	5	1.0%
Some or all of the above	49	9.7%
Other	63	12.5%

Overall, 60% (303) of students with disability received additional specific funding because of their disability or learning difference, while 17.6% (89) of students with disability did not receive additional specific funding. About one in five survey respondents – 21.4% (108) – did not know if the student with disability received additional funding because of their disability or learning difference.

A total of 77% (389) of students with disability were NDIS participants, with 15.1% (76) of students with disability using their NDIS funding to assist in accessing and participating in education. The most common forms of NDIS supports used to support the students' education were specialist allied health, transport and assistive technology (Table 8).

**Table 8. Types of funding from the NDIS to support education (n=76)**

Support from NDIS funds	No	Percentage
Specialist allied health	31	40.8%
Transport	9	11.8%
Assistive technology	7	9.2%
Individual support worker	5	6.6%
Behavioural support	2	2.6%
Capacity-building and daily activities	1	1.3%
Personal care	1	1.3%

## Out-of-pocket costs for families to support education

Overall, 57.2% (289) of families of students with disability had paid personally for specific supports or equipment required to enable access to, and participation in, education. These include specific aids and equipment, specialist allied health and individual support workers (Table 9).

**Table 9. Out-of-pocket costs for families (n=289)**

Type of supports or equipment paid for by student's family	No	Percentage
Specific aides and equipment	112	38.8%
Specialist allied health: OT, speech therapist, psychology	40	13.8%
Individual support worker, tutor	25	8.7%
Transport	9	3.1%
Books/copies of text books	4	1.4%
Social support, sports, recreation and excursions	6	2.1%
Special clothing/shoes	3	1%
Behavioural support and personal care	2	0.7%

Comments from families about out-of-pocket costs to enable the access and participation of the student with disability include:

"Our son has been diagnosed with a range of conditions and hasn't been formally tested and diagnosed with specific learning disabilities. We have a report from the clinical psychologist. We have paid for tutoring, speech pathology and OT for specific learning disabilities severely affecting reading and writing. The school offers no support in class and no remedial programs. They have refused to have external service providers visit the school despite offering to fund these supports. They have refused our son any classroom accommodations so that he cannot participate in class activities and NAPLAN at a level playing field" – family of a child aged 10–12 years, mainstream school, metropolitan VIC.

"Bought so many resources, even painted a spare room in the unit so they could set up a sensory room" – family of a child aged 7–9 years, mainstream school with a special unit, regional QLD.

"Specialised communication system, assistive technology, training in use of these, furniture for use at school, modifications to uniforms" – family of child aged 10–12 years, mainstream school, metropolitan QLD.

"iPad for writing due to fine motor and executive function problems however school still pushes her to hand write" – family of child aged 10–12 years, mainstream school, metropolitan WA.

"Extra tutoring, extra travel time, moving sibling to different school so other child can access education" – family of child aged 10–12 years, special school, metropolitan NSW.

"Aides that have been broken and need replacing" – family of young person aged 13–15 years, mainstream school, metropolitan VIC.

## School cultures for inclusion

### Personalised learning plans

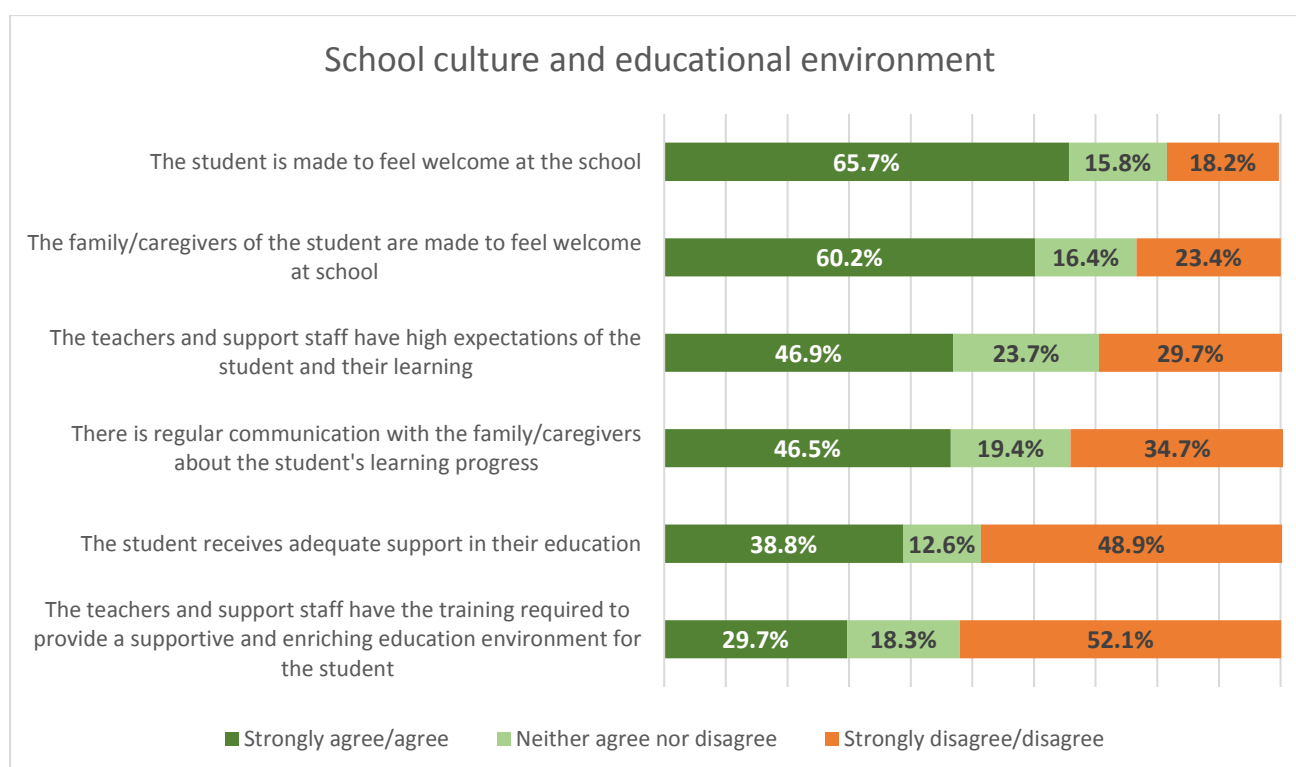
For students with disability it is important that they have personalised learning plans that provide high educational expectations. While the majority of students with disability, 72.3% (365), had an Individual Education Plan (IEP) in place, 17.8% (90) did not have an IEP in place, and 9.1% (46) of respondents didn't know if an IEP was in place.

Of the 136 students with disability who either did not have an IEP in place or families were not sure, most were in mainstream schools (70.5%). Those that were either dually enrolled with a special school or solely in a special school (14.7%) did not have an IEP in place. Family involvement in the development of the IEP was limited, with 36.4% (184) of families not involved in the development of the plan.

### Inclusive environments and high expectations

Survey respondents were asked a number of attitudinal questions about school cultures and the educational environment (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. School culture and educational environment**



The majority of respondents (52.1%) 'disagreed' that teachers and support staff had the training required to provide a supportive and enriching education environment for students with disability. Almost half (48.9%) 'disagreed' that the student received adequate support in their education. While almost half of respondents (46.5%) 'agreed' that teachers and support staff had high expectations for the students, the majority either 'did not agree or disagree', or 'disagreed', that there were high expectations for students with disability. There were large proportions who 'disagreed' the student was made to feel welcome at school (18.2%), that family/caregivers were made to feel welcome at school (23.4%), or that there was regular communication with the family/caregivers about the student's learning progress (34.7%).



## Abuse and violence

### Bullying

Almost half of the survey respondents, 47.9% (242), reported that the student with disability had experienced bullying at school in the last year. When asked for more information, survey respondents said bullying occurred from other students, there was both physical and verbal bullying and some of the abuse was from teachers, principals and other school staff (Table 10).

**Table 10. Types of bullying experienced by students with disability (n=242)**

Response	No	Percentage
Bullied by other students	112	46.3%
Verbal: nicknames, taunt, teased, racist comments	70	28.9%
Physical: pushed, kicked, beaten, chased	30	12.4%
Bullied by teachers, school principal and other school staff	22	9.1%
Social exclusion	19	7.8%
Cyberbullying	3	1.2%
Sexual harassment	2	0.8%
Bullying causing self-harm and depression	2	0.8%
Bullied by other parents	1	0.4%
LGBT bullying	1	0.4%
Did not specify	4	1.7%

Comments from families about the bullying experienced by students with disability included:

"Disgusting comments from other girls every day. School PE teacher ridiculed her for not wanting to participate in sensory-overloading PE classes and music. But at home, she loves music" – family of a child aged 10–12 years, now home-schooled, regional QLD.

"Bullied so bad that it has led to self-harm and depression" – family of a young person aged 13–15 years, dual enrolment between mainstream and special school, regional NSW.

"Name calling, a child who told him he wants to kill him, rejection, not being allowed to access the same areas of the school as other kids, other kids getting special awards for speaking to him and this creating negative perceptions and devaluing him" – family of a child aged 10–12 years, mainstream school, metropolitan QLD.

"Name calling, exclusion, forced to play with kids who have hurt my child, teachers referring to child's work as terrible and garbage, pushed into the ocean off a pier, hid in garbage bin to hide from tormentors, too many to list" – family of a child aged 10-12 years, mainstream school, metropolitan VIC.

"By other students – photographing him and videoing him telling him to say inappropriate things. Teachers not thinking what behaviour is communicating. Singling him out in front of fellow students and saying things like 'he has to understand the impact he has on other students'" – family of a young person aged 16–18 years, mainstream school, metropolitan QLD.

"Bullied by previous principal. Punished with less time at school. Was only allowed to attend school for two hours a day. New principal allows my son to go to school every day" – family of a young person aged 13–15 years, rural VIC.

"He was threatened continually by staff due to a medical condition that annoyed the staff member. He was constantly sent out of the classroom by the teacher (sometimes several times

every 15 minutes). This was not behaviour-related but an uncontrollable issue with his disability” – family of child aged 10–12 years, mainstream school, metropolitan QLD.

"Pushed down stairs, called names, was threatened with rape" – family of a child aged 10–12 years, mainstream school, metropolitan NSW.

"Daily. Her anxiety is so high she can't cope with recess, let alone lunch. She arrived late every day to avoid the morning social interactions. She has had group violence on numerous occasions [for] which she always ended up suspended or with a punishment for fighting back and defending herself. She has also had online bullying. At 11 years-old was suicidal with a plan; luckily I was able to intervene" – family of a young person aged 13–15 years, mainstream school, rural SA.

## Restrictive practices

Restraint and seclusion are restrictive practices. The 2019 Education Survey defined restraint as “any practice or intervention that has the effect of restricting the rights or freedom of movement of a person with disability”. This can include physical, mechanical or chemical restraint. It can also include psycho-social restraint, which involves using intimidation or threats to control a person.

The survey defined seclusion as "solitary confinement of a person in a room or area from which their exit is prevented by barrier or another person. Seclusion includes situations in which people believe they cannot or should not leave an area without permission”.

Almost one in three students with disability, 30.9% (156), experienced restraint or seclusion in the last year. There were 11.1% (56) who experienced both restraint and seclusion.

Restraint and seclusion were consistent across all school types, with roughly the same proportions of students experiencing restrictive practices across ‘mainstream’ (30%), special schools (29.5%) and those with a dual enrolment (37.5%).

Overall, 21% (106) of students with disability experienced restraint in the last year and, of these, the most common form was physical restraint, followed by psycho-social, mechanical and chemical restraint (Table 11).

**Table 11. Type of restraint experienced by students with disability (n=106)**

Type of restraint	No	Percentage
Physical	57	53.8%
Psycho-social	18	17.0%
Mechanical	10	9.4%
Chemical	6	5.7%

There were also 21% (106) of students who experienced seclusion in the last year. The settings for seclusion included solitary confinement with and without supervision in a room, classroom or staff office (Table 12).

**Table 12. Settings for seclusion of students with disability (n=106)**

<b>Response</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Solitary confinement	28	26.4%
Solitary confinement with supervision	6	5.7%
Room	21	19.8%
Staff office	9	8.5%
Isolated around school, corridors, playground, reception	7	6.6%
Classroom	3	2.8%
Detention, after school detention, internal suspension	3	2.8%
Recess and lunch	2	1.9%
During NAPLAN examination	1	0.9%
Did not specify	2	1.9%

Feedback from families about restrictive practices:

"Restricted practice with the use of weighted equipment in a time-out room with no communication with the family. Also has been locked in a support unit area and refused access to the mainstream area during recess and lunch" – family of a child aged 13–15 years, dual enrolment, regional NSW.

"Initially the school tried to encourage 'chemical restraint' by encouraging me to have my son placed on Ritalin. But again I had to advocate that it is not required for my son's condition and only works on children with ADHD, which my child does not have" – family of a child aged 7–9 years, mainstream school, metropolitan QLD.

"In the disability unit he was left in a room on his own and when he became agitated and broke a window they rang me and suspended him on two occasions. If I left him there any longer he would have been expelled. He only ever had behavioural issues in that environment" – family of a child aged 10–12 years, mainstream school, metropolitan SA.

"Psycho-social restraint. A person who loves life and interacting with people often comes home and says 'I don't talk at school, I only talk at home'" – family of a young person aged 16–18 years, mainstream school, metropolitan QLD.

"Has had to work in the principal's office rather than the classroom" – family of a child aged 10–12 years, mainstream school, metropolitan VIC.

"He was left briefly in a hot school taxi and felt scared that he couldn't get out" – family of a child aged 7–9 years, dual enrolment between special school and mainstream school, metropolitan SA.

"Made to sit on a bench in the playground and not move off it" – family member of a young person aged 13–15 years, special school, regional NSW.

## Summary and discussion

As outlined in the report *Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation*, inclusive education is provided within the 'general' education system and ensures that each person has access to opportunities to maximise academic and social development.<sup>5</sup> The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability definition of inclusion in education outlines that no form of segregation or integration constitutes inclusive education.<sup>6</sup> Despite this, the number of students in Australia with disability attending a special school increased by 35% between 2003 and 2015<sup>7</sup>.

Research shows that students who experience disability who are educated in 'mainstream' settings demonstrate better academic and vocational outcomes when compared with students educated in segregated settings. Research also demonstrates benefits for educational attainment, with students who are educated in 'mainstream' settings nearly five times more likely to graduate at the expected time than students in segregated settings.<sup>8</sup>

Segregation and denial of education has been defined as macro-exclusion<sup>9</sup>. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability has clear definitions of what is and what isn't inclusive education, and states all forms of segregation and integration, without making adjustments to the educational environment, constitutes exclusion.

The 2019 CYDA National Education Survey results show that one in four students is in a special school or has a dual enrolment between a 'mainstream' and special school. Meanwhile, one in ten is enrolled in a 'mainstream' school but is separated from the class in a separate unit. There is also evidence of 'gate-keeping' and students being denied enrolment, with one in ten students with disability having been refused enrolment. There are significant numbers of students who are not participating in full-time schooling, with families reporting that schools are using suspensions and 'support needs' as ways to prevent students from attending school full-time.

What is insidious is micro-exclusion that occurs in mainstream schools, where students are not valued members of the school community or included along with their peers.<sup>10</sup> There is strong evidence that students are routinely being denied opportunities to fully participate in the curriculum and school life, with almost half of students being excluded from participating in camps, sports, excursions, events and school activities. The survey results show one in ten students with disability has been suspended and many on multiple occasions.

Families report they were not included in the development of personalised learning plans for their child and that they and the student are not made to feel welcome at school. One in three say that teachers and support staff do not have high expectations of the student and their learning.

Despite many students receiving additional support at school and additional funding, half of the survey respondents believe the student doesn't receive adequate support in their education and that teachers and support staff do not have the training required to provide a supportive and enriching

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<sup>5</sup> Cologon, K. (2019) *Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation*. Report written by Dr Kathy Cologon, Macquarie University, for Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA)

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General comment No. 4 (2016) Article 24: Right to inclusive education

<sup>7</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2017) [\*Disability in Australia: changes over time in inclusion and participation in education\*](#). AIHW, Canberra.

<sup>8</sup> Cologon, K. (2019)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

education environment. Families are also using their child's NDIS supports and are paying personally to ensure the participation and access of the child or young person with disability.

The micro-exclusion described above is equally concerning as the macro-exclusion, where "...segregation on the basis of 'disability' is, arguably, the last remaining 'respectable' form of segregation in schooling."<sup>11</sup>

Micro-exclusion, which the survey results highlight, reflects a deep systemic and cultural problem that needs to be urgently addressed in Australia's educational system. These problematic attitudes, behaviours and ableism are not going to be solved without whole-of-system educational reform and investment in inclusive education.

The violence against and abuse of students with disability is widespread. Almost half of students with disability have been bullied by either their peers or by teachers and school staff, and one in three students with disability has been subject to the restrictive practices of restraint and seclusion. In the Australian Civil Society Shadow Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disability we highlighted under *Article 15, Freedom from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment* that Australia has no regulatory protective framework to protect children with disability from being subjected to behaviour modification and restrictive practices in schools. We called for "a nationally consistent legislative and administrative framework for the protection of people with disability from behaviour modification and the elimination of restrictive practices across a broad range of settings"<sup>12</sup>.

CYDA has made Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to all Australian state and territory education jurisdictions about abuse and restrictive practice in schools. To date, some jurisdictions have provided some information, but there is no consistent way the data is recorded nationally or in each state and territory.

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to highlight the systemic violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children and young people in their education and we look forward to making multiple submissions to inform the Commission's work.

Looking to the future, the terms of reference of the Royal Commission to examine neglect and exploitation, along with violence and abuse, is very helpful, as a lack of inclusive education is a form of neglect and a denial of human rights.

*Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation*<sup>13</sup> outlines a roadmap to inclusive education with the following recommendations:

- Develop and implement a national action plan for inclusive education to ensure a successful transition from parallel systems of education to one inclusive system of education
- Ensure that no new segregated settings (schools, pre-schools, centres, units or classrooms) are created
- Ensure the full recognition of human rights
- Foster a culture of inclusion
- Introduce compulsory, comprehensive and ongoing teacher education for inclusion
- Build the foundations for successful collaboration for inclusion
- Ensure flexible and responsive curriculum and assessment approaches

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 18

<sup>12</sup> *Disability Rights Now*, 2019 Australian Civil Society Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: UN CRPD Review 2019, p.23

<sup>13</sup> Cologon, K. (2019)



- Listen to students
- Prioritise disability equity education.

Additionally, significant legislative and practice change is required to prevent violence and abuse at school – this requires urgent attention.

While the 2019 Education Survey looks at school education, there is further work required to examine violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children and young people in education in other areas, including early childhood education, post-school transition and further education.