

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION THE EARLY YEARS



Expanding Ideas; Creating Change

This fact sheet is designed to share information and ideas that have helped other Queensland families when their child with disability is transitioning into Prep, to help support your choice and your vision for inclusive education.

The Importance of an Inclusive Education.

Starting school is a big step for every child and their family.

When your child has a disability, it can feel even bigger.

It is good to know that in Queensland, every student is entitled to attend their local state school.¹

It is also reassuring that 50 years of research has found that mainstream education settings provide positive academic and social outcomes for all learners, along with better long-term outcomes for employment, independence and social belonging for learners with disability.²

Families may choose to enrol their children with disability into their local school because they are guided by a vision for their child to grow up as any child would, following the typical life path that leads from school to life in their community.



“ When we approached our local school about enrolling my daughter (Kate), they seemed surprised that we wouldn't consider a special school as our first option. There was a suggestion of only attending for a few hours a day and concerns around whether she would make authentic friendships or be vulnerable due to her limited verbal communication.

We were also told that experienced support could be limited and that the academic gap would get wider each year. But we had looked into the research around academic and social inclusion done well and understood that if the school were willing, all of those potential hurdles could be managed.

We have never been concerned with Kate “keeping up”, just that she would be supported to achieve her own potential.

It hasn't always been easy, but I'm happy to say that our daughter was able to enjoy 7 years at our local primary school, thanks to open hearts and minds, along with collaborative and respectful partnerships between the staff and our family.

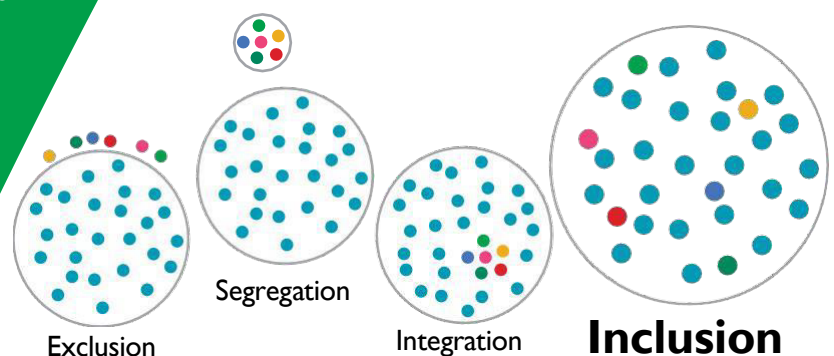
My message to other families is to understand what you want for your family member in the long term and then work back from there. Share why it's important and don't be persuaded to give up on what you think is right for your child simply because someone suggests it might not work always hold your long-term vision for your child close. ”

What is inclusive Education?

Inclusive education is about everyone learning and growing up together – in all our diversity.

Inclusive education means that **all students** attend and are welcomed by their neighbourhood schools in age appropriate, regular classes and are **supported to learn, contribute and participate** in all aspects of the life of the school. This means physical, cultural, social and curriculum inclusion is provided for all learners.

Inclusion is distinct from other educational practices such as segregation and integration.



What is my role as a parent in my child's inclusive education?

You have a choice to enrol your child with disability at their local state school. Historically, you may have expected that a special education path has been the default for children with disability. This may make you unsure as a parent about asking for inclusion. When enrolling your child, it will first be important to understand what good inclusion looks like, in contrast to exclusion, segregation and integration.³

It is helpful for you as a family to plan and collaborate with your child's school, and to advocate for your child's needs rather than thinking inclusion will "just happen". This may seem daunting, but being prepared will help you feel much more confident. Knowing that other families around Queensland are also advocating for inclusion is helpful.⁴

It's important to know about the evidence and the law that protects your child's right to attend school and to be supported to succeed. These include the Australian Disability Standards for Education and Queensland's Anti-Discrimination Act and Human Rights Act. The book, 'I Choose Inclusion' may also help you.⁵

The Australian Curriculum is designed to include all learners, and supports all students to achieve their full potential.⁶ There is information on the Queensland Department of Education website ⁷ to support your child's positive transition to school.⁸ Inclusion is about everyone.

Schools prepare to welcome and support each child from their first day.

This is the beginning of an important partnership.

Your relationship with your child's school will be important. Schools are required to consult with you about the adjustments they are making to support your child. It may be helpful to know that your child's school has an obligation to provide access to interpreters if required to support you in these conversations. Find time to work with your child's teacher to find solutions to any problems or barriers, and to celebrate successes. Remember you're a valuable partner in your child's education and it is important to build positive relationships as you go. You can work together to ensure a quality education for your child.

EVERY child has the right to be included. Every child CAN be included. Be prepared, but also excited about this new stage in your child's life!

To learn more about advocating for your child's inclusive education, and to connect with others on a similar journey¹⁰ visit <https://cru.org.au/resources/factsheets/inclusive-education/>



What can you do to help school get to know your child?

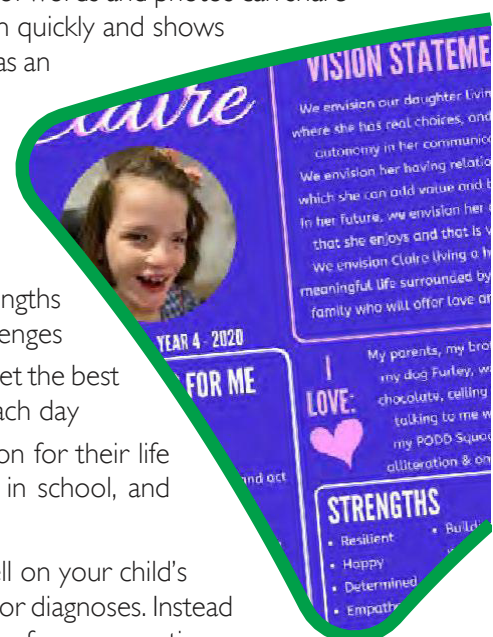
Remember to work with your child's school so they know how best to include them. It is good to let your child find their feet, but also very important for you to share your knowledge, ideas and vision with the school. A vision captures how a family pictures their child's future – friendships, employment, their own home etc. When making education choices for a child with disability, it's important to keep this vision in mind, as an inclusive education is a helpful pathway to an inclusive life.

Many parents find it valuable to create a "one page profile" about their child to help school get to know them.²

A mixture of words and photos can share information quickly and shows your child as an individual:

- their passions and interests
- their strengths and challenges
- how to get the best out of each day
- your vision for their life included in school, and beyond.

Don't dwell on your child's challenges or diagnoses. Instead set the tone for conversations by speaking about your child with high expectations. Introduce them as the valuable family and community member they are, and the valuable classmate they will be!



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