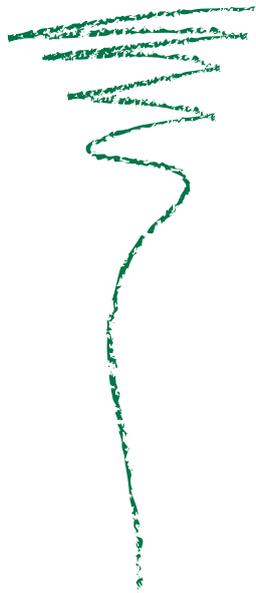


I CHOOSE INCLUSION

A guide for parents in their search for an inclusive education



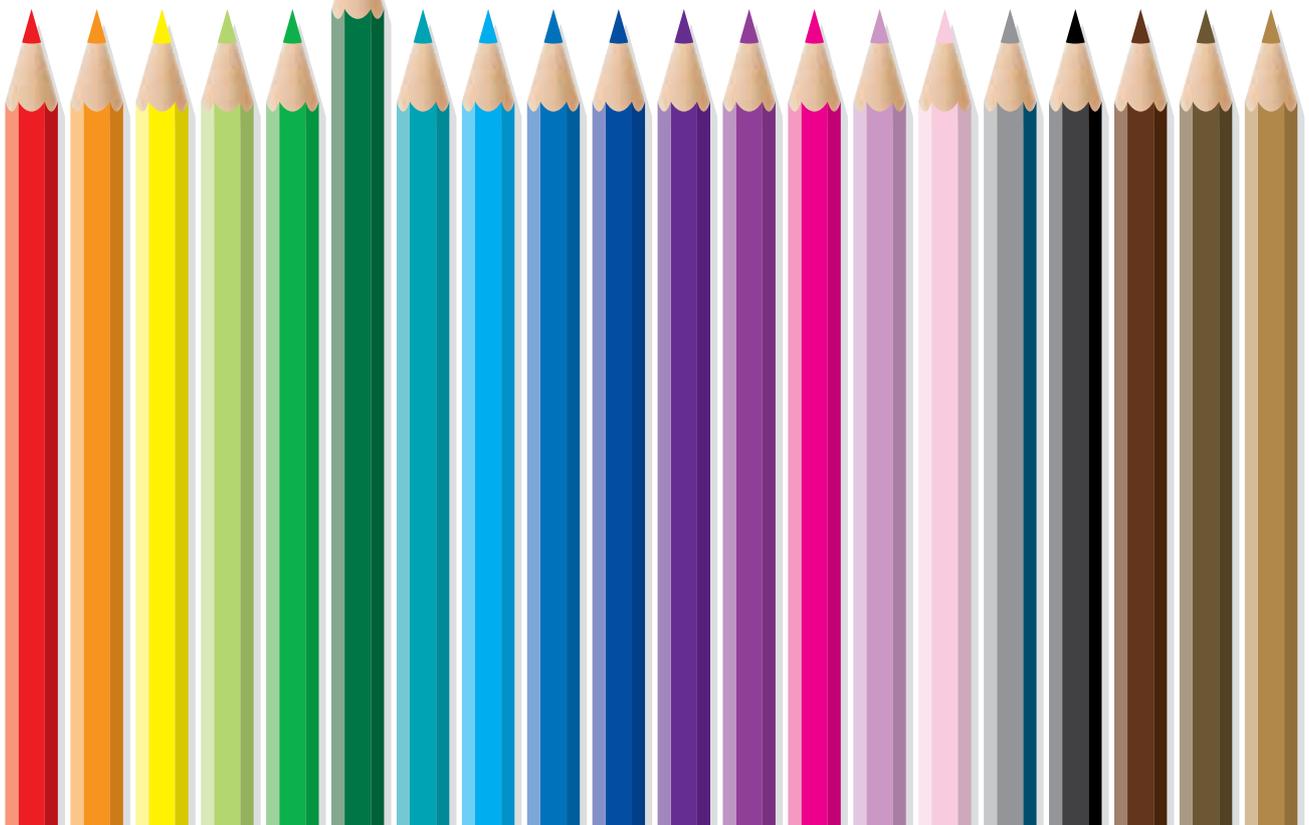
QUEENSLAND
PARENTS FOR
PEOPLE WITH A
DISABILITY



Community
Resource
Unit Ltd.

Expanding Ideas; Creating Change

2020





Queensland Parents for People with a Disability

Queensland Parents for People with a Disability was a state-wide family and systems advocacy organisation for over 30 years. QPPD's mission was to vigorously defend justice and rights for people with disabilities by exposing exclusionary practices, speaking out against injustices and promoting people with disabilities as respected, valued and participating members of society.

The pursuit of genuinely inclusive education was a long-term priority for QPPD and QPPD wrote and produced the first edition of I Choose Inclusion in 2011. When QPPD folded, CRU recognized the gap that was created by the loss of such a significant family voice for inclusive education. Over many years, CRU has resourced families to learn about inclusive education and to develop the leadership skills to keep pursuing inclusive education for their own children as well as to be a voice for change, and to support other families. In 2019, CRU received funding from Queensland's Department of Education for the Families for Inclusive Education Project which is designed to assist families to develop their advocacy skills so they can be a valued partner in their child's education.

This revised edition of I Choose Inclusion is funded from the Families for Inclusive Education Project, proudly supported by the Queensland Government through the Department of Education.

Acknowledgements

The original publication of I Choose Inclusion was led by Glenys Mann, QPPD project worker, with input from QPPD staff, board members, members and supporters. Many parents also contributed stories.

This updated version was led by Ainsley Robertson, and by other CRU staff, particularly members of the Families for Inclusive Education team. We appreciate the input from Dr Emma Phillips and Nikki Parker from Queensland Advocacy.

A particular thanks to the parents who each day continue to choose, or dream of, inclusion. This booklet is dedicated to them.

Disclaimer

While all efforts were made to ensure that the information in this booklet was accurate at the time of publication, policy and school procedures change regularly. You are advised to check for updated information about current legislation, policy and practice and how this is likely to apply to your individual circumstances. It should not be considered legal or professional advice. Content was developed independently by CRU based on QPPD's original material and publicly available information. The content has not been endorsed by DoE.



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Foreword

In 2011, I wrote the foreword for I Choose Inclusion as then QPPD President. Now, I am introducing this revised version for CRU's Families for Inclusive Education project. I Choose Inclusion has been a valuable resource for countless families, but with new policies and legislation in place, it was in need of revision. Our approach in this revised edition was to take a minimal approach by updating key changes but not every use of terminology. We wanted to acknowledge QPPD's legacy, while also noting that the views put forward are also ones that CRU (and others) would also claim. Sadly much of QPPD's advice to families about the barriers they would face and the skills and networks they would need to achieve school inclusion is still completely relevant and remains unaltered!

CRU believes, as did QPPD, that inclusive schooling provides the best pathway for a life for a person with disability to be valued and seen as belonging to their community. We also believe that through more children being educated in regular neighbourhood schools, we will build communities where the gifts and contributions of people with disability will find recognition. We know that we have five decades of research that inclusive education provides the best educational outcomes for all children – with and without disability. Since the 2011 publication, General Comment no 4 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability has provided even stronger direction about what the right to inclusive education means, what isn't (integration, segregation and exclusion), and highlighted that a child's right cannot be taken away through parental choice. Our moral imperative is clear – students with disability must be able to access regular education – they have a right to belong to the centre and not the margins.

So while CRU believes that inclusive education is a right of the child (not primarily a decision for parents), we also know that families who want to choose an inclusive education continue to face barriers. Some schools welcome and include students with disability well, but too many parents and students still face unnecessary barriers in accessing their neighbourhood school or a quality inclusive education experience. Further, even where goodwill and welcome exist, it is likely that advocacy will at some time be required to maintain a quality inclusive education.

To parents, we hope that this booklet will inform, encourage and inspire you. While achieving inclusion can be a challenge, do not be deterred from choosing inclusion. The obstacles are NOT the whole story; inclusion is worth our efforts. Just like in 2011, we want this booklet to provide you with solace and strategies in the hard times. The original QPPD publication was developed with encouragement to those reading to stand firm in their dreams because of the wondrous fruits of an inclusive education, and a desire to see each successive generation of children with disability to reap those same rewards – and more. That message stands.

Inclusive education is possible and best for all students, though we also know that many families feel forced into making other choices – or face circumstances where the option of inclusion no longer seems tenable for their son or daughter. This is not cause for judgement or rejection, but we need to ask why, in 2020, this is still the case. For families who find themselves between a rock and a hard place, we know that inclusion and a good fulfilling life is a "whole of life" journey and it is never too early – or too late – to seek an inclusive path or to work for community belonging.

Every young Queenslanders should find welcome at their local school – and be supported to learn, participate and contribute as a valued member of that school community. Families and allies must stand together in solidarity until this hope is fulfilled. Not only does every child deserve to take their place in inclusive school communities, but each one of them through their own unique gifts will enrich and strengthen those same school communities.

Dream big, stand strong, be wildly proud of your precious child, and know that in choosing inclusion you are making a difference, not just for your family but for those who follow.

Lisa Bridle, Community Resource Unit.

About this booklet

This booklet is designed to help parents access an inclusive education for their son or daughter, and then make it work for their child.

Each section contains factual information as well as advice and perspectives from other parents of children with disability about their experiences in education. The booklet draws on research done by QPPD for the Diving for Pearls research project, as well as pulling together the thinking of experts on inclusive education. Often it will be the parent voices that will be most helpful for other parents as they strive to achieve the best for their child.

This booklet has some strong messages for parents as they support their child through their education.

1. Inclusion is good for everyone

Section 1 of this booklet outlines the research about the benefits of inclusion. Including children with disability meaningfully and thoughtfully in a school benefits the child with disability, the other students, the school itself and the wider community. Inclusion in education is one of the first steps to achieving a full life as a part of a community. This section defines inclusion, and summarises the legal and policy environment that aims to ensure children can access an inclusive education in a school of their choice.

2. You need to choose the school that is right for your son or daughter

Section 2 helps parents grapple with choices about schools, and with the enrolment process, so that their son or daughter has the best chance of true inclusion in the school the parents choose for them.

3. School procedures should work for your child

Education systems have procedures and resources designed to support inclusion for students with disability. Section 3 of this booklet outlines what is required of schools and how to make sure these procedures and resources benefit your child.

4. Inclusion takes effort from parents

Parents are the natural "advocates" for their children – the people who will stand up for their child's rights and push for the best interests of their child. Section 4 of the booklet contains advice on working with schools to make inclusion a successful experience.

5. Sometimes you will have to fight for your child

To achieve real inclusion for their son or daughter, parents often have to advocate for their child. Section 5 of this booklet outlines advice from parents who have been through the education system about what to do if things aren't going so well.

6. Inclusion is the law

Section 6 presents key laws and policies that support inclusion for students with disability.

7. There is help available

Section 7 suggests websites and resources to help parents along the way.

INCLUSION:

1. *It's the right thing to do*
2. *It's good for the school and essential for society*
3. *It has long term outcomes: living together starts with learning together*
4. *It's good for the child with disability*
5. *It's good for other children and for teachers*
7. *It doesn't cost any more overall*
8. *It's a worldwide trend*
9. *It's policy*
10. *It's the law*

(Jackson, 2003)

I. Introduction to inclusive education

Parents of children with disability have a number of decisions to make when their child is starting out in the school system or changing schools (e.g. moving location, or transitioning into secondary school). One of these decisions is the choice of school. This involves deciding between state schools, Catholic schools, independent schools or, for some parents, home schooling. Then, within the state school system there are special schools, regular schools with special education programs, and regular schools with no specified program.*

A fundamental choice in this decision-making process is between an inclusive (regular) and a segregated (special) education. It is likely that many people including friends, family and professionals will have an opinion on which is best. It is helpful to understand what inclusive education is and why you would choose this path, so that you can make up your own mind and make a well-informed decision.

Families can feel uncertain about what inclusive education means, and whether inclusive education is right for their child. Confusion about inclusion is understandable because widely varying school processes are called 'inclusive education'.

The following pages seek to clarify what inclusion means, and to share parents' vision of inclusion and their experiences. When parents have a clear picture of what they want for their child, and clear expectations for their child's schooling experience, they are better able to articulate their expectations and to push (advocate) for their choices.

Sometimes knowing what something is NOT helps to clarify parents' vision for what they DO want. As well as providing information about what inclusion IS, this booklet provides information about what is not inclusion.

This section also provides a brief summary of the laws and policies that protect your child's right to an inclusive education.

Inclusive education is a right for all children. This section will tell you why.

* For more information regarding schools available in specific Queensland regions go to schoolsdirectory.eq.edu.au

"Fortuitously this time I came across a school ...with a strikingly different approach. They appeared to genuinely care about getting to know the real Harrison veiled by his disability. He was not a problem to be managed. They valued parental opinion and suggestions and embraced outside input."

"Seeing how well some teachers do this makes me believe it is possible for everyone."

"Inclusion must mean more than just being at the school. To be included requires investment in understanding the unique disability of the child and making suitable adjustments. Supports should be in place to aid success."



cru.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Fact-Sheet-1-WHAT-IS-INCLUSIVE-EDUCATION.pdf

Ia. What is inclusion?

Inclusive education means that all students attend and are welcomed by their neighbourhood schools in age appropriate, regular classes. Students are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school.

Inclusion includes **Physical, Social and Curricular** Inclusion.

Inclusion is:

- Students with disability present and fully participating in the same environments with their same aged peers for the same amount of time, including participation in school excursions, assemblies, concerts and other extracurricular events.
- School communities welcoming all students, supporting them to belong socially and not separating them in the classroom or playground.
- All students learning the same curriculum and lesson material, with appropriate support and adjustments.
- Students with disability present in the same proportions as found in the population. They are in regular classes rather than congregating together in "special" classes or programs.

Inclusion is distinct from other educational practices such as **segregation** and **integration**. www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=xHHTbgvjbxA&feature=emb_title

The Queensland Department of Education's Inclusive Education Policy (2018) states:



"Inclusive education means that students can access and fully participate in learning, alongside their similar-aged peers, supported by reasonable adjustments and teaching strategies tailored to meet their individual needs. Inclusion is embedded in all aspects of school life, and is supported by culture, policies and every day practices." ppr.det.qld.gov.au/pif/policies/Documents/Inclusive-education-policy.pdf

This policy distinguished between inclusion and exclusion, segregation and integration. In spite of inclusive education polices, families may continue to experience exclusionary practices at the school level. Parents have found that creating an inclusive culture requires more than just the development of legal and policy documents.

Families who speak of inclusive experiences talk of:

- feeling that they and their children are welcome at the school
- being listened to by teachers
- establishing a good relationship with teachers and school administration
- experiencing good communication with teachers and other staff
- benefiting from flexibility of teachers and other staff
- knowing teachers understand disability issues
- being involved in the decision-making about their children
- seeing their children being supported in the regular classroom
- watching their children participating in regular classroom and school programs, doing modified work that makes this participation meaningful
- seeing their children continuing to learn (sometimes at a different rate to other children)
- enjoying the achievements of their children.



“I walked out of the place and burst into tears. I didn’t even know what had happened to me at the time. It took me a while to realise that we (me and Tim) had been judged and excluded.”

Why parents seek inclusive schooling:

“Because school is a key stage in life’s journey. An inclusive life is more strongly built from an inclusive school life.”

“So that he can grow up and be involved in/with his local community...learn from modelling the other children... be recognised as a participant and contributor in his community.”

“I felt very happy, happy to see my beautiful girl off doing fun things kids her age do.”

“I couldn’t see that he would be prepared for a real world other than being in it. I didn’t believe in the promises of special ed. I didn’t think he needed to be ‘fixed’ to gain entry into the mainstream. To me he already belonged.”

“For me and my family to be able to choose the life we want and to be supported when necessary to do that.”

Ib. What is exclusion?

Unfortunately, ‘inclusion’ is a term that has come to be interpreted in many different ways.

It is NOT inclusion if:

- it happens in a special school environment (even though special schools may be welcoming)
- students with disability are placed in general classrooms without preparation or support
- special education services are provided in separate or isolated places
- children are physically present in classrooms but their individual needs are ignored
- students’ safety or well-being is jeopardised
- unreasonable demands are placed on teachers and administrators
- parents’ concerns are ignored
- students with disability are isolated in regular schools
- students with disability are placed in schools or classes that are not age-appropriate
- students are required to be “ready” and to “earn” their way into regular classrooms based on cognitive or social skills
- you are expected to be grateful for an enrolment.

It is EXCLUSION when:

- an enrolment is refused because a child has a disability
- an enrolment is discouraged on the grounds of funding, hardship, not being able to meet a child’s individual needs etc
- parents are directed to another school which is deemed more appropriate because of a special education focus
- students are educated in separate classrooms
- students are not given the support or modification required to access the general curriculum
- students are separated from peers at lunchtimes
- students are not supported to participate in extra-curricular activities such as camps, sports, excursions.

Families who speak of NOT feeling included talk of:

- **feeling unwanted in the school and/or by specific teachers**
- **being told their children would be a problem or a burden**
- **being told their child would be better somewhere else; being directed to a different school**
- **being told their children would not cope**
- **being left out of decision-making; not having ‘real’ input**
- **experiencing poor communication with teachers**
- **dealing with inflexible teachers**
- **their children spending little or no time with students who don’t have a disability (either in the classroom or lunchtimes)**
- **their children being in regular classrooms or activities but not participating in the classroom work or activities**
- **their children experiencing time-wasting with a lack of educational outcomes.**

“Best way for Harrison to learn to be with his peers, social skills, how to fit in with society. To establish a network of typical friends and participate in typical activities.”

“Being known is a safeguard.”

“In comparison to the special school arena the inclusion within normal school has helped my child to blossom and prove that even though she can’t speak ... she is still capable of learning, creating, and to a lesser amount teaching her peers.”



Ic. Why is inclusion a better choice?

Academic

Research shows that students with disability educated in general settings score higher on achievement tests and perform closer to grade average than students in segregated settings. They spend more time on academic learning in general classroom settings and demonstrate better outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics and experience fewer behavioural issues. Post-secondary education is more likely as is competitive employment post-school. Overall, research indicates that students educated in regular schools are given more opportunities to achieve academic and other beneficial outcomes.

Social and Emotional impact

Inclusive settings encourage higher levels of interaction for both students with and without disability than segregated settings, with more opportunities for students to establish and maintain friendships. Inclusive education facilitates social development in children with and without disability, and development of friendships they may not have considered otherwise. Inclusive education also facilitates improved attitudes and more positive self-worth for both students with and without disability. Inclusive education leads to a sense of belonging, increased likelihood to be part of a school group, and a self-concept as a contributor. Students with disability are found to be more independent during and following schooling, including more likely to live independently post-school.

Impact on other children

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. Inclusive teachers engage all students in more higher-order thinking, questioning and dialogical interactions than non-inclusive teachers. Students in inclusive classrooms, with and without disability receive higher-quality instruction that is better suited to individual needs. Inclusive education has also been found to reduce fear of human difference and to promote increased acceptance of others. Students have more opportunities to develop effective communication skills and are able to develop personal moral and ethical principles as well as warm and caring friendships.

Ref: Cologon 2019 & ALANA Report 2016

Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation
www.cyda.org.au/resources/details/62/towards-inclusive-education-a-necessary-process-of-transformation

A summary of the evidence on inclusive education
alana.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/A_Summary_of_the_evidence_on_inclusive_education.pdf

INCLUSION

- **It is a human right**
- **Best academic and social outcomes for ALL learners**
- **Better long term outcomes for employment, independence & social belonging**
- **The school community learns to value diversity and how to accommodate difference**
- **Children grow up at the same schools as their siblings and neighbourhood friends**
- **Teachers become more effective teachers and learn skills for partnering with parents**
- **Inclusion is a foundation for inclusive communities**



Id. The legal and policy environment

Section 6 of this document outlines laws and policies relating to inclusive education, as summarised below.

- The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 protects individuals from discrimination. Within the Act, the Education Standards 2005 set out the rights of students with disability to participate in education, courses or programs on the same basis as students without disability.
- The Standards require schools to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate students with disability.
- The Standards state that schools do not have to accommodate a student with disability if doing so would cause “unjustifiable hardship” in terms of cost or safety to others.
- The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) was conceived by the Council of Australian Governments in 2008 and has been implemented by all Australian schools since 2015.
- The NCCD collects data about school students with disability who are receiving adjustments across Australia. The NCCD outlines how schools can comply with their obligations under the DSE to develop adjustments in consultation with students and their parents/carers.
- The right to inclusive education is reflected in the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, (CRPD), which was ratified by Australia in 2008. The right of persons with disability to access an inclusive, quality, free education on an equal basis with others is explicitly proclaimed within Article 24 of the CRPD.
- In 2016 General Comment No. 4 was added to further clarify CRPD’s Article 24: Right to Education. General Comment No. 4 provides further detail relating to the core features and substantive elements of inclusive education. (See 6d for more information).
- In 2018 The Queensland Department of Education released its Inclusive Education Policy which draws on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRDP)
- The previous year, Queensland’s Department of Education released its ‘Every Student with Disability Succeeding’ (Disability Review Response Plan) with the stated purpose to, “set us on a journey to lift learning outcomes, so that every student with a disability is succeeding, and every school is supported to achieve excellence.”
- Catholic dioceses and schools have their own education policies and procedures. The overarching Queensland Catholic Education Commission released an ‘Inclusive Practices for Students in Queensland Catholic Schools’ position statement in 2014 (amended 2019).
- Independent schools vary in their policies and procedures, but like other schools are bound by the Disability Discrimination Act and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In 2018, Independent Schools Queensland released a document titled, ‘Supporting Students with Disability’ which provides examples of how students with disability may be supported within a Queensland independent school.

“At both enrolment interviews we were told that it probably wasn’t the school for my son.”

Ie. Commonly raised objections

Parents have reported that they have faced the following objections and fears when seeking inclusive education:

1. **Your child would be better suited to enrolment in a special school, where there is more access to therapy, resources, smaller groups and specially-trained teachers OR to a split placement with part-time enrolment in a special school.**

Answer: Parents have found that access to therapy, resources, and effective teaching can be limited even in a special school. There is no empirical evidence to suggest that learning outcomes are improved in a special setting, in spite of smaller numbers. Research (Jackson, 2008) suggests that students with disability will achieve better educational outcomes in regular rather than special schooling. In regular schools, students have better role models for learning and are more likely to be exposed to academic challenge and higher expectations. Split placements must be considered with caution; students can be disadvantaged by having to fit in with two different environments.

2. **Our school doesn’t have the funding to support your child and / or we already have a number of children with disability at this school. You would be taking the funding away from them.**

Answer: Parents report that resourcing varies between schools. There is some autonomy in schools regarding their budgets which suggests that schools prioritise their spending differently and can find funding when there is a commitment to inclusion. To suggest one student would take funding away from another can feel like emotional blackmail – it is unfair and misleading. If extra funding is absolutely necessary, education systems can be lobbied for more. However it must be remembered that an inclusive culture is more than just a funding issue. Providing support to a student is part of the reasonable adjustments which education providers must comply with under the Education Standards (2005).

3. **We can only provide support for reduced hours.**

Answer: It is a mistake to equate “support” with teacher aide hours. Adult support is not the only successful strategy in inclusive classrooms. In fact it is sometimes to the detriment of good inclusive practice. It is important that teachers become skilled in teaching learners with different abilities and that classroom programs are designed so that ALL learners can participate.



“I have received a lot of flak from other people who seem to think it would be better for my daughter to go to a different school [to her siblings]. I stand my ground and my gut feeling keeps telling me to keep them at the same school. I shouldn't have to be worried whether I have made the correct decision.”

“First school (state school) made a suggestion my son would be better off at a special school.”

4. There are other schools that are better equipped to teach your child.

Answer: Queensland's Department of Education states in their Inclusive Education policy that students of all abilities can attend their local state school and be welcomed and supported to access and participate in high quality education alongside their similar-aged peers. It is the school's responsibility to ensure inclusion of your child and to provide the accommodations and support consistent with the current inclusive education policy and with legislation. Ideas about “schools better equipped” are likely to be based on historical habits of segregation rather than a true and evidence based analysis.

5. You would be disadvantaging your child if you sent them to this school.

Answer: There is NO empirical evidence to suggest that regular schools disadvantage any student. In fact there is a large body of research to support the inclusion of students with disability. There is no reason for you to feel that you are making a decision against your child's best interests.

6. Your child wouldn't be able to cope here.

Answer: Schools are legally required, under the Education Standards of the Disability Discrimination Act, to make necessary, reasonable adjustments. This objection reflects low expectations rather than a genuine prediction based on knowledge of your child.

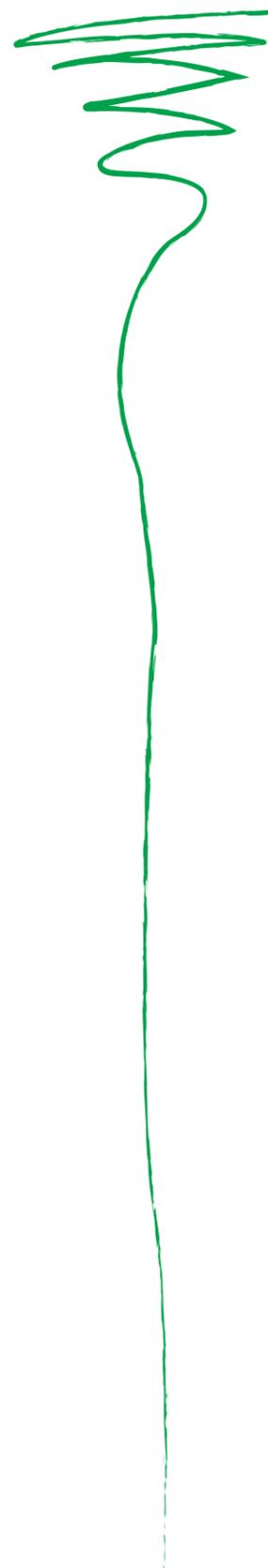
7. Your child won't have friends

Answer: Children are more likely to have friends when they spend time together in shared activities over long periods of time. Research (Cologon, 2019) suggests that inclusive education allows students both with and without disability to build and develop friendships that they might not have encountered otherwise. It is part of a teacher's role to support the development of relationships.

8. You are being unrealistic.

Answer: Parents have found that inclusive education CAN happen and has been possible for children with significant impairment when there is the will to include. Seeking inclusive education is in line with policy and the law.

2.



At the beginning: choosing and enrolling in a school

Choosing a school can feel daunting. This chapter runs through the process of choosing a school and enrolling at it, to help you pursue inclusive education for your son or daughter.

2a. Choosing a school

Although parents will have different expectations when choosing a school, common priorities are:

- local schools (i.e. proximity to home)
- good educational support for their child's needs
- a welcoming, caring attitude.

It is not uncommon for parents to feel they had no choice or were influenced in their choice by educational staff or even by families and friends

While educators may have valuable information to consider, parents are the primary decision-makers and it is families who will have to live with the results of that decision (e.g. long drives; distance from neighbourhood friends, missing out on ordinary school rituals and experiences). Remember, parents have the right to enrol their child at the school of their choice. Begin your decision-making in the same way that you would for a child without disability e.g. the neighbourhood school, a religious / private school, the family school.

Visit the schools that meet your initial criteria. Talking to the principal and teachers gives you a sense of what the school has to offer and of the school's attitudes and values concerning students with disability. For more information regarding schools available in specific Queensland regions go to schoolsdirectory.eq.edu.au or www.myschool.edu.au

Your first meeting with the school is an important one.

- **Be confident and clear that you want a regular class and access to the general curriculum rather than a separate class and a special curriculum**
- **Ask about what support will be provided so that this can be successful rather than if support will be provided**
- **Speak about the contribution your child will make (share your child's strengths) to the school rather than being apologetic about possible issues**
- **Ask about the general culture of the school community rather than their experience with special education**
- **Beware of “programs” or language suggesting segregated models such as “SEP kids”, “the unit students” or any program reserved for students with a label.**
- **Embrace your authority and express your vision (see section 4a for more information).**



“I had been to every high school within 10 minutes driving distance from home, trying to find a suitable place. The last one I visited (and the one we have chosen) was so incredibly different to the others...I was so relieved to find such a welcoming place. The other schools had said all of the ‘right’ things about inclusion, but were not really welcoming. It was all about the attitude; there was no talk of how hard it might be or funds or resources – it was just a sense of ‘he’s welcome here and he belongs here.’”

“Wanted Indigo to learn; have friends; have same opportunities as her sister and peers. I thought/ think congregate educational settings for students with disability are like a 12 year babysitting option, that lead to exclusion from the rest of life opportunity.”

“Don’t be put off; while you may initially feel unwelcome, don’t be discouraged. Go back; don’t trade your hopes for your child; don’t settle for welcome at the expense of inclusion in a neighbourhood school.”

Consider talking to existing parents in the school as this gives a more rounded view. Even if you haven’t made up your mind, put your child on the waiting list for schools that you think might be a possibility.

Some traps in this decision making process have been:

- **choosing a school based on a specific teacher or principal.**
When that individual leaves, the situation changes.
- **choosing a school because other children with disability go there.**
Good inclusive practice is threatened by disproportionate numbers of students with disability in the school community.
- **choosing a school because it has been promoted as having specialist facilities and staff.**
Parents have found that the specialist supports like therapy are not necessarily as promised. Some families have found that schools with special education programs are more likely to exclude students with disability from the general classroom and curriculum.
- **taking the option that is recommended.**
Holding out for your preference can have positive outcomes.

2b. Enrolment

Enrolling at a Queensland State School

You can apply to enrol your child with disability at your local state school where, in line with the DoE policy, they will be welcomed and supported to participate in school activities, learn and achieve their full potential. This means that children of all abilities can access and participate in a high-quality education and fully engage in the curriculum alongside their similar-aged peers.

education.qld.gov.au/parents-and-carers/enrolment
pqr.det.qld.gov.au/pif/policies/Documents/Inclusive-education-policy.pdf

Queensland State Schools are required to provide parents with an enrolment form/ package and if requested provide an opportunity to meet with the Principal Education Officer/ Student Services to discuss school-based services for students with disability. For more information regarding enrolment in a Queensland State School see: pqr.det.qld.gov.au/education/management/Procedure%20Attachments/Enrolment%20in%20State%20Primary,%20Secondary%20and%20Special%20Schools/enrolment-in-state-primary-secondary-special-schools.pdf

Enrolment cannot be refused on the basis of disability.

While schools may refuse enrolment for other reasons (e.g. catchment), “it is unlawful to refuse or place special conditions on a prospective student’s enrolment on grounds they have a disability.”

“The Director-General can refuse the enrolment of a prospective student if they reasonably believe that, if enrolled, the prospective student would pose an unacceptable risk to the safety or wellbeing of members of the school community”. The Director General can make decisions about excluding a prospective student from certain state schools, or all Queensland state schools.

pqr.det.qld.gov.au/education/management/Procedure%20Attachments/Refusal%20to%20Enrol%20-%20Risk%20to%20Safety%20or%20Wellbeing/refusal-to-enrol-risk-to-safety-or-wellbeing.pdf

“I have discovered that a quick way to identify a good/not so good school environment for my son is to state the diagnosis. A good school will have staff who smile and reassure me. At a not so good school I get the feeling that the staff have immediately gone into politically correct (hidden text: get them out of here) mode.”

“I have come to the conclusion that you cannot tell what a school will be like until you go there.”

“We chose this school being our local ‘community’ school. Most local kids go there. It is important that he grows up being part of the community and known amongst his peers as well as those of his brother and sister.”

“Went to a lot more schools before accepted.”

“I was a bit bamboozled by all the paper work and aide issues that were signalled as part of the enrolment process.”

Even when a prospective student meets entry requirements for enrolment in a special school, see Queensland Department of Education’s policy - Special school eligibility (“person with a disability” criteria), parents should be made aware of policies and evidence that supports inclusion. Eligibility for enrolment in a special school does not mean this is the only choice or will be the best option for your son or daughter. As already outlined, evidence suggests that an inclusive option is preferable even for students with significant impairment.

Queensland Catholic Education Schools have individual enrolment procedures which can be found on most school websites.

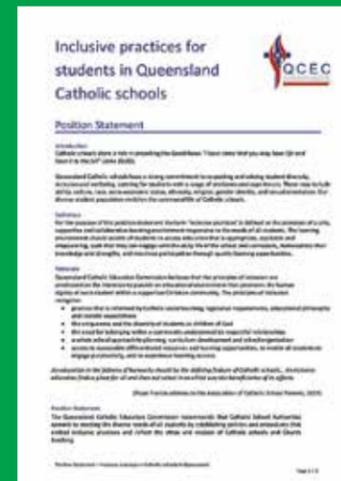
In regards to enrolment of students with disability Queensland Catholic Education Commission states in their Position Statement, ‘Inclusive practices in Catholic schools in Queensland’ that ‘Catholic schooling authorities and schools in Queensland will give consideration to:

- developing enrolment policies and procedures that promote inclusion
 - having enrolment processes which identify the student’s specific needs, adjustments required, whether adjustments are reasonable and can be made without creating unjustifiable hardship for any party”
- qcec.catholic.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/20190819-Amended-IP-Position-Statement.pdf

Independent Schools across Queensland also have individual enrolment procedures these can be found on most Independent School websites.

When parents have talked about enrolment, some have described positive, welcoming experiences. It is important, however, to be aware of the following:

- **Parents have been directed by education staff to a special school (in spite of the Inclusive Education Policy)**
NB Parents do not have to accept an enrolment in a special school if that is against their wishes.
- **Parents have been directed by education staff to an alternative school**
NB Parents can enrol their child on the same basis as children without disability. The influence of educational professionals is not always direct. It can take the form of an unwelcoming, negative attitude at the time of enrolment enquiries or ‘gentle persuasion’ that can feel like emotional blackmail (e.g. “you would be disadvantaging your child/other children”).
- **Parents have been offered dual enrolments (i.e. where students’ time is split between a regular and a special school)**
Dual enrolments, particularly against parents’ wishes, have the potential to disadvantage students (e.g. having to adjust to different rules, expectations, social groups). Students may feel like they don’t belong in either place.
- **Parents have been offered part-time enrolments or staggered entry**
Reduced time in the school often disadvantages students with disability who can be the very ones who need more support, consistency and/or extra time to learn. It can also be stressful for parents due to organisational issues. Where part-time attendance or staggered entry is considered, this should only be to address specific needs of the child, rather than because of shortfall in support hours or other school limitations.



“The best advice I can give is to stay connected to people who value your goals and who will support you in pursuing your dreams. For me, knowing other parents who were choosing inclusion and were a little further down the track has been gold.”

“It has been so critical to be clear about my vision. I would say to write it down. Hold onto the gifts and beauty of your child as this will help you resist negative ideas imposed by others. This is particularly true at times when you are facing assessments or transitions when the talk may be dominated by negative views or a lack of vision by others.”



2c. Facing the crowd

Unfortunately you are likely to meet numbers of people who will not understand or support your choice of a regular education setting. Many people expect that students with disability should attend a special education setting and think these places better cater for and “protect” students with impairment. It can be difficult dealing with intrusive comments which judge your choice and undermine your own ideas of what is best for your son or daughter: It can be particularly challenging if those questions or outright judgment come from people within your own family or close friends – or from people in positions of authority who have a great deal of say in your child’s education. It is, therefore, important that you have strategies in place to deal with those “naysayers”. It is important to remember your own authority and your long-term legitimacy (see section 4a). You have access to information about the advantages of inclusive education and effectiveness of inclusive practices that many people will not have. Many opposing your choice are relying on outdated stereotypes and limited ideas of what is possible for people with disability. This is particularly true if a person is seen as having higher support needs because some people will not be able to imagine how your child can be included. Their low expectations do not make them right.

It can be helpful to rehearse responses so you are more prepared. Work out the extent to which you want to engage with particular people. You may, for example, want to invest more time in trying to educate and bring on-board your family than you would an acquaintance. At the same time, casual encounters can be an opportunity for you to practise telling people about your hopes and dreams. Some parents have chosen a spiel like:

“I want my child to grow up in our local community so they are known and valued. I know that children with disability learn best in regular classrooms so I chose what would be best for their education and development. I wanted all my children to be able to attend school together.”

Being able to bring hurtful discussion to a close is also important. Some parents have been told that their child’s inclusion will impact on other students. Here you might want to say something like “I’m sorry you think that. Inclusion doesn’t have to take away from other students and I think my child has every right to benefit from the resources of the school. It is my role to look out for their best interests”. You don’t have to have an answer for everything and you should not have to feel apologetic for your choices. It is OK to simply acknowledge the difference of opinion and hold onto your child’s right to belong and benefit from regular education. You will not be able to convince everyone. Don’t hide away to avoid confrontation but try to identify some allies to smooth the way in certain situations.

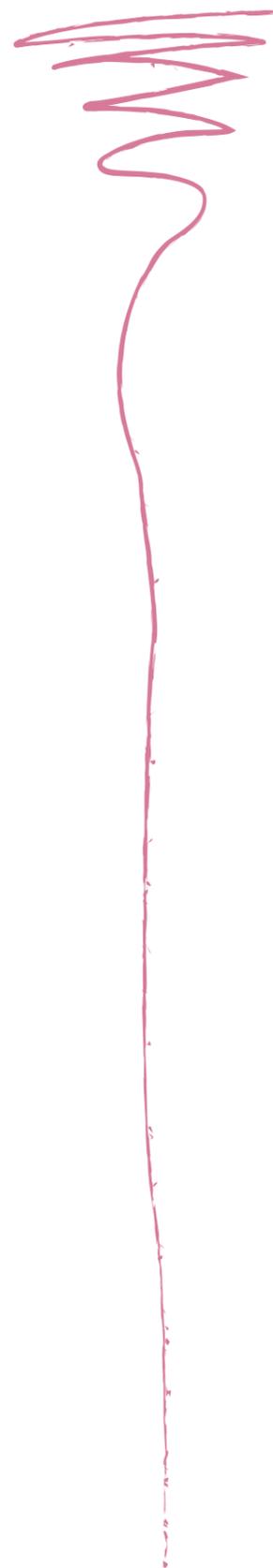
Sometimes opposition will come from someone in a professional role. Remember that person may have a vested interest (for example through commitment to special education) or just suffer a lack of vision themselves. Do not let professional authority distract you – the history of disability is full of examples of where professionals have got badly wrong what is “best” for people with disability.

It is normal to feel some doubt or emotional fallout from these encounters, so it is important to look after yourself and emotionally re-group. Keeping a sense of humour is critical. Remind yourself that other people’s perceptions can change and keep your eye firmly on your own goals. Being well informed about how inclusive education works best, legislation, and examples of successful inclusion will help you be more confident in your arguments.

QPPD’s Propaganda Directory features suggested responses to common school statements which are at odds with an inclusive mindset. Read more here to help you frame your responses:

cru.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/QPPD-Propaganda-Sheet-2014-with-QCIE-logo.pdf

3.



What to expect: school procedures

Parents can feel uncertain about the processes, support options, language used and staffing arrangements in schools. The following pages outline what you can expect to encounter and what other parents have said about their experiences with school procedures.

Links to relevant documents will be provided whenever possible.

It is helpful to know something about school procedures BEFORE entering the system because with more information, you can:

- feel more confident working with teachers
- make better decisions
- be more effective in meetings
- know who to approach for specific issues
- understand what is being talked about in meetings
- be more effective at advocating for your child.

The Queensland Department of Education has several webpages dedicated to, 'inclusive education' and 'students with disability'. These webpages feature information regarding policy, school procedure, supports that are available, staffing roles, etc. education.qld.gov.au/students/inclusive-education
education.qld.gov.au/students/students-with-disability

Catholic Education (Brisbane Archdiocese) has a webpage dedicated to 'student support' featuring information regarding school procedures, supports that are available, staffing roles etc. Each Diocese will have similar information and individual schools may also have information available. www.bne.catholic.edu.au/students-parents/Pages/Supporting-Students.aspx

There is also a parent guide ('Supporting Students with Disability at School' 2005) though the currency of this document is unclear. www.bne.catholic.edu.au/students-parents/Inclusive%20Education%20Documents/Supporting%20Children%20with%20a%20Disability%20at%20School%20-%20A%20Guide%20for%20Parents.pdf

We urge parents to focus primarily on the opportunities, choices and supports that are available for all students in the general education system.



Some parents have spoken of good communication and partnerships with teachers. You have the right to be involved in discussions, to have input into the decisions that are made and the profile that is developed if you wish to participate. We recommends that you take up this right to be involved.

“Yes, when we finally had a school that valued my thoughts and opinions, then planning meetings are a truly collaborative process with mutual respect of participating parties, and outcomes, although they may not be ideal, are far more meaningful and satisfying.”

3a. Education Adjustment Program (EAP)

All Queensland State, Catholic and Independent schools access the ‘Education Adjustment Program’. The EAP process has implications for the resourcing of the school to accommodate students with verified disability.

For more information relating to ‘verified disability / verification’ see: [education.qld.gov.au/students/students-with-disability/education-adjustment-program/verification#:~:text=Verification,Adjustment%20Program%20\(EAP\)%20categories](http://education.qld.gov.au/students/students-with-disability/education-adjustment-program/verification#:~:text=Verification,Adjustment%20Program%20(EAP)%20categories).

The Education Adjustment Program (EAP) is a process for identifying and responding to the educational needs of students with disability who require significant education adjustments related to the specific impairment areas of:

Autism Spectrum Disorder; Hearing Impairment; Intellectual Disability ; Physical Impairment ; Speech-Language Impairment; Vision Impairment.

* An additional category of disability is also eligible for support in non-state schools only: **Social-Emotional Disorder.**

EAPs do provide additional resourcing and the purpose of these additional resources is to assist classroom and specialist teaching staff to deliver quality educational programs that are designed to meet the individual program needs of students within an inclusive school setting. These additional resources are allocated to the school, not directly to individual students. Principals are responsible for the resources provided to support educational programs of all students in their school, including students with disability who either meet or do not meet EAP criteria.

education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/ Documents/policy-disability.doc
education.qld.gov.au/about/Documents/disabilities-policy.pdf

The EAP supports schools to:

- understand and meet obligations to make reasonable adjustments for students with disability,
- identify students (Prep to Year 12) who meet criteria for the EAP categories
- Report significant education adjustments that are currently in place to address the extra educational needs of these students.

education.qld.gov.au/students/students-with-disability/education-adjustment-program

**Note: Many students with disability won't 'fit into' any of the EAP categories but do sit within the Disability Discrimination Act's definition of disability. If an EAP has been ruled out for your child, the school remains obligated under the Disability Standards for Education (DSE) to provide reasonable adjustments to enable them to participate in education on the same basis as other students. Education providers must consult with the student (if possible) and parents before making a reasonable adjustment. For more information on other ways that schools provide for the individual needs of a student with disability please see 3a or see the document, 'Students with Disability' by Queensland Department of Education).*

education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/ Documents/students-with-disability.pdf



Some parents have said that they find the process difficult and that their information/ suggestions are ignored and even questioned. Keeping records of past work; work at home or even video footage can be useful in supporting your suggestions/ observations.

“The special education system is heavily focused on identifying impairment or a child’s deficits. This can be emotionally devastating and can discourage parents from pursuing inclusion. Even if it is not directly stated, the process can give a message that your child is too impaired to cope with inclusion.”

Steps in the EAP include:

1. Verification: a process of confirming that a student's identified impairment and the associated activity limitations and participation restrictions, which require significant education adjustments, meet criteria for one or more of the six EAP disability categories.
2. An EAP profile: developed to describe the range and frequency of adjustments that are made to assist the participation of students with disability. This profile is submitted for approval.
3. Validation: undertaken to ensure that the information gathered through the EAP process is valid and reliable.

Support for students with disability and adjustments do not always require funding.

For more info about the Queensland Department of Education's EAP process: education.qld.gov.au/students/students-with-disability/education-adjustment-program

Catholic schools in the Brisbane archdiocese also use an EAP process which is outlined on Brisbane Catholic Education's webpage. www.bne.catholic.edu.au/students-parents/Pages/Supporting-Students.aspx

Independent Schools Queensland's 'Supporting Students with Disability' brochure mentions EAPs and other government supports available for students with disability. rms.isq.qld.edu.au/files/Weblive_Diversity/Diversity%20brochure%20SVD.pdf

It is important that you are involved in the Education Adjustment Process (EAP). You have vital information and insights to share because you:

- have known your child the longest
- know what has been successful in the past with other teachers
- know what has worked successfully at home
- are more likely to see your child holistically – not as a sum of their deficits or limits
- are likely to see how your child's strengths can be used in planning.



3b. Nationally Consistent Collection of Data

The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) is a yearly count of students by all Australian schools across the country. The aim of the NCCD is to provide the Australian Government with information about the number of students with disability in Australian schools and the types of adjustments they need in order to access and participate in education on the same basis as other students.

From 2018, the NCCD has been used by the Australian Government to inform funding for schools, known as the 'student with disability loading'. Students with disability who are counted in the top three levels of the NCCD (extensive, substantial and supplementary) attract additional funding through the student with disability loading.

The Australian Government does not strictly specify how this NCCD disability loading must be spent by schools. **This means that education systems and schools across Australia may utilise the NCCD disability loading in different ways.** The important message is that schools do have access to funding from NCCD or elsewhere to assist with providing adjustments for students with disability. It is important to note here that although funding, whether from NCCD or other buckets can be of great assistance, many adjustments don't require funding and that without appropriate planning and implementation adjustments can be ineffective.

Your child should be included in the NCCD if they require ongoing adjustments at school due to a disability as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). This is a very broad definition of disability and a formal diagnosis is not required for a student with disability to be counted in the NCCD.

For more information about the NCCD:

www.nccd.edu.au/for-parents-guardians-and-carers

www.education.gov.au/what-schooling-resource-standard-and-how-does-it-work

education.qld.gov.au/about-us/reporting-data-research/data/disability-data-collection

Some parents who have been genuinely included have found the IEP process to be a mutually rewarding and positive experience.

"Being prepared for meetings and thinking about what information I can provide about Sophie has been really important. I have mostly found teachers very open to my input but I do try to be well prepared, to keep an eye on what I want from the process for Sophie and also modelling a positive approach."

It took a while for me to break the habit of focusing on Sophie's limits but while I don't deny the challenges, I do see my role as keeping the broader picture in view – that Sophie is a student with the same need to participate, learn, have friends and be challenged."



3c. Individual Plans

For most parents and carers of a child with disability, discussions relating to how your child will be supported in the classroom will follow soon after the enrolment application. This support will require some form of 'individualised or 'personal planning'. There are many terms used for school based individual plans. The most common are: Individual Curriculum Plans (ICPs), and Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Other terms used may include: Individual Learning Plans and Personalised Learning Plans.

CRU has devised a summary document **Individual Plans Explained** cru.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Individual-Plans-June-2020.pdf

Queensland Department of Education State Schools:

While individual plans are important, families should be aware of whole school approaches to differentiated teaching and learning – *teachers are required to provide differentiated and explicit teaching and learning for all students, focused teaching for groups and individuals in response to formative assessment and intensive teaching for individual students is provided in response to the analysis of monitoring tasks and diagnostic tools and addresses specific understandings and skills.*

education.qld.gov.au/curriculums/Documents/school-approach-to-differentiated-teach-and-learn.PDF

Individual Curriculum Plan (ICP) - ICPs are most commonly implemented in State Schools. However, similar plans (sometimes with a different title) are implemented in Catholic Education and Independent schools across Queensland. The majority of students in Prep to Year 10 are able to access the curriculum and achievement standards for their year level/age cohort with the differentiated teaching and learning in place (as described in the 'Whole school approach to differentiated teaching and learning' above.) For the small percentage of students who are not yet meeting or who are exceeding the achievement standard for their year level, an ICP may be required. This will enable them to access either a higher or lower year level curriculum than their age cohort so they can continue to progress in their learning.

The stages of the ICP process include:

- Information Gathering
- Decision to provide an ICP
- Selection of appropriate Year level curriculum
- ICP developed for semester
- Parent and Principal endorsement of ICP
- Implementation of ICP
- ICP reviewed each semester

education.qld.gov.au/curriculums/Documents/individual-curriculum-plan.pdf

**Note: Schools must consider the long term implications of providing students with adjustments and/or an ICP. Ongoing alterations to curriculum may affect students' future pathways, as they progress towards either a Queensland Certificate of Education or a Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement.*

Your role in the IEP or ICP process involves providing information about your child that will be useful for planning.

It is also important to contribute your views on suitable goals for your child and strategies and resources that will assist your child to meet those goals.

Some parents who have been genuinely included have found the IEP process to be a mutually rewarding and positive experience. Some parents, unfortunately, have found this process to be tokenistic. For example, they have been asked to sign IEP documents that they have had little or no input into, or have been invited to meetings but their suggestions have been ignored.



Resourcing, and the way it is used, is an issue that is often raised with parents.

“So many times they tried to make me feel guilty and greedy when I advocated for resources for my daughter. ‘You will be taking away resources from other students,’ they would say. Over the years I learnt to respond and say that I don’t accept this and it is a systemic problem. They need to take it up with their district office and stop trying to burden me with their inappropriate argument. Eventually they stopped. I would also remind them that when I contact them to advocate for my child I do not appreciate them sharing the issues they face in their job with me, they need to find peer support for their dilemmas.”

“This school had a special education program which at the time seemed well set up and the staff seemed knowledgeable. Unfortunately this was not the case when our son started to attend.”

“There also needs to be a better range of service provisions. For example, the only special education units in our area put kids with ASD and Intellectual Impairment in the same groups, but these two groups of students have very different needs.”

“Funding is retrospective causing anxiety and difficulty for schools to respond in a meaningful way.”

3d. Support for inclusion – Queensland State schools resourcing

In the past (and yes...still today) many students with disability were directed away from general classroom settings towards segregated settings provided by SEPs (Special Education Programs) or Special Schools as the belief was that these students would be able to access specialist support with greater ease. However, as reflected by research (see Ic : Cologon, 2019) moving a child with disability out of a general classroom setting to a segregated setting where they receive more intensive specialist support does not result in better long-term outcomes for the individual.

Families should be aware that you can choose inclusion for your child AND still access specialist support within a general classroom setting. This does not mean receiving individual therapy at school but rather having teachers access specialist support for guidance and training. This model, rather than the child being withdrawn from class for 1:1 therapy, is more in-line with best inclusive practice.

Regions and schools provide a continuum of support and services for students with disability and learning difficulties. This may include:

- guidance officers
- support teachers (literacy and numeracy)
- speech language pathologists
- behaviour support teachers
- nurses
- teacher aides
- assistive technology
- alternative format materials
- special provision for assessment
- other supports available at the school level as determined by the school.

Students who meet EAP criteria may also have access to:

- specialist teachers (disability specific)
- physiotherapists
- occupational therapists
- statewide services for students with vision impairment.

In addition, schools have access to:

- regional inclusion coaches
- autism coaches
- mental health coaches
- principal advisors
- advisory visiting teachers (AVTs) specialising in hearing, physical or vision impairment - or inclusion (some regions).

education.qld.gov.au/students/students-with-disability/succeeding-with-disability/support-services-resources

In recent years The Queensland Department of Education has established the **Autism Hub** and **Reading Centre**. These are separate co-located services. The Autism Hub’s key focus is to build capability and confidence of school leaders, teachers and parents to improve the engagement and educational achievement of students with autism. The Reading Centre provides specialist advice to educators and parents on how to teach reading and support readers, including strategies for students with dyslexia.

ahrc.eq.edu.au/services

Parents can contact their school / district office for information regarding local support.

No matter which education system parents approach, many parents have found that funding was raised as a barrier to inclusive schooling.

“I care for my sons 24/7 and do not withhold care until I get extra funding. This says to me that if some teachers can and will teach my sons successfully with what they are allocated then so can others. There is an attitude that allows teachers to stand tall erroneously when they perpetuate the fallacy that they need more funding to provide my sons with an education.”

3e. Support for inclusion – Catholic Education resourcing

Brisbane Catholic Education’s “Supporting Students” webpage provides an outline of BCE’s resourcing and support for inclusive education.

www.bne.catholic.edu.au/students-parents/Pages/Supporting-Students.aspx

For information regarding how other Catholic dioceses in Queensland provide support and resourcing for inclusive education, it is recommended that you visit the education website for your diocese and search for information relating to inclusive education and/or student diversity.

As noted previously, Brisbane Catholic Education has “A Guide for Parents: Supporting Children with Disability”. This guide describes the specific disability categories that are used for the purpose of allocating additional funding resources. These categories are drawn from the broader Disability Discrimination Act definition of disability. Website information may be more up to date than this guide.

While roles can vary, commonly found Support Personnel include:

- **Support Teacher: Inclusive Education** works in collaborative partnership with school/college leadership, teachers, parents, consultants/education officers and other professionals, in fostering a school/college culture that enhances the educational outcomes for all students.
- **Consultant/Education Officer: Inclusive Education** has key partnership responsibilities with the school/college leadership, teachers, parents, and other professionals in fostering a culture that enhances the education outcomes for students in the area of inclusive education.
- **Speech Pathologist (SP)**
- **Visiting Teacher: Hearing Impairment**
- **Guidance Counsellors**
- **Advisory Visiting Teacher** – Physical Impairment & Vision Impairment (Provided by Queensland Department of Education)



Parents have found that within the school community there are other people who may have a part to play in their child's schooling. For example:

- tuckshop convener
- grounds keeper
- administration staff (at reception)
- other parents
- teacher librarians
- chaplain.

It is worthwhile to invest in good relationships in the wider school community as each of these school members may have a positive role in creating inclusive experiences.

3f. School procedures – general information

You are likely to work or come in contact with a range of staff members over the time that your child is at school. These will include:

- leadership staff (e.g. principal)
- classroom teachers
- special education teachers
- therapists
- guidance officers
- teacher aides.

The link below provides comprehensive information in regards to the roles and Responsibilities of key Queensland Department of Education staff:

qed.qld.gov.au/working-with-us/det-induction/queensland-state-schools/working-in-state-schools/role-descriptions

It is also likely that terms and acronyms will be used by education staff that may be unfamiliar to you e.g.

- ICP (individual curriculum program)
- SEP (special education program)
- IEP (individual education program)
- EAP (education adjustment program)

3a and 3b of this document provide some explanation of the above terms.

CRU has devised a summary document **Individual Plans Explained**

cru.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Individual-Plans-June-2020.pdf

Although there will be certain processes required of all schools in a specific system (Queensland Department of Education, Catholic Education, Independent Schools Queensland), individual schools will vary in their onsite procedures and the manner in which these are carried out. It would be helpful for you to find out about these procedures as soon as possible so as to be more confident in your communication with the school. For example:

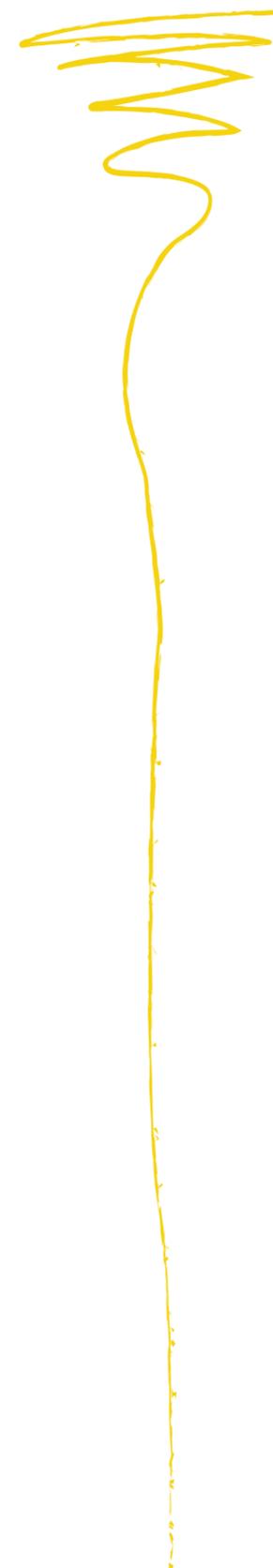
- How do you get in touch with teachers?
- Is there a specific contact person for your child?
- How does the school share information?

(*Note: **OneSchool & QParents** are the names of Queensland Department of Education's systems where information regarding your child, their learning and other admin. information is recorded and shared).

education.qld.gov.au/parents-and-carers/school-information/oneschool-qparents#:~:text=OneSchool%20is%20the%20department's%20comprehensive,curriculum%20and%20assessment%20management



4.



How to get what you want

(adapted from the writing of Michael Kendrick and Marg Ward)

It is usual for parents to hand over a major part of the responsibility for the education of their children to teachers. The line between what is school business and what is family business is generally fairly clear. When seeking an inclusive education for children with disability, however, the roles become blurred.

Parents can be unsure of the part they have to or would like to play; and as a consequence find themselves acting or being expected to act in the role of teacher, therapist, advocate, problem solver, teacher aide, etc. rather than just as a parent.

In an inclusive school, there should be no expectation that parents will take on extra roles (unless of course, they would like to and this is a usual part of the school culture). As a safeguard against the possibility of bureaucratic thinking by educators, it is vital that you:

- dream for what may seem impossible
- think lovingly, passionately and intuitively about your children
- espouse your sons' and daughters' beauty, gifts and talents.

You may also find that, if your sons and daughters cannot speak out for themselves, you will need to:

- ensure that teachers meet your child's needs
- name what good schooling is for your children
- have a clear idea of your expectations
- get answers if you have doubts or unanswered questions.

You will also need to think about the confronting of authority. Advocacy (standing up for your child's rights and needs) is not optional when you have a child with disability. Due to long legacies of discriminatory treatment, at some point you will be called upon to challenge unfair treatment or less than ideal circumstances. It is possible that there will be circumstances when the authority of education professionals will seem to overshadow your authority as a parent. It can sometimes help to remember that you have a natural authority of your own which can go a long way to reducing this imbalance of power.

The following pages explore the roles of parents and some of the typical situations that you might experience in the inclusive education journey.



“It was important that people wanted to know, understand, support Harrison; not just manage a ‘problem’ and important to go with my gut instinct...I don’t have too much hope or belief in the ‘experts’”.

“The specialist teacher took the position of expert and told me what observations were noted in relation to my son and that a determination had been made...I listened to the expert and when the expert had finished I asked how well they knew my son. The specialist teacher said that she had observed Edward a few times. I went on to explain that I had known Edward his whole life and I would not be accepting the advice given ...I refused to sign the documents and asked for new [ones] to be drawn up.”

“Schools need to listen to parents, as they know their child best, and not think they are a whinger when they push ideas that may assist their child and the school.”

“Where will that leave my son? I feel once a school gets the funding they just dictate what a parent has to accept. I know my son better than they think they do.”

“At the school Levi now goes to I was told before he started that parents have the final say; staff may advise and express their opinions but when parents are involved the parents ultimately have the final decision (within reason). Previous experience had of course taught me to be sceptical but at this current school my natural authority is very much respected.”

4a. The natural authority of families

(adapted from an article by Michael Kendrick, CRUcial Times, Issue 6, July, 1996)

It is helpful for parents to appreciate their own natural authority and be willing to act on it. What follows are some common sources of authority that parents can call on when they are acting in their children’s interests.

1. Parents have the authority to be highly engaged because they also tend to have greater responsibility for the wellbeing of their family members.
2. Parents know their family member the most fully and over time. They have long-term observation, insight and personal relationship.
3. Parents typically care about or love their children more than other people do. It is their expected, legitimate role to care for and stand up for their own children.
4. Parents have a stake in outcomes in that they have to live with the long-term consequences of school decisions (as do their children).
5. Parents are expected to advocate for their own family members and are granted considerable presence in decision-making processes.
6. The family is an authoritative witness to the performance of professionals and systems and may have special insight into events.
7. Parents bring a wide range of talents and experiences which can give them additional authority on many matters.
8. Parents can be best positioned to see the entirety of their child’s life. They can often see the incongruities of different interventions.
9. Family members are often free of the vested interests which call into question the credibility of other parties.

While these common sources of authority do not, in the end, resolve the question of ultimate authority, they do offer you some measure of security that your views should matter as much as, or more than, others who also claim authority in deciding what will happen to your child. Because it would be very difficult for you to advocate if you are doubtful about the legitimacy of taking on the role, these points may help to strengthen your resolve to hang in there.

Embrace your natural authority.

(from an article by Margaret Ward, CRUcial Times Issue 24, July 2002)

If you are unsure of your authority as a family member, I suggest you make two lists on a sheet of paper. In the first column, list all the people who have been constant in the life of your son or daughter. In the other column, list all the people who have come and gone over the same period.

My guess is that your first list will be short, naming your family members. There may be others, if you are lucky, and perhaps a few faithful friends or ‘extended family’. This list is valuable because these are the people who can even begin to claim some authority in your son or daughter’s life. The other list will be enormous and frighteningly irrelevant.

Although parents have described positive meetings, it is likely that at some time you will experience difficult ones.

“Attended many many meetings to keep my daughter in the classroom with her peers participating in regular curriculum....Felt at times angry, frustrated, determined, focused, helpless, thrilled.... ‘on guard’ most of the time.”

4b. Meetings

Extra meetings with teachers and other professional staff are a necessary and important part of good inclusive schooling. These can be an effective way for parents and teachers to share information and to jointly plan and make decisions.

Parents have reported however, that school meetings can be overwhelming, so:

1. Be sure of the purpose of the meeting. If you don’t know what it is, ask. If something else is brought up, ask to discuss this other issue at another time.
2. Don’t go alone. Take an ally – a partner; a friend; a formal advocate. Your ally can take notes; speak up on your behalf; discuss the meeting with you afterwards. Make sure you are clear what you each will do in the meeting (e.g. who is doing the talking; who is taking notes).
3. Keep focused on your child and their needs. Listen to, but don’t be sidetracked by, the issues of the school.
4. Find out who will be at the meeting. If there are people there who you don’t know, find out who they are and why they are there. There may be people who don’t know your child.
5. Be prepared. Know the research, legislation and policy. Have written notes. You may need to take examples of work; school records etc.
6. Have a plan – think about your options beforehand, your bottom line and what you would be willing to compromise on.
7. If language or terms are used that you don’t understand, ask for clarification. Ask that others avoid professional jargon.
8. Speak positively. Commend the school on their strengths and successes. Build on what is working well.
9. Clarify what will happen next. Who does what? When?
10. Remember; you are an authority on your child... just because a teacher says something doesn’t necessarily make it so. Don’t be afraid to challenge what is said and to put forward your perspective.
11. Keep a record – who you have met with, the outcomes, what you have agreed to do.

Be wary of the following:

- **Being caught off guard:**
 - Going to a meeting that you expect will be one way (e.g. an informal discussion and finding that teachers have a different purpose in mind (e.g. a formal ‘placement’ meeting)
 - Having other issues raised that are unexpected (e.g. talking about behaviour at meetings that were called to discuss curriculum)
 - Having issues raised when you are at school for other reasons (e.g. tuckshop; pick-up / drop-off times) and are therefore unprepared.

A possible response to these situations could be: “Yes, I think it is important to discuss ____; but it was my understanding that today we were to talk about _____. Can we make another time to discuss your other concerns? I am available on _____.”
- **Being outnumbered; having many professionals present:**

Having others involved in your child’s schooling present at meetings can be a good thing and can assist in decision-making. It can however be harmful when people are called in to “stack” the meeting when a difficult decision has to be made or teachers want to put pressure on parents.
- **Being asked for input but having that input ignored or outweighed by professional input:**

Remember that you are the expert on your child and have positive information to share.
- **Asking for meetings and being ignored:**

Make sure that what you are requesting is reasonable and doable for the teacher. Clarify if there are other ways to share information that would suit better (e.g. email). As a last resort, contact the principal to clarify the school’s process for arranging times to meet with teachers.



“Many times I was aware of the thoughtful way teachers set this up for success”

“You catch more bees with honey – while it is not always achieved, if you can build a strong and respectful relationship in the school you are more likely to succeed at an inclusive education.”

“Apparently they have learnt a lot by being challenged by us. I have tried to make the most positive experience it could be for my son’s sake...The great thing is that they were responsive once they got to know us. My son has had some fabulous teachers, but he has taught them also.”

“It has been a positive experience from the start. I think if you go in with a happy attitude and ask what can I do for you, to help my son in your classroom ... then you should be off to a good start.”

“Parents need to have a good working relationship with the school and need to spend more time there.”

“I’m really happy with the school. I communicate regularly via email on issues of concern – both academic and emotional/ personal issues...”

I always attend parent teacher meetings and chat with staff and thank them regularly for their support and care. I think as a parent I have been able to make a big difference by being involved in Chloe’s education.”

4c. Working with teachers

A healthy relationship between parents and teachers is an important factor in successful inclusion. While parents vary in their capacity and availability for working with teachers, parents who experience good inclusion speak positively about their involvement in the classroom and school communities.

Here are some points for parents to consider when working with teachers:

- A vital component of healthy relationships is good communication. Good communication involves both being able to speak up and being able to listen.
- With the teacher, find regular times and ways to communicate. Work out the best way for you both (e.g. written diary, email, face-to-face meetings).
- Help out whenever you can (both with information and with practical assistance e.g. excursions).
- Be involved in the school community (e.g. P&C, tuckshop, school events).
- If you have an issue, speak up without criticism or blame.
- Pick your battles; give the teacher space.
- Congratulate good examples of inclusion.
- Achieve a balance in understanding that your child counts and is also only one of many.
- Understand that teachers will vary in their skills, experience, and capacity.

Some common mistakes that parents make:

(from workshop notes, Wills and Jackson, 2009)

- expecting teachers to know how to include
- expecting that curriculum is easily modified
- mistaking ‘values’ problems for ‘knowledge’ problems
- only getting involved when there is trouble
- expecting teachers to value parents’ expertise
- not knowing who can help (both at the school, and from outside agencies)
- not planning enough time for thinking.

Many parents have described positive and successful working relationships with teachers. It is important to acknowledge this as well as the issues you face.

The education system can be heavily focused on the negatives. “I think the education system failed my son because the system was aware of his strengths and weaknesses and focused upon his weaknesses instead of his strengths...The benefits to Edward of his [abilities] around his music were not explored.”

So some parents have gone out of their way to change the focus on their child and build a positive, valued image of them as a learner and school member.

“A sign of whether someone truly knows your child is not how much they can tell you about their diagnosis or their disability label, but what they would choose to buy them as a birthday present... ask your teacher sometime.”

“Whenever I am asked to talk to school staff about my child’s disability I always start by describing her personality and then I give some information on the disability. This is to help them see the child and not the disability because when they see the child they do a much better job... I see my role as being her ambassador.”

“At the beginning of each year, I prepare a little updated summary for the incoming teachers and support staff about Adam. It includes information about our family, his past schooling, his interests and passions, his successes and achievements, what extra-curricular activities he has been involved in and a bit I call “How to get the best from Adam” ... which is about Adam’s needs or challenges but talks about these in a very positive and solution focused way. I try to paint a picture of Adam which shows him as a having lots of ordinary interests, great passions and a whole history of being loved and appreciated for his gifts (not only by his family but by friends and community) – rather than the student with Down syndrome they are likely to see. I work on modelling how I want Adam to be seen and I find it gives teachers common ground when they know Adam outside school. Many of the teachers pick up on those interests (camping, swimming, his cousins) in activities.”

4d. Talking about your child

Inclusive schooling is not just about responding to a child’s diagnosis. Focusing solely on disability categories and “needs” does not tell us what we need to know. High expectations, optimism and a focus on gifts and strengths are more helpful to children and also help parents and teachers to create inclusive experiences.

How you speak and write about your child will have an impact on how others see them.

When communicating with teachers and other parents about your son or daughter remember to:

- let labels go – see the child first
- speak and write positively about your child – focus on what they can do rather than what they can’t
- don’t apologise for your child
- don’t apologise for expecting inclusion
- use language carefully, e.g. “It takes my son longer to get used to routines than other kids” rather than “My son has intellectual impairment”
- be solution rather than problem-centred
- keep your child’s gifts, talents and interests as the focus of communication.
- avoid talking in terms of burden – focus on what your child has to offer; what they bring to the class and school
- focus on similarity rather than difference – draw people’s attention to commonalities with other children
- be a model for how you would want others to speak and write about your child
- try to make sure that written records contain helpful, positive information. Examples of successful strategies are more helpful to future teachers than lists of disability-related problems
- based on your child’s strengths and talents, negotiate learning outcomes that are achievable so that your child and their teachers can experience success.

The education system can be heavily focused on the negatives. So some parents have gone out of their way to change the focus on their child and build a positive, valued image of them as a learner and school member.



“Peers were so proud of her (and their) achievement and so pleased with themselves and happy. One of those moments when I felt ‘Yes – this is the right place for Kathy’ - we made the correct decision.”

“Become empowered and stay strong by associating with like-minded advocates.”

“Sally went to the grade 8 camp – welcomed, wanted, and included. She had fun fun fun. This was significant because she was left out from Grade 7 camp. Nothing had changed about Sally and it shows what a difference it makes if a school is willing.”

“At the end of the year she [the teacher] was as teary as we were – so grateful for the opportunity to learn. She left the school sometime after but became a strong advocate for inclusion at a different school. It seemed testament to the importance of being prepared (as a family) to hang in while people learn.”

4e. Keeping the vision

(including notes from Wills and Jackson workshop, 2009)

Many parents who seek inclusion say that they have times of doubt. It is important, therefore, to revisit your vision for your child regularly throughout their schooling experience.

It will be particularly important to keep that vision clearly in mind when times are tough.

- If you have a vision for an ordinary life, included in the community, this will start with inclusion at school.

“Inclusive education, in early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary, adult and community education, is the foundation for social inclusion and participation of all citizens.”

(from the Blue Skies Scenario, Blue Skies Group, 2009)

- Your child is a unique, wonderful individual who has much to offer the world. Honour this. Celebrate this. Encourage others to recognise this.
- Look for positive examples of successful inclusion to inspire you.
- Talk to other parents who also have a vision for an inclusive education.
- Talk about your vision with others; particularly teachers and parents at your child's school.
- Think big.
- Think outside of what already exists and focus on what could be.
- Exclusion is our habit now but we can break that pattern and make inclusion a new habit.
- Let go of 'different' and 'special'. Focus on similarity and commonality.
- Remember that it is not your child that is the issue. The problem does not reside within your son or daughter but in the capacity of the system to include your child.

Your vision for your child will be an important tool in your decision-making. When deciding on an action or path to take, consider whether that action or path will lead you closer to your vision of an inclusive life or whether it will take you further away.

To read more on how to build a vision:

cru.org.au/families-for-inclusive-education/resources/vision/

cru.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Clarifying-your-vision-for-school.pdf

Having a plan for de-stressing; revitalising; enjoying the experience (in spite of the efforts required) is essential from the outset....

“When I had difficult days at school, I was so thankful for the friends at the end of the phone who knew exactly what I was going through because they had been there too. Somehow just talking about it all made things so much easier to deal with.”

“A long walk always helped to get things back into perspective.”

“You can never know the outcome of the decisions you make; you just have to do the best you can.”

...because inclusive schooling is likely to mean ongoing doubts and fears

“Even when things are going well; there is always the anguish of knowing that my child is not valued the same as the other students and that another incident will need me to advocate for her rights to be upheld.”

4f. Dealing with anxieties, fears, doubts

Pursuing inclusive education for your child will inevitably bring some stresses. Parents who choose inclusion accept that they are in some respects choosing a more challenging path, but that this is a long-term investment for a regular life in the community for their son or daughter.

It is really important to develop ways to manage stress, such as a hobby, meditation, yoga or walking. It's also important to revisit your vision for your child when things seem hard. Make time for relaxing activities. Make time for fun. Make time to spend with your child in ordinary, enjoyable family activities. School does not have to take over your family's whole life.

Beware of unfounded fears and anxiety, and try not to brood over issues. Confirm the source of your fear one way or the other. If it is unfounded then you can relax. If it is real, you can take action. And once you have decided on a course of action; follow it. Once you have followed your course of action; let go.

It is demoralising to dwell on problems and difficulties, or the things that are going badly. Refocus your energy and attention to the positives; keep photos, stories, letters, and positive memories close at hand to remind you why you have chosen this path.

Make a set, 'thinking time' each week to work on key issues/ concerns you have for your child so that you don't dwell on them all day every day.

It helps to get advice from someone you respect and who knows inclusion. Talk your concerns over with a friend or advocate.

Pick your battles. Let some things go.

Remember that this too, will change. Beware of feeling too settled when things are going well; and too despairing when things are going badly. Keep things in perspective. Schooling is not perfect for any child. Some years are better than others as are some teachers. This happens for children without disability too.

Allow yourself to make mistakes sometimes...everybody does! Reframe these as learning opportunities.

Ensure you have a break sometimes to refresh and re-energise and to be away from the pressure of school and negativity.

Spend quality family time together – don't allow school battles to infect your family relationships.



“If opportunity doesn’t knock,
build a door.”
(Milton Berle)

4g. Fostering friendships

For many people friendship is the most important and sustaining aspect of their lives, particularly during their school years. For children with disability, the experience of friendship at school can be limited, and students can be lonely and isolated. The fear that children will be rejected, alone and even bullied, and the belief that the cause of this is the child’s disability, have been powerful factors in decisions to keep children with disability segregated. Choosing a special setting, however, often means that the student is denied the opportunity to make friends within their local community, and will be mixing with other students who themselves find friendship difficult.

While it is true that many children with disability find making friends more difficult because of their impairment (e.g. communication difficulties), it is also true that isolation is not a natural consequence of having a disability but a product of low expectations and exclusionary attitudes and practices. Fostering friendship takes work. It should be a joint responsibility between parents and school. Waiting and hoping for it to happen is likely to result in disappointment.

Here are some thoughts on helping friendship to happen:

- Expect that your child will have friends; believe that this can and will happen.
- Friendships are mutual. Focus on what your child has to offer in a friendship rather than what they can’t do. What is it that you love about your child? Why do you like spending time with them?
- Friendships need space to develop. Allow other people the pleasure of getting to know and spend time with your child. Let people in.
- Friendships develop between people who share common interests. Arrange for your child to explore their interests with others.
- Friendships develop over time. Support your child to be in long term activities with others.
- Don’t be afraid to ask. Invite other children over. Arrange outings with other children.
- Plan activities in which your child will do well.
- Invest in widening your own circle of friends and acquaintances as well as your son’s or daughter’s.
- Look for opportunities and make the most of them. If someone expresses an interest, follow it up.

The following guide was compiled from QPPD documents about friendship.

- Dream a little. Think what it would be like to have other students taking an interest. What would they be doing? Who would they be?
- What would others find attractive about your son or daughter? What gifts do they have to offer? In what situation are they at their best?
- How can you support your son or daughter to be more skilful in relating to others?
- How does your son/daughter’s life compare with other children the same age and gender? What does your child do all week?
- What are the current interests of other young people?
- What do other students do who share the same interest as your son/daughter?
- Who is in your son/daughter’s life? Who are they in contact with? How often? Are there people already in contact who could be more involved?
- Are there any naturally-occurring relationships that could be nurtured? How?
- Who else could assist? Who could make a difference?
- Which students have influence in your son/daughter’s class? How can you connect them more to your son/daughter?
- Where do other students meet at school? Where do other kids hang out on weekends? When do things happen?
- How can you show others the best way to include your son/daughter?
- How can you encourage your son/daughter to reach out; make arrangements (e.g. phone lists; Facebook)?



cru.org.au/families-for-inclusive-education/resources/friendships-and-belonging/

5.



Troubleshooting

Inclusive education as a way of educating students with disability is still in its infancy if we consider centuries of dominant histories of devaluing and segregating people with disability. We still face historical habits of separate, special education so many people feel more skilled and comfortable with that approach. Many teachers and parents are trying to undo these traditional ways of thinking, but this will take time. We are all still learning how to get inclusion right. It is understandable, though still frustrating, that there will be times (maybe many) that are difficult.

The difficult times should NOT be a reason to give up on inclusion. These are times when parents need to stay clear and strong in their vision and to be confident in their advocacy, communication and problem-solving skills. These times should also encourage us to join with others to keep advocating for the reforms which will improve inclusive education for everyone.

The following pages raise some common thoughts about and advice for difficult times.



“I find it helpful to remind myself that when I go into meetings I am on my child’s side and hers alone. Often no-one else is, so it is important I remain loyal to her best interests. I go in with clarity and saying, whatever the outcome, I have to go home, look her in the eye and tell her what I have accepted. This makes it very easy for me to NOT accept a dud deal for her as I make myself accountable to her.”

“I learnt as a parent not to be aggressive but to be prepared with all information. Made me a tougher person – having to deal with all that.”

“Edward did not finish Year 12; school was a most difficult experience for my son and I often wonder if my input into his schooling was a negative in his life. I will never know and so we move on and try to repair the damage...”

“Deputy HOSES made me feel ashamed, guilty, inadequate. I was upset and annoyed that circumstances had not been appropriately planned for and managed; very annoyed when found Harrison had to be excluded the whole morning and was not being directed or constructively occupied at all.”

5a. When teachers and parents disagree

The relationship between teachers and parents is an important factor in successful inclusion. However, even in a good relationship, it is possible that there will be times when teachers and parents disagree because:

1. parents and teachers know the child in different contexts
2. parents and teachers have different priorities
3. parents and teachers may have different expectations.

Some tips for parents to consider when they disagree with teachers:

- Respect the teacher as a professional. Consider their viewpoint even when you don't agree.
- Expect that the teacher will respect your viewpoint and your natural authority as parents. Be confident to discuss your views.
- Express your viewpoint clearly, with your reasons; without criticism or blame.
- Remember that while you may be feeling anxious about raising a different viewpoint with teachers, they (especially new teachers) can be equally anxious when meeting with parents.
- Find out your school's policy on dealing with disagreements.
- It is best to talk directly to teachers, rather than about them behind their back.
- Avoid criticising teachers in front of children.
- While it may be helpful to talk about issues with other parents, it is not constructive to criticise teachers in front of other parents in the school.
- Choose an appropriate time and place to discuss the disagreement with the teacher.
- Refer to conflict resolution network strategies such as <http://www.crnhq.org/12-skill-summary/>
- If necessary seek third party assistance from someone external to the school if problems are not resolved within the school.

Conflict in itself is not necessarily a bad thing and can lead to a positive change...

However, often parents fear that conflict will disadvantage their child or are themselves damaged by the experience.

Think about strategies to help you cope when things aren't going so well – see section 4f.

“My child was unable to participate in a planned excursion due to failure to organise accessible bus and venue. It was a genuine mistake by the school which had always been very inclusive. This time, before I could react strongly, my child emailed the school leaders responsible and told them very bluntly how angry he was and that he wanted them to fix their mistake. The school reacted instantly, fixed the problem.”

“Fake it till you make it – no-one knows they can do this until they begin. This is not about a perfect education; but the same ‘hit and miss’ education everyone gets.”

“Year 3 was a tricky year – the teacher was anxious and it seemed that for a whole term I only heard of the complaints – behaviour ‘incidents’ and the work Steven was not coping with. It took a long time for me to stop bracing myself for bad news. Eventually though I saw that the teacher was noticing success and was excited not nervous.”

5b. What is reasonable to expect?

In line with the Education Standards (DDA) and the UN Convention (CRPD) – Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education and General comment No. 4 (2016) – it is reasonable for parents to expect:

- that schools are designed for inclusion
- that they can enrol their children at the school of their choice and on the same basis as other children, that is, full enrolment (given their knowledge of their own child, parents may decide that full-time enrolment/attendance would be too difficult. It is reasonable to expect that this should be the parent's decision not the school's.)
- to be welcomed at that school and not redirected elsewhere (if other options are given, there should be no overt or subtle pressure to take them)
- to have a positive conversation about what accommodations will be necessary for their child's active participation in the life of the school
- to participate in meetings and decision making processes.

It is also reasonable for parents to expect that:

- their child will learn and participate in the same environments including regular classrooms for the same amount of time as other students rather than in separate, special education classrooms. They should only be withdrawn in keeping with what is usual for children generally (unless flexible withdrawal allows for more successful time in the general classroom, as requested by parents)
- their child will participate in all regular classroom activities (including projects, presentations, homework etc.) and learning (modified when necessary so that it is meaningful)
- their child will participate in regular playground and extracurricular activities (e.g. sporting days, camps)
- their child will be safe
- they will have access, under relevant legislation, to information kept by the school about their children.

It is not reasonable to expect that:

- a child will have a full-time aide (except in a few exceptional circumstances). This would usually not be desirable anyway
- individual teachers will have all the answers
- teachers will be available to talk at any time
- teachers can focus exclusively on one child.

For an overview of UN Convention (CRPD) General Comment No. 4 (2016) see: www.startingwithjulius.org.au/un-committee-clarifies-right-to-inclusive-education

Inclusive education is a learning journey for teachers too. Make sure your expectations are reasonable. Aim to inspire rather than criticise.



“An unspoken assumption that my son would not go [on year 6 trip to the snow], or if he did, one of his parents would have to go also. Knowing our son would want to go, and would not want his parents to go; wondering if we would have to take the extreme step of threatening to stop the entire excursion unless our son was included and supported; feeling sickened and scared. But we did – checked the policy; told the school it had to comply’ and it did. Our son had a great time; the school learnt full inclusion wasn’t so hard. So be brave! Fight for what is right.”

“Even after many years of promoting inclusion it can easily be taken away!”

“We are the leaders in a social revolution. Our efforts need courage and we must stand on the side of our sons and daughters as we walk the path less travelled.”

“I have been lucky as I have been able to advocate for my daughter. Even so, it has not always been easy to get information and it is difficult navigating the system no matter how competent you are.”



5c. Advocacy

It is likely that parents seeking an inclusive education will at some point (most likely at many points) have to take on the role of advocate for their children. Advocacy is not something parents typically seek. It can be emotional and exhausting. However it can also be a fruitful and empowering experience, and a factor in creating inclusive experiences. Developing skills in effective advocacy is a great asset for the long-term.

Michael Kendrick reminds us that one of the most challenging elements of advocacy is the very real prospect that at some point parents may have to confront authority. “This can cause anxiety, dread, insecurity and many other emotions... In many cases, it can lead to the advocate, both consciously and not so consciously, avoiding situations that hold the promise of conflict with people in authority... Such an outcome is highly undesirable though not uncommon. For those being advocated for it may well mean that their needs and interests can be compromised if not otherwise damaged.” (Advocacy and the Challenging of Authority, 2003)

Given the potentially weighty consequences of avoiding speaking up on behalf of your child, it becomes all that more important for you to become skilful as an advocate.

Below are some tips on how to be an effective advocate:

- Develop knowledge of policies and legislation.
- Prepare. Be clear about what you want both for your child and from the advocacy. Write it down.
- Find at least one support person who shares your vision.
- Decide on your priorities and bottom lines. Decide what you want to achieve from your advocacy.
- Find out who is responsible or accountable for the decision and action you seek.
- Use proper channels.
- Listen to other people’s points of view.
- Think about what others may raise and how you might respond.
- Don’t always expect conflict but be prepared with a positive strategy if you do strike disagreement.
- Be open-minded; others might suggest solutions that you may not have thought of or different ways of doing things that may be just as effective.
- Try to stay calm, but draw on strong emotion if you need to.
- Ask a friend or professional to help you with advocacy if you need some support.

For more tips on preparing for meetings and being an effective advocate see:

cru.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Fact-Sheet-7-BEING-AN-EFFECTIVE-ADVOCATE.pdf

“When the beach is continually polluted with spillage from oil tankers you can take two approaches. You can keep on cleaning up the beach or you can hop in the boat and go out to stop the tankers. Both are necessary but which will be more effective in stopping the spillage?”

Our advocacy for inclusive education can be the same... Do we continually try to fix up the issues at our own school? And for our own child? Or do we hop in that boat and go to the heart of the problem?”

5d. Systems advocacy

(From State-wide Parent Advocacy Network SPAN)

Significant change to legislation, policy and practice in the area of inclusive education has taken place over the past 30 years. In most cases these changes have been driven by families and other advocates. Systemic change is likely to have positive outcomes for individuals. Some tips on how busy parents can affect change in legislation, policy and practice with minimal time and energy are summarised here:

- Be informed. Families can learn about legislative issues through the publications and social media of advocacy organisations. A list of some key advocacy organisations active on inclusive education can be found in 7 (a). They include: Queensland Advocacy Incorporated (QAI), Queensland Collective for Inclusive Education (QCIE), Children and Young People with Disability (CYDA), Family Advocacy (NSW), Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE) and All Means All Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education. See 7(a) for links to advocacy/inclusive education website. Many of these organisations summarise legislative issues in an easy-to-read format to help parents be up-to-date without much effort. Then, when an issue of importance to them appears on a legislative agenda, they are ready to respond.
- Contact your state legislator or Member of Parliament. A quick phone call or a one-page letter to an elected official’s office is all it takes to express a view. Elected officials pay attention to communications from constituents. Telephone numbers and mailing and e-mail addresses of MPs are usually easily available online.
- Share your family’s story. Parents don’t need to provide detailed information about policy. When parents tell a representative about how proposed legislation would affect them and their child, it puts a “face” on the issue.
- Use campaign opportunities to tell your story. In an election year, political candidates are at fairs, speaking at community meetings, and knocking on doors. Parents can share personal stories about what education and other government services have done for their family. In addition, they can explain about their need for additional services and funding.
- Follow up. When things go well in the family because of action taken by a representative, parents can tell him or her. A phone call or short thank-you note will be greatly appreciated.
- Join with other parents to campaign for change. The Queensland Collective for Inclusive Education (QCIE) is a group of Queensland families who promote inclusive lives for their children with disability and work together to make inclusive schools a reality for all. To find out how to connect with QCIE families visit: www.qcie.org
- Be inspired to learn more from other parents and groups who have successfully achieved social change.
- Utilise the media to get broader support for your campaigns – but know you may not be able to control their message.



“In Year 5, I went to meet the teacher as requested to make an appointment. I noted as I went into the classroom there were two tables with chairs outside of the class. I made the time to meet with the teacher and asked about the tables and chairs outside of the class. ‘I send the disruptive children out there; they can still see what is happening.’ I said to my son in front of the teacher, ‘Do you go out there?’ He told me he had been outside since February; six weeks past. I went and spoke to the principal about this and their knowledge of this practice. I noted the next day as I walked around the school the desks were removed. I made a formal written complaint on behalf of my son. The outcome was positive.”

“Don’t try to micromanage the school – It will end badly. Catch the big fish. Don’t complain about everything you are unhappy about.”

“Write an email but DON’T send it straight away. Address it to yourself so it doesn’t go to the school. The next day when you have calmed down, read it again and if you need to, make it less confrontational and seeking a cooperative approach to address the issue. This has worked really well for me. I get my anger out in the email but I don’t send it for another day or two until I have calmed down.”

5e. Making a complaint

(adapted from Barry Dwyer, IF YOU HAVE TO COMPLAIN)

At some time in their child’s schooling, many parents are likely to be faced with a situation that is less than satisfactory. If you are unhappy with something that is happening with your child, consider the following advice:

- Keep an open mind. Check your perspective.
- Avoid impulsive, angry letters; these can lead to defensiveness or, in extreme cases, to legal action against you.
- Make an appointment, or at least think carefully about the best time to voice your concern.
- Approach the teacher or principal in a polite manner.
- Begin by expressing an overall appreciation of the work being done. Even in a complaints situation, remember the positives.
- The challenge is to come to a shared resolution of the issue.
- Try to avoid “going over people’s heads” initially, but if you are not satisfied, go to the next level in the complaint process.
- Consider the best way to raise your complaint. Depending on your personality and emotions (and those of the person that you will be complaining to) it may be better to phone, write, or talk face to face.
- Seek a support person or advocate who can provide support and a sounding board.
- If sorted out, write a note of thanks. Build goodwill for the future.
- Offer continuing support.

The Queensland Department of Education’s publication

“Making a Complaint: Information for Parents and Carers” recommends:

1. **Early resolution:** the best place to raise any concerns is at the point where the problem or issue arose. You can make an appointment at the school to discuss your complaint with your child’s teacher or the principal. You are also welcome to lodge your complaint in writing or over the phone. Check the school’s website to find your school’s complaints management process. You can also make a complaint through QGov. www.complaints.services.qld.gov.au The schools directory contains contact information for all schools. schoolsdirectory.eq.edu.au The regional office may be able to assist through this process, or provide advice. education.qld.gov.au/contact-us/state-schools-regional-contacts
2. **Internal review:** if, after taking the early resolution step, you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint or how the complaint was handled, you can ask the local regional office to conduct a review. You need to submit a Request for internal review form within 28 days of receiving the complaint outcome.
3. **External review:** if you are dissatisfied after the internal review, you may wish to contact a review authority, such as the Queensland Ombudsman or Queensland Human Rights Commission, and request an independent, external review. www.qld.gov.au/education/schools/information/contact/complaint

In Catholic Education and independent schools, complaints are dealt with at a school level with relevant personnel involved as deemed appropriate. If you feel your complaint is not dealt with satisfactorily by the school, you can contact the Diocesan Office of Catholic Education to take further action.

The Queensland
Human Rights Commission

For more information
Telephone: 1300 130 670
Email: enquiries@qhrc.qld.gov.
Website: www.qhrc.qld.gov.au

5f. Discrimination and human rights

There are three external bodies you can complain to if you feel your child is experiencing discrimination – The Queensland Human Rights Commission, the national Australian Human Rights Commission and The Queensland Ombudsman. Disability advocacy organisations may be able to advise on the most appropriate body for your case.

Making a complaint is usually a last resort after exhausting other avenues at the school or system level.

Queensland Human Rights Commission

www.qhrc.qld.gov.au/complaints

The Human Rights Commission has jurisdiction over both the Anti-Discrimination Act 2019 (Qld) and the Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld).

In relation to education the Queensland Human Rights Act (2019) protects:

- the right to recognition and equality before the law (s15)
- the right to protection from torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment (s17)
- the right to have access to primary and secondary education appropriate to the child’s needs; (s36)
- the right to have access, based on the person’s abilities, to further vocational education and training that is equally accessible to all. (s36)

Note: Both the DDA and the QHR Act aim to give students with disability access to the same rights and opportunities in their education as those available to a person without disability. S17 which covers protection from inhumane and degrading treatment may allow claims related to unlawful seclusion or restriction. s15 covers a person’s right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination. Both of these rights are drawn from the UN Conventions, and are found in the UNCRPD.

If you feel there has been a breach of the Disability Discrimination Act or the Queensland Human Rights Act, you may be able to lodge a complaint.

The Act does not apply to the curriculum or content of courses offered by education providers – only to aspects of the provision of education itself. Note that under the Human Rights Act 2019, the person must first write to the Dept. raising concerns in writing, usually giving a 45 day waiting period for a response.

How can I complain?

Under the legislation, complaints have to be received in writing. This means in a letter or email, or by filling out a complaint form online. A complaint should be made within one year of the situation you are complaining about.

Seeking legal advice before making a complaint is recommended. You can do this through Legal Aid Queensland or a Community Legal Centre, or find a private solicitor through the Queensland Law Society.



What will the Commission do with my complaint?

The Commission will consider the complaint and decide whether to accept it – it will be accepted if it is received within time and is considered to come within one of the acts for which the QHRC has jurisdiction.

They may take these steps:

1. Your complaint will be sent to all the parties you are complaining about (the respondents) giving them a chance to respond in writing.
2. The complainant will be sent any responses received, so you can see if you are satisfied.
3. The Commission will try to resolve the complaint. They will negotiate between the parties or, call a compulsory meeting (conciliation conference) to talk about your complaint, and help everyone reach an agreement.
4. If there is an agreement, this will be recorded in writing and all the parties may sign so that the agreement is binding. The Human Rights Act gives the QHRC reasonably strong powers to investigate which may also be useful.

The Australian Human Rights Commission

www.humanrights.gov.au/complaints#main-content

The Australian Human Rights Commission investigates and conciliates complaints about discrimination and breaches of human rights.

How can I complain?

Your complaint needs to be made by submitting a form (available via the website). There is a timeframe of 6 months to lodge with the AHRC, though this can be extended.

What will the Commission do with my complaint?

- The Commission will use the information you provide to assess, investigate and/or conciliate your complaint. They usually provide a copy of the complaint (excluding your contact details) to the person or organisation you are complaining about, and if necessary, others who have relevant information about the complaint.
- Conciliation is an informal, flexible approach to resolving complaints – matters can be settled by an exchange of letters, a telephone negotiation between the Commission and the people involved, a telephone conciliation conference or a face to face conciliation conference. The Commission's role is to assist the parties to consider different options to resolve the complaint and provide information about possible terms of settlement. The Commission may also help write up the conciliation agreement.
- If the President of the Commission is satisfied that a complaint cannot be resolved, the complaint will be terminated.
- If the complaint can't be resolved through conciliation, you can apply to have the matter heard in the Federal Court of Australia or the Federal Circuit Court of Australia. The Commission cannot take the matter to court for you or help you present your case in court.



Which Commission (QHRC or AHRC) should be approached?

- The decision about which Commission to approach can be confusing as there are no hard and fast rules. Sometimes it will depend on timing (AHRC has a 6 month time limit, QHRC has a 12 month limit). It can also depend on who the respondent is, as well as whether you wish to make a joint complaint under both acts (discrimination and human rights) in the same process (QHRC). The AHRC has the benefit that the definition of direct discrimination includes a failure to make adjustments (not the case under state jurisdiction where you need to show less favourable treatment). With the AHRC, you can also rely on the Disability Standards for Education under the (federal)DDA. As well it may depend on judgments about the most favourable jurisdiction to progress a matter if the matter is not resolved e.g. QCAT vs Federal Court. (QCAT may be a more accessible and less financially risky option). These possible considerations do not constitute legal advice. Seeking legal or advocacy advice is recommended.

The Queensland Ombudsman

www.ombudsman.qld.gov.au/how-to-complain

The Queensland Ombudsman investigates complaints about the actions and decisions of state government departments and agencies (including state schools and TAFE). The Queensland Ombudsman complaints assessment and investigation service is free and independent.

How can I complain?

On-line via the website or by submitting a complaints form.

What will the Commission do with my complaint?

If the Queensland Ombudsman decides that your complaint should be investigated, it will be given to an investigator. The investigator may need to request information from the organisation involved. They will then look at all the information provided by you and the organisation and assess:

- the impact of the organisation's decision or action
- whether the organisation's decision was lawful, fair and reasonable
- the outcome you want
- whether an investigation is likely to lead to a positive outcome for you and/or lead to an improvement in the organisation's procedures.
- Outcomes may include - the investigator determining that your complaint does not need to be investigated further OR the investigator working with you and the organisation to achieve/reach an outcome

The Ombudsman's investigation may find the organisation's decision was unlawful, unfair or unreasonable and make recommendations to fix your complaint. The Ombudsman may also recommend changes to the organisation's policies or procedures, so the issue does not happen again. The Ombudsman cannot force an organisation to follow their recommendations, but most are accepted.

The Human Rights Commission
Telephone: 1300 656 419 or
02 9284 9600
www.humanrights.gov.au

You can make a complaint online
at www.humanrights.gov.au/complaints/make-complaint

If you prefer, you can print off a
complaint form, fill it in and post
it to them at GPO Box 5218,
Sydney NSW 2001 or fax it to
02 9284 9611.

6.

Further information Education – laws and policies

Families can feel uncertain about

- 1) what their entitlement is with regard to inclusive education and
- 2) what they can expect from the system.

The following pages give brief summaries of the laws and policies regarding education for students with disability. Each page also contains links to full documents.

It is helpful for parents to read these documents because if you are better informed:

- you will feel more confident in meetings
- you can be a more effective partner in decision making
- you can be a more effective advocate
- you will understand more about what you can expect from the system
- you can play a role in informing teachers about their legal requirements
- you are better placed to challenge exclusionary practices.

“Knowing that the legislation states that Harrison is entitled to be included and access everything that school has to offer on the same basis as his peers, and that not doing so is discrimination, has certainly helped a more timid soul such as myself stick to my guns irrespective of what is thrown back at me.”

6a. The Disability Discrimination Act – Education Standards

From the Australian Human Rights Commission website

www.humanrights.gov.au

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person, in many areas of public life, including employment, education, getting or using services and accessing public places, because of their disability. It also protects friends, relatives and others from discrimination because of their connection to someone with disability.

A plain language Guide to the Disability Discrimination Act is available on the Australian Human Rights Commission webpage.

humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/brief-guide-disability-discrimination-act

From the Disability Discrimination Act Education Standards website

ddaedustandards.info

Disability Standards on Education (the Education Standards) became Federal law in August 2005. The Education Standards set out the rights of students with disability under the Disability Discrimination Act in the area of education. They also set out the obligations under the Act of education providers like schools and universities to assist students with disability in the area of education.

The main aim of the Education Standards is to give students with disability the right to participate in educational courses and programs on the same basis as students without disability. This means a person with disability should have access to the same opportunities and choices in their education that are available to a person without disability. This includes activities like excursions and camps as well as classroom programs.

There are three key obligations:

- to consult (in order to understand a student’s disability and to work out if adjustments are needed to assist the student)
- to make reasonable adjustments (to allow students with disability to take part in education on the same basis as other students)
- to eliminate victimisation and harassment (so that students and families feel safe in the education environment).

For a full copy of the Education Standards go to:

www.education.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005

** In 2020, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment will be reviewing the Standards. The Minister for Education, in consultation with the Attorney-General, must review the Standards every five years to determine if they are effective in achieving their objects.*



Although the term ‘reasonable adjustments’ provides only vague guidelines for what is required by schools, some parents have found that the curriculum is adjusted well for their children:

“Last teachers have been a godsend – modified and followed the same program but adapted. This term it is all coming together for her.”

“She goes at her own pace, as do all of the children in the class. She may do less complicated activities but nevertheless participates at her level of ability on the same topic that is being taught.”

6b. Education Standards - Reasonable Adjustments

From the DDA Education Standards website:

dda.edustandards.info/obligations-2

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Education Standards require schools to make “reasonable adjustments” to allow people with disability to take part in education on the same basis as other students.

Reasonable Adjustments may include making changes to the curriculum and programs, teaching approaches, the classroom, or accessing support services.

What are some examples of reasonable adjustments?

Examples of reasonable adjustments or special services or facilities that have been put in place to help students with disability work in regular classrooms include:

- providing interpreters or note-takers for deaf students
- allowing extra time for exams
- allowing a student to use a laptop or iPad in class or exams instead of hand-writing
- the teacher using a microphone to transmit to earphones for a student with a hearing impairment
- providing a teacher aide to support a student in class or with particular activities
- adjusting classwork and homework so that it is accessible for the student
- improving physical access, e.g. providing a lift or an accessible toilet.

The Education Standards require schools to consult and plan with people with disability and their families or associates to determine what adjustments will be needed.

Schools should have access to specialist staff see section 3c who can help them work out what adjustments or supports will help a student with disability be included. If you feel that an outside expert opinion would help, ask the school to get it.

An accompanying fact sheet to the Education Standards titled ‘Parental Engagement’ provides information on key elements of effective partnerships to support engagement between schools and parents.

docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/dse-fact-sheet-3-parental-engagement_0.pdf

Examples of proper consultation may include:

1. regular meetings to make sure all is going well and change supports if needed. Records should be kept of these meetings
2. professional reports about the needs and supports that can help a student. This might include having an occupational therapist to assess types of furniture and equipment that can best help a student with a physical disability. It might also include psychological reports to help design good learning strategies for students who might have learning difficulties.

If an adjustment can be made to allow a student with disability to participate in education on the same basis as other students, then the education provider is required by law to make that adjustment if it is “reasonable”, i.e. if it doesn’t impact too much on the needs of other people, and if it doesn’t cause unjustifiable hardship to the school.

Many parents, however, have found that teachers do not know how to make adjustments and/or are reluctant to make them. Their children have been expected to fit into a prescribed curriculum (without the necessary adjustments for meaningful participation), an expectation that goes against the spirit of inclusive philosophy and the intention of the Education Standards.

“I am continually asking for a modified program but they won’t do it.”

How do schools decide if an adjustment or the provision of special services or facilities is reasonable?

The school needs to consider:

- the barriers, needs or challenges confronting the student
- the views/suggestions of the student and his/her family
- the effect of the adjustment on the student, the class and the teacher
- whether the adjustment genuinely allows the student to participate on the same basis as other students
- whether the adjustment will damage the academic standard or remove an essential element of a course.

Adjustments are required to be made within a reasonable amount of time. They will often need to be reviewed as circumstances may change over time.

If an adjustment is judged to be unreasonable the education provider is not required to make it. If you believe a decision relating to adjustments for your child is unfair you can make a complaint (see organisations listed in 5f).

6c. Unjustifiable Hardship

The Disability Discrimination Act’s Education Standards (2005) say that an education provider does not have to carry out an obligation under the Education Standards if that obligation would cause it unjustifiable hardship, either in terms of cost or safety of other people. Similarly, the Anti-Discrimination Act (Qld) also states that schools do not need to provide special services or facilities to a student with disability if it would impose an unjustifiable hardship.

In determining if the supply of special services or facilities would impose an unjustifiable hardship, all the circumstances of the case must be looked at including:

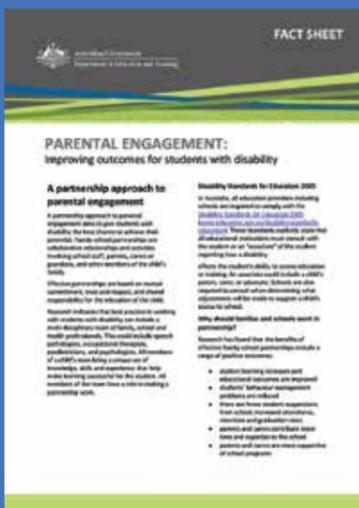
- the nature of the services or facilities
- the cost of supplying them
- the financial circumstances of the school or education authority (e.g. Education Queensland for a state school)
- the disruption that supplying the services or facilities might cause
- the nature of any benefit or detriment to all people concerned.

Determining unjustifiable hardship is not a decision that schools can take lightly. The Standards say that an education provider should be careful not to use this exception without proper consultation and research. “If an education provider wants to use this exception, then the education provider has to prove that the obligation would cause it unjustifiable hardship. This might mean the education provider has to prepare and show financial reports, bank account details, impact statements and quotes to prove it is fair to use this exception.”

dda.edustandards.info/exceptions-for-unjustifiable-hardship-2/

In the mid-1990s some schools won court cases to exclude students with a disability on the grounds of ‘unjustifiable hardship’. Times have changed and it is believed that if the cases from the mid-90s went to court today the outcomes may be different. Some school education staff may use the outcomes from earlier cases to form opinions without factoring in contemporary developments in the provision of adjustments, special services and facilities

Unjustifiable hardship is a fluid rather than a fixed concept; each interpretation will depend on many variables and it is not possible, therefore, to present a tick and flick list for (cont.)



“It was my belief that it was her right to attend her local school with siblings and neighbourhood friends...and that she would make greater progress in all areas when learning and playing alongside her peers.”

“I knew what the alternatives were and I was philosophically opposed to people being boxed into a system whereby people are marginalised, labelled as others and stigmatised as different.”

families to use. Some families have told us that the school of their choice cited unjustifiable hardship as a reason for not enrolling their son or daughter. Many education staff may not understand the complexity of ‘unjustifiable hardship’ and may indeed breach their legal duty to include and accommodate in attempting to interpret the ‘legal’ application to individual cases.

If there is a dispute, unjustifiable hardship may ultimately be determined by a Judge or Tribunal who will use fact and law to make the determination. If there is a dispute, unjustifiable hardship is NOT finally determined by a school or by education staff. If families believe education staff are not in a position to sustain their claim of unjustifiable hardship they might consider seeking advice from a disability advocacy organization or a lawyer. You can also seek guidance or more information from the AHRC or the QHRC, though they will not provide legal advice.

6d. UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

It is vital that parents are aware of, and familiar with, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which was ratified by Australia in 2008. The right of persons with disability to access an inclusive, quality, free education on an equal basis with others is explicitly proclaimed within Article 24 of the CRPD.

www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-24-education.html

- In 2016 General Comment No. 4 clarified CRPD’s Article 24: Right to Education. General Comment No. 4 on the Right to Inclusive Education was developed due to concerns that “Many millions of persons with disabilities continue to be denied the right to education and for many more education is available only in settings where persons with disabilities are isolated from their peers and where the education they receive is of an inferior quality.” www.refworld.org/docid/57c977e34.html
- General Comment No. 4 provides further detail relating to the core features and substantive elements of inclusive education. These are summarised below:
 - Persons with disabilities and, when appropriate, their families, must be recognised as partners and not merely as recipients of education.
 - The right to inclusive education encompasses a transformation in culture, policy and practice in all educational environments [including private] to accommodate the differing requirements and identities of individual students, together with a commitment to remove the barriers that impede that possibility.
 - Inclusive education is to be understood as a fundamental human right of all learners – notably, education is the right of the individual learner and parental responsibilities in regard to the education of a child are subordinate to the rights of the child [including the right to an inclusive education]; and
 - Inclusive education is the result of a process of continuing and pro-active commitment to eliminate the barriers impeding the right to education, together with changes to culture, policy and practice of regular schools to accommodate and effectively include all students.
 - The need to distinguish between “exclusion”, “segregation”, “integration” and “inclusion” is critical.

Ref: Catia Malaquias:

www.startingwithjulius.org.au/un-committee-clarifies-right-to-inclusive-education/

“My son was diagnosed and therefore labelled in early primary school. His teacher at the time was very supportive and had a good understanding of inclusion and inclusive education policy. He was in her class for two years and was always welcomed by the teacher and the other children in the class. It was a really positive time during my son’s early schooling.”

“I felt so proud of Richard achieving so successfully. The careful preparation but unobtrusiveness of the teacher - true inclusion.....I sent a thanks to the principal for this teacher’s ability and skill to include.”

Other parents have not been so lucky and have found that inclusive policy has not been put into practice in their school.



6e. Education Policy – Queensland Department of Education

The Queensland Department of Education Inclusive Education Policy (2018) draws heavily from General Comment not 4.

ppr.det.qld.gov.au/pif/policies/Documents/Inclusive-education-policy.pdf

“The department commits to continuing our journey towards a more inclusive education system at policy and regional levels, and as part of our everyday practice in schools, educational settings and classrooms.”

The policy states that all students can:

- attend their local state school and education centre and be welcomed
- access and participate in a high-quality education and fully engage in the curriculum alongside their similar-aged peers
- learn in a safe and supportive environment, free from bullying, discrimination or harassment
- achieve academically and socially with reasonable adjustments and supports tailored to meet their learning needs.

The policy states that the Department’s work towards a more inclusive state education system will be guided by nine principles adapted from the United Nations’ nine core features for inclusive education:

- A system-wide approach
- Committed leaders
- Whole of school
- Collaboration with students, families and the community
- Respecting and valuing diversity
- Confident, skilled and capable workforce
- Accessible learning environments
- Effective transitions
- Monitoring and evaluation

The Department’s All Students with Disability Succeeding Plan looks to improve outcomes by lifting A-E performance, increasing the number of students receiving a QCE, and reducing student disciplinary absences and part-time attendance. education.qld.gov.au/students/students-with-disability/succeeding-with-disability

Either way, knowledge of policy is an important strategy for parents who want inclusive education.

“Stay focused; be clear about what you want & why; know your education policies”

6f. Education Policy – Catholic Education

Each Catholic diocese and school has their own education policies and procedures. The overarching Queensland Catholic Education Commission released an 'Inclusive Practices for Students in Queensland Catholic Schools' position statement in 2014 (amended 2019). The Queensland Catholic Education Commission advocates that Catholic school authorities commit to establish policies and procedures that incorporate inclusive educational practices into their operations.

The Commission's, 'Inclusive Practices for Students in Queensland Catholic Schools in Queensland; Position Statement' (2014) recommends: "that Catholic School Authorities commit to meeting the diverse needs of all students by establishing policies and procedures that embed inclusive practices and reflect the ethos and mission of Catholic schools and Church teaching"

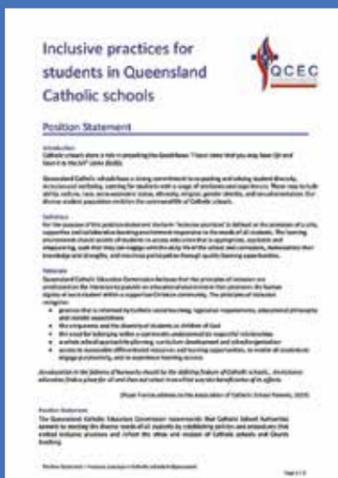
qcec.catholic.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/20190819-Amended-IP-Position-Statement.pdf

The Commission states the principles of inclusion include the following:

- the uniqueness and the diversity of students as children of God
- the need for belonging within a community
- a whole school approach to planning, curriculum development and school organisation
- access to reasonable differentiated resources and learning opportunities.
- establishing policies and procedures that embed inclusive practices and reflect the ethos and mission of Catholic schools and Church teaching

Implications Catholic School Authorities and schools in Queensland will give consideration to:

- enrolment applications from families "who identify with and seek the values of Christ"
- developing enrolment policies and procedures that promote inclusion
- having enrolment processes which identify the student's specific needs
- implementing strategies that reflect the call by Pope Francis to "foster harmony in diversity"
- providing opportunities for professional development of staff
- building respectful partnerships between students, families and educators
- seeking to develop collaborative partnerships and service agreements with agencies beyond the school
- providing uniform options
- creating physical environments that are accessible, stimulating, safe, respectful and welcoming
- supporting and assisting students and their families to discern appropriate educational arrangements, particularly in times of transition.



“It all seems to come down to the attitude of the leadership of the school. If the principal is not supportive of difference, then the learning experiences can be very negative.”

“Some say they are pro-inclusion but when you ask, they send you somewhere else.”



6g. Education Policy – Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ)

An independent school is a non-government school that is governed, managed and accountable at the level of the individual school. Its governing body is autonomous. Independent schools will vary in their policies and procedures regarding students with disability.

However, the Independent Schools website outlines some common characteristics and commitments:

- providing a well-grounded general education
- fostering students' moral and spiritual development
- providing students with pastoral care; promoting discipline
- catering to the needs, aptitudes and interests of the individual student
- developing strong home-school partnerships
- achieving the best possible outcomes for all students.

Independent Schools Queensland have a brochure titled, 'Supporting Student with Disability'. It states:

“Queensland independent schools cater for a diverse range of students, including those with disability. Schools implement programs and strategies, in consultation with parents, to enable all students to participate in school activities, access the curriculum and achieve learning outcomes.”

rms.isq.qld.edu.au/files/Weblive_Diversity/Diversity%20brochure%20SWD.pdf

You are advised to ask individual schools for their policy on Inclusive Education.

NB Legislation does not exempt private schools from their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act and the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

While practice is variable, some families have been pleased to find their teachers are well aware of inclusive education policies and know how to put inclusion into practice.

7.

Information and resources that support inclusive education

Inclusive education has been discussed, debated and developed for many years. There is now 60 years of research that supports inclusive education. Many books have been written and numerous groups have been formed on the basis of a vision of inclusion. The following pages contain but a few of the ideas and resources that you might find helpful in your journey.

Community Resource Unit (CRU) specifically supports inclusive education through the Families for Inclusive Education Project (Funded by the Queensland Department of Education). The aim of the Project is to 'support families to be clear, informed, confident and connected so that they can work as respected and valued partners with state schools to ensure contemporary practice in inclusive education'.

The project builds the capacity of families to advocate for and sustain their child's successful participation in inclusive education. The project offers:

- Workshops
- Webinars and online learning
- Individual consultations to families (can include discussion of advocacy strategies but not individual advocacy)
- Information and resource development (website materials, newsletters, case study development) and individualised information distribution
- Peer support network development
- Assistance in connecting with other supports and peer contacts

cru.org.au/families-for-inclusive-education/

7a. Websites

Australian

www.qcie.org

The Queensland Collective for Inclusive Education (QCIE) is a group of families who promote inclusive lives for their children with disability and work together to make inclusive schools a reality for all. QCIE hosts events for families to learn about inclusive education. QCIE works for positive change in the education system. QCIE's website provides resources for families, educators and clinicians.

www.cyda.org.au

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) is the national peak body which represents children and young people (aged 0-25) with disability. CYDA provides a link from the direct experiences of children and young people with disability and their families to federal government and other key stakeholders. CYDA's website features links to information relating to advocacy, useful resources, research, current issues and help.

www.acie.org.au

The Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE) is an initiative bringing together organisations that share a commitment to advance Inclusive Education in Australia and across State and Territory education systems including government and non-government schools. ACIE's website provides the latest news in relation to Inclusive Education issues in Australia.

www.allmeansall.org.au

Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education (All Means All) works to remove the legal, structural and attitudinal barriers that limit the rights of some students, including students with disabilities, to access full inclusive education in regular classrooms in Australian schools. Their website features 'toolkits' for parents, teachers and links to on-line support groups (School Inclusion Parent Network SIPN and School Inclusion Network for Educators SINE).

www.startingwithjulius.org.au/category/swj-included

Starting with Julius is a project which promotes the inclusion of people with disability in Australia. The 'SWJ IncludEd' webpage features articles which explore and explain current events and issues related to inclusive education.

www.school-inclusion.com

School Inclusion – From Theory to Practice is an online platform created by inclusive educator, Loren Swancutt, to share and unpack school-level design, implementation and leadership processes that support the realisation of inclusive education in Australian schools and school systems.

www.research.qut.edu.au/c4ie

QUT's Centre for Inclusive Education website provides links to articles and research by Australian education experts.

www.include.com.au

Include is an initiative developed by inclusion expert Dr Bob Jackson. The site has helpful information about inclusion.

International

www.inclusiveschools.org

The Inclusive Schools Network (ISN) is a web-based resource for families, schools and communities that promotes inclusive educational practices.

www.paulakluth.com

Dr. Paula Kluth is a consultant, author, advocate, and independent scholar who works with teachers and families to provide inclusive opportunities for students with disability and to create more responsive and engaging schooling experiences for all learners.



www.cast.org

CAST is an educational research and development organisation that works to expand through Universal Design for Learning.

www.fivemooreminutes.com

Five Moore Minutes is a website established by educator Shelley Moore with videos dedicated to empowering schools and classrooms to support all learners.

www.inclusion-international.org

Inclusion International is the international network of people with intellectual disabilities and their families advocating for the human rights of people with intellectual disabilities worldwide.

www.csie.org.uk

CSIE is an independent organisation promoting inclusive education as a basic human right of every child.

www.understood.org

Understood.org provides straightforward information relating to learning disabilities and strategies on how best to provide support.

Please note website quality can vary overtime. You should do your own research and make your own judgements about the value of these links.

7b. CRU resources

Many resources are available on CRU's Families for Inclusive Education Resource Pages.

Families for Inclusive Education: cru.org.au/families-for-inclusive-education/

Information on events and supports for families, as well as resources on: vision; what is inclusion; classroom learning; collaboration; friendships and belonging; and advocacy.

Bringing the Good Life to Life: thegoodlife.cru.org.au

This website explores what makes a Good Life and how to create and sustain this for a person with disability.

Queensland Parents of People with Disability (QPDD) history and resources:

cru.org.au/about/history/qppd/

This page on the CRU website shares the history of QPPD and some of the resources this organisation created.

Inclusive Education Factsheets: cru.org.au/resources/factsheets/inclusive-education/

These fact sheets were developed to build family capacity of parents for inclusive education.

CRUcial Times: cru.org.au/resources/crucial-times/

CRUcial Times features local, national and international writers on themes around authentic inclusion for people with disability and what change efforts will lead to more inclusive lives.

YouTube channel: youtube.com/user/CommResourceUnit

CRU's YouTube channel features stories, presentations and webinars on inclusive education and other topics.

Podcast: cru.org.au/resources/crucialconversations/

CRUcial Conversations: Five stories of grassroots leadership and change in the disability community in Queensland.

7c. Current thinking – Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Until recently, the most common approach to inclusion in mainstream schools has been differentiated teaching; where teachers start with a prescribed curriculum, program or plan aimed at the “average” student, and then adjust it for children who need adaptation.

More recently, some teachers, policy makers and academics have used a different premise, called Universal Design for Learning, which designs a range of approaches and outcomes into the curriculum in the first place. Awareness of UDL is growing.

A universally-designed curriculum is designed right from the start to meet the needs of the greatest number of learners, making costly, time-consuming, retro-fit changes to curriculum unnecessary.

CAST is an international research team that provide a framework for Universal Design. This framework provides guidance on how to remove common barriers, make learning accessible and to provide equal access to learning to all. Some common barriers to learning include: lack of background knowledge, not having the required skills for a lesson, unfamiliarity with key vocabulary. Common barriers to learning can be identified in terms of representation, action and expression and engagement. CAST recommends providing the following in order to eliminate learning barriers -

- multiple means of representation to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge
- multiple means of action and expression to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know
- multiple means of engagement to tap into learners' interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn.

Ref: Fiona Anderson, 2011 & CAST- About Universal Design for Learning
www.cast.org/our-work/about-udl.html#.XuqP8mozby0

Understood.com says UDL is a powerful approach because from the very start of your lesson, it helps you anticipate and plan for all your learners. It can help you make sure that the greatest range of students can access and engage in learning —not just certain students



Conclusion

The future for inclusive education in Queensland

“QPPD acknowledges the significant progress in inclusive policy development in recent years and the sustained efforts of educators within Education Queensland and elsewhere in support of inclusive education. Nevertheless, despite this, exclusion, rather than inclusion, continues to be the reality for too many.

We dream for a day when our children’s gifts, talents and contributions will shine brightly – in the same classrooms and playgrounds as other children.” (Lisa Bridle, Diving for Pearls, 2011)

There is no way we’re going to get the social and economic participation promised by the NDIS unless we get inclusion in school right ... while those special places exist, I think there will always be the threat of exclusion, [and] there will always be coercion placed on families to take that special path. [The dual system] undermines the will to include ... reinforces a myth that special places are the right places for people with disability, and it’s a theft of resources that are best placed in the regular school system Lisa Bridle, Disability Royal Commission (4 November 2019)

As parents we do not seek something extraordinary. All we seek is the right for our children to receive a quality education in local neighbourhood schools...Inclusive education is the absolute cornerstone of an inclusive life path as well as an essential tool in building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.

The inclusion of children with disability has been accompanied by dramatic improvements in the life conditions and opportunities for people with disability. This is likely to be a reflection of reform and changing attitudes and expectations.

Increasing numbers of people with disability are going to post-secondary education and increasing numbers of adults with severe disabilities are achieving success in the work force.

We are now in a position to know confidently that inclusion is preferable for ALL students with disability and has benefits for their classmates too. Forced segregation is now illegal and considered immoral in most western countries.

It is time to move on from the question of “should we include?” to “how can this best be done?” - and how can we progress inclusive education as quickly and successfully as possible.

Our students with disability – and the next generation of students – deserve nothing less.

“I ultimately want to light a fire in all who are associated with education to dare to imagine more. We can’t possibly be happy with what we are currently doing because history has reminded us time and again that the segregation and othering of diverse groups of our own human kind results in the most horrific outcomes which linger for many decades and transcend generations. We have known better for an awfully long time. We must act with urgency and do better.” Loren Swancutt, Disability Royal Commission Townsville Hearing (6 November 2019).

CRU hopes that together – students, parents, educators, policy makers, community members – we can imagine, work for, and insist upon meaningful and successful inclusion for all students.





Expanding Ideas; Creating Change

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