

FURTHER ADVOCACY TIPS

DEALING WITH MYTHS AND BARRIERS

There are many myths and barriers to inclusive education. The best way to combat these is to learn more yourself. Challenging people in authority is daunting, and when decisions impact on our children, our emotions can be heightened. To be an effective advocate you will need to be brave in speaking up for your child and to do so with thought, skill and clarity. That's why we recommend being connected to other families.

GET INFORMED ABOUT:

- the clear research evidence and the laws protecting your child's rights to inclusion
- your long-term vision for your child's life
- what good inclusion looks like
- government policies and legislation
- your school's policies, mission and values
- the processes that are open to you e.g. internal complaints, regional contacts, anti-discrimination processes.

UNDERSTANDING COMMON MYTHS

Knowing some of the more common myths and objections helps you rehearse a response so you are able to respond less emotionally without backing down. Being forewarned also helps you to deflect stereotypes and model more positive assumptions about your child.

Here are some of the more common statements you may hear:

- Your child's needs would be better met in a special school.
- Our school does not have the resources/expertise.
- Our school can only provide x hours of support so your child can only attend for x hours per week.
- Your child will be disadvantaged with less 1 to 1 or specialist support.
- Your child won't cope or won't be safe.
- Your child won't have friends.
- The gap is getting wider.

To deal with these myths, it will be important to be informed, connected and clear.



DEVELOP YOUR COUNTER-ARGUMENTS

- Draw on the facts, in particular that there is no evidence that special education is better than regular school for any child with disability (and indeed the weight of evidence is completely the opposite).
- Explain that resources are one part of the picture. Schools can build expertise; the most important factors are quality teaching and a whole school commitment.
- Point out that you are seeking inclusion as a foundation for a life in community – which is made possible when children are included alongside their typical peers.
- Explain you are not seeking “special education” and that support can be provided in a variety of ways. Be familiar with the Disability Standards for Education and the requirement for all schools to make reasonable adjustments.
- Be clear that all children have the right to belong. Everyone benefits. Every child has needs and each has the capacity to contribute.

SUSTAINING YOUR ADVOCACY; SUSTAINING YOURSELF

Being an advocate can be challenging. There may be doubts and fears, and times of frustration when your issues are not being heard. Remember to take care of yourself over the long-haul of school advocacy.

- Celebrate what is good. Enjoy your child's school years, their progress and the highlights of inclusion.
- Remember no child's school years are perfect. Aim for better without being too despondent about the gap between what you have and an ideal of true inclusion.
- Build a strong support network – having people who support your vision and being able to bounce ideas off others is invaluable.
- Keep reflecting on your advocacy goals but don't overthink. The best arguments don't guarantee success. The most important factors in the long-term are likely to be persistence and a clear vision.
- If things are not going well (a teacher who doesn't get it, difficult times with peers), look at ways you can protect your child from that fallout. It is OK to take a break from advocacy to concentrate on other aspects of life.
- Find an outlet for yourself – a way to debrief and relax.



MAKING A COMPLAINT OR TAKING LEGAL ACTION TO ADDRESS DISCRIMINATION

If you are unsatisfied with the results of your own advocacy, you may need to pursue formal complaints or advocacy. Tips for this include:

- Have good records. Ensure your language is fair, reasoned, polite, and the details are accurate.
- Use the formal processes. Don't escalate issues prematurely – give the people closest to the situation the chance to respond.
- Distinguish between the desire to vent or punish and the goal you are pursuing.
- Stay focused on the most important issues so you can achieve the best outcome for your son or daughter

USEFUL WEBSITES:

- Anti-Discrimination Commission of Queensland www.adcq.qld.gov.au
- Australian Human Rights Commission www.humanrights.gov.au
- United Nations (UNCRPD) www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/crpd
- Education Department education.qld.gov.au
- There will be different contact points across Queensland for complaints within Catholic and Independent Schools.