

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION TRANSITION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL



Supporting your child with disability for inclusion success in their secondary school

The secondary school years are an exciting time for students – a time of significant growth exploring new subjects, making new friends, and discovering their unique strengths and interests. For students with disability, this is equally true.

This fact sheet is designed to help parents consider how they can support their child to make a positive start and a successful transition from primary to secondary school.

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Our Vision for Bobby

We see Bobby being part of and experiencing the wonderful opportunities that life offers. We see him always living in a place that he calls home and being surrounded by family and friends who love him.

As he grows through the adolescent years we want him to continue to develop roles and relationships that are typical to his siblings and peers. He will experience the highs and lows of life and develop and mature into an adult that is connected and contributing to the community.

We want other people to also experience and see the beautiful person he is who is full of life and lots of fun. As he matures we want him to develop his own dreams and vision for his own life.

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TIP

Have a clear vision statement that details your child's and family's hopes for the secondary school years and beyond. Vision statements focus on what is typical and ordinary for any young person.

Consider why inclusion at secondary school is important to you and your child:

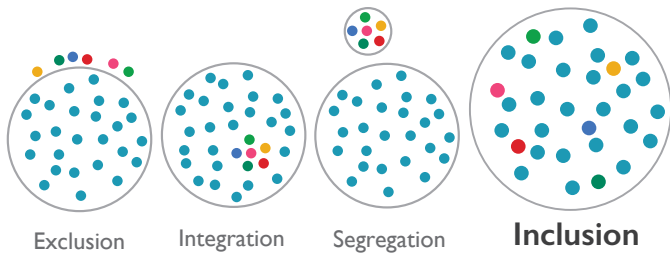
Inclusion at the local secondary school gives your child access to a wide range of subjects, opportunity to meet lots of local people and a chance to develop or extend their interests through extra-curricular activities like clubs, sport, band, chess or environment groups.

Research has found that **students with disability who attend their local secondary school experience better employment outcomes after school. Academic and social outcomes are also better.** When students with disability attend mainstream secondary education, they develop more independence, and more connection with their local community¹.

Having a clear vision for inclusive education that fosters an inclusive life is essential for early discussions with school and when making important decisions.

To learn more about creating a vision you can refer to our [resources](#)².

What does inclusive education in secondary school look like?



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

It will be important for you to know what to look for in an inclusive secondary school, and what to advocate for on behalf of your child. To learn more about becoming a better advocate you can refer to these helpful [guides](#)³.

The [Disability Standards for Education 2005](#)⁴ (DSE) state that education providers are obligated to provide 'reasonable adjustments' for students with disability so they can participate in education 'on the same basis' as students without disability. The Australian Curriculum provides teachers with the flexibility to respond to the diversity of students within their community by offering opportunities for multiple means of accessing the curriculum, learning and assessment.

The Queensland Department of Education's [K-12 Curriculum, assessment and reporting framework](#)⁵ outlines the requirements for all Queensland state schools for all year levels, including the requirements for a whole school approach to differentiated teaching and learning.

Inclusive education is much more than classroom learning. You should see every student being a valued participant and supported to be a part of all aspects of school life, such as joining peers at break times, participating in school sports and cultural activities, and fully included in excursions and camps.

[Inclusive education](#)⁶ in Queensland is supported by the Inclusive Education Policy.

Start looking at schools early

Many families start researching local secondary schools when their child is in year 5, or younger. Staying local means your child will have more natural opportunities for connecting to the local community.

It is important to note that some Queensland state schools (primary and secondary) have [enrolment management plans](#)⁷ in place, meaning that students that live within the school's catchment zone are prioritised.

It can be tempting to look for a school that appears to have a lot of supports and programs available for students with disability, however these may end up leading to less inclusion for your child if the support gets in the way of them developing social relationships (e.g. a one-on-one teacher aide), or takes them away from their class or the curriculum being taught.

There are ways to find out more about a school's culture and approach to inclusion:

- Speak to other families about their experience of local secondary schools – do they speak of collaboration and belonging for all students?
- Explore the school's website and the school's social media. School policies, newsletters and event updates are often shared on these platforms.
- Attend open days and try to take your child with you, noting the atmosphere – is it one of care, openness and does the school seem to embrace diversity? Note your child's response to the school and ask them how they feel about the school.
- Ask school staff about how they include all students and what a typical school day might look like for your child.
- Look for information about how the school includes students with disability.



Enrolment and preparing for first meetings

It is important to know that students with disability have the right to enrol in a school 'on the same basis' as students without disability. This means that schools must take reasonable steps to ensure that enrolment processes do not discriminate against students with disability.⁸

School staff may access (if transitioning within the state education system) or ask for copies of medical reports and support plans. Although these documents may assist school staff in understanding your child's disability, supports and adjustments, they won't provide a full picture of your child, who they are as an individual and what their strengths and interests are.

Involve your young person, put their voice at the centre:

Support your child to express what they need to feel well supported through this transition time and communicate this with your child's primary and secondary schools. **Ensure your child is part of creating their vision statement and one-page profile.**

Involving your child in communicating their dreams, strengths and what helps them to learn and participate (supports and adjustments), will give them an opportunity to develop self-advocacy skills.

Schools need to consult with students and their parents/guardians before making an adjustment. This is one of the requirements set out in the DSE.⁹

For more tips on involving your young person and putting their voice at the centre of discussions, refer to '[It's my learning I have a say](#)'¹⁰ and [Practice Guide - Student Consultation](#)'¹¹



TIP

Think of yourself as your child's ambassador.

Your role in first meetings is to help the school get to know your child as the young person they are. When introducing your child to a new school, consider using a 'One Page Profile', to help staff get to know the strengths of your child, and the particular adjustments that they prefer and that work for them.

View this video to learn more about 'Introducing your child positively'¹².



What works for me

- | | |
|---|---|
| ✓ Feeling valued and that I belong | ✓ AAC (Proloquo2Go)& Assistive Technology – to assist with reading and creating texts |
| ✓ Always inviting me to participate | ✓ Patience – giving me time to think and respond |
| ✓ Peer Modelling | ✓ Regular movement breaks |
| ✓ Finding ways I can communicate my understanding | ✓ Advanced notice of transitions and changes |
| ✓ Visual schedules/routines | |
| ✓ Key word signing | |
| ✓ Picture Cues for instructions/tasks | |



- Being rushed
- Unexpected change
- Too many verbal instructions
- Feeling excluded
- Assuming I am not capable
- Asking me questions (declarative language often works best)
- Negative talk
- Too much happening at once
- Assuming I don't understand
- Assuming I'm not listening or that I can't hear what you are saying
- Stress-filled environments
- Unkind words and actions

STRENGTHS: Receptive language, strong visual-spatial skills, long-term memory, gentle, values kindness, enjoys exploring new spaces and places, enjoys travelling, a creative illustrator, Disney expert, shooting hoops, brilliant at colouring in, LEGO, puzzle and iPad master!



VISION

To live a life filled with joy, companionship and learning.

To feel included, valued and productive each and every day.

I Enjoy....

Being included, welcoming peers, our French Bulldog 'Choppa' & 'Pierre', Scouts, basketball, graphic novels, bush walks, the beach, stand-up paddle boarding, listening to Top 20 'bangers', having a good laugh, Google Earth, building with LEGO, Nintendo Switch & all animated movies.

"We want him to be positively and genuinely connected to his mainstream community for the rest of his life and that starts with school."

Establish a collaborative partnership

It is good to be prepared for some challenges as your child transitions and settles into the secondary school years. Schools and teachers are at different stages in their understanding and experience with inclusive education. It will be important in your role as your child's advocate, to establish a positive collaborative relationship from the start. That way if issues do arise, they can be resolved quickly for your child.

Some helpful things to do as you and your child establish a relationship with the school include:

- **Establish who the main point of contact will be** at the school for you and your child. Ask that you can also have direct communication with your child's subject teachers when needed, and how this can best happen.
- **Negotiate how communication will work best** for you and school staff – frequency, email/phone, and when and how meetings about supports and adjustments will occur (face-to-face/online).
- **Where possible, have your child join in school meetings** and discussions (talk to the school about how your child can be supported to participate). Talk about the meeting with your child beforehand so they know what it is about and can prepare to share their views.
- **Speak positively about your child**, including when there are challenges. Lead with their strengths and interests. Model to others how you would like them to problem solve in relation to your child.



- **Remember that all relationships require time and effort.** Make sure you reach out on a regular basis to your child's teachers and support staff. Little thank you messages and offers of support from parents help to keep pathways for conversation and collaboration open and productive.
- **Be realistic about school systems.** They will not always get it right, and you are likely to need to let some smaller issues go, so as to preserve relationships for working on bigger issues if/when they arise. Refer to ['Being an effective advocate'](#)¹³ fact sheet to learn more about building positive partnerships.
- **It is helpful as a parent to be aware of your school's policies and procedures.** If an issue does arise it is always best to start with the staff member closest to the issue. If you can't resolve the issue at this first step, then it is best to follow the steps outlined in the school's complaints process. See [I Choose Inclusion](#)¹⁴ for helpful tips in your advocacy.
- **Familiarise yourself with available research** to communicate how inclusive education benefits all students, teachers and the wider community.
- **Connecting with other families** who are also pursuing an inclusive education can be helpful in sustaining your efforts. CRU helps families connect with each other for peer support. To find out more about peer support for families, contact [CRU](#).

Orientation and Transition

Your child will take part in orientation activities at the new school, so they have a chance to learn the layout of the school, meet other students and some of the teachers.

Transition support can be more than orientation generally provided to students. Your child can have extra visits or time to become more familiar with the new school environment, systems and practices. School staff can provide written or photographic information to look at over the holidays, to help them feel prepared. One way this may occur is through a [‘virtual visit’](#)¹⁵.



Making the most of the secondary school years (friendship, positive roles):

Help to facilitate opportunities for your young person to join activities based on their interests and strengths.

Support your child to find a role in a team or group they enjoy, and which has value. For example: choir singer, tech crew member for school events, team swimmer, origami artist, soccer player or committee member. Such roles build a sense of belonging and provide responsibilities and friendship opportunities for students with disabilities.

Refer to [‘Building friendships through the school years’](#)¹⁶ and [‘Building belonging in the school community’](#)¹⁷ to learn more about developing friendships and positive roles.



Testimonial – provided by parents of James

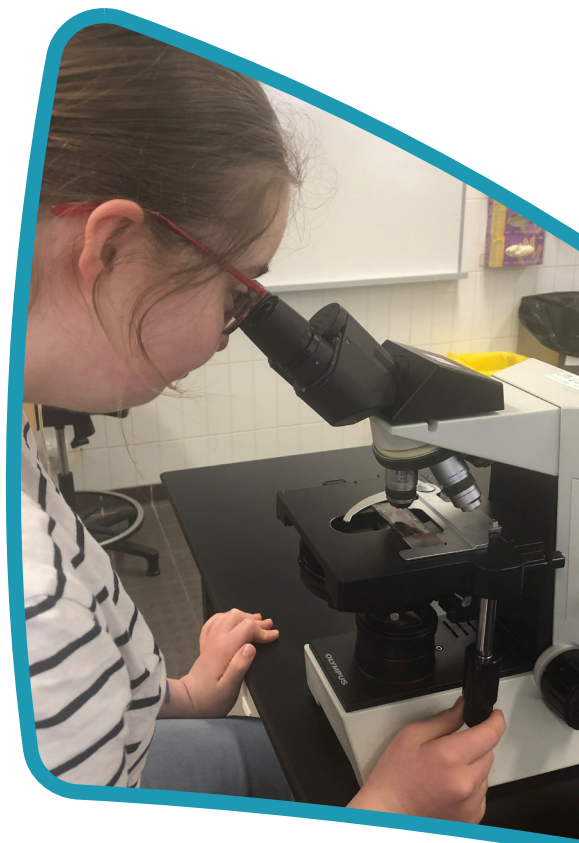
“ We were nervous about transitioning to the local secondary school, as the school is much larger than the primary school. However, family preparations and collaboration with school staff have resulted in our son (James) having a positive start to his secondary school years. Updating our son’s vision and one-page profile and sharing this with staff reduced the need to explain why our family seeks an inclusive education, which has meant that conversations are typically focused on James’ strengths and interests and the support he needs to be successful. Including James in discussions and meetings has meant that he is consulted on the supports and adjustments that work best for him, and after all, he knows what works. Being prepared for some challenges, checking in with James and returning to his vision for guidance has been helpful. Knowing about our son’s right to participate on the same basis as other students without disability has also helped our family to feel confident when navigating conversations relating to curriculum and extra-curricular inclusion. James was nervous about the first day, but taking part in the school’s orientation day plus some extra transition sessions meant that he was already familiar with the new routines, and he was greeted by some already familiar faces in staff and peers. We’ve kept having conversations with staff too about the importance of building James’ belonging, and how he needs some support to get involved in extra-curricular activities and have the opportunity to develop friendships. That has really helped this first year of secondary school be successful for James. ”



Transition to secondary school is an exciting time and a big step. Speak positively with your child about the many opportunities that attending secondary school will open up for them. Your child will likely have many questions and concerns ... take time to listen and to work through these with them. Remember to reach out to staff who know your child well at primary school and to other friends who have secondary school aged children for ideas and support. When challenges arise remember to keep your eye on the long-term benefits. Graduates with disability of regular secondary schooling at their local school and their families state that these long-term benefits make the effort and advocacy worth it. Refer to [‘Dreaming Big Standing Strong’](#)¹⁸ to hear from Queensland graduates of inclusive education and their families.

Links and references

- 1 **Dr Kathy Cologon, Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation (for Children and Young People with Disability Australia, 2019) -**
<https://cyda.org.au/towards-inclusive-education-a-necessary-process-of-transformation/>
- 2 **Creating a vision -**
<https://cru.org.au/our-work/inclusive-education/resources-fie/vision/>
- 3 **Advocacy guides -**
<https://cru.org.au/our-work/inclusive-education/resources-fie/barriers-rights-and-advocacy/#guides>
- 4 **Disability Standards for Education 2005 -**
<https://www.nccd.edu.au/disability-standards-education>
- 5 **K-12 Curriculum, assessment and reorting framework -**
<https://education.qld.gov.au/curriculums/Pages/k12.aspx>
- 6 **Inclusive education -** <https://education.qld.gov.au/students/inclusive-education>
- 7 **Enrolment management plans/catchments -**
<https://www.qld.gov.au/education/schools/find/enrolment/catchment>
- 8 **Enrolment - Nationally Consistent Collection of Data -**
<https://www.nccd.edu.au/wider-support-materials/enrolment>
- 9 **Consultation - Nationally Consistent Collection of Data**
<https://www.nccd.edu.au/wider-support-materials/consultation>
- 10 **Student voice – It’s my learning I have a say -**
<https://youtu.be/NPIKrZ9zwIM?si=EaJoCXb9Imh0C6mB>
- 11 **Consulting students with disability: A practice guide for educators and other professionals -**
<https://research.qut.edu.au/c4ie/wp-content/uploads/sites/281/2020/08/Practice-Guide-Student-Consultation.pdf>
- 12 **Leading with Gifts: Introducing your Child Positively -**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69OMWoQue5U>
- 13 **Being an Effective Advocate -**
<https://cru.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Fact-Sheet-7-BEING-AN-EFFECTIVE-ADVOCATE.pdf>
- 14 **I Choose Inclusion – A guide for parents in their search for an inclusive education -**
https://cru.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CRU_I-choose-inclusion-_Interactive_e-l.pdf
- 15 **Virtual visit -**
<https://autismhub.education.qld.gov.au/resources/virtual-visit>
- 16 **Building friendships through the school years -**
<https://cru.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Building-friendships-through-the-school-years.pdf>
- 17 **Building belonging in the school community -**
<https://cru.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Building-Belonging-in-the-School-Community.pdf>
- 18 **Dreaming Big Standing Strong – Queensland stories of inclusive education -**
<https://cru.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/CRU-Dreaming-Big-Standing-Strong-Interactive.pdf>





Further information

CRU's Families for Inclusive Education Project resources

<https://cru.org.au/our-work/inclusive-education/resources-fie/>

Department of Education resources

<https://education.qld.gov.au/>

Transition to secondary school for students with disability –

Supporting a shared approach for successful transitions – Fact sheet for parents/carers -

<https://education.qld.gov.au/student/students-with-disability/supports-for-students-with-disability/Documents/transition-to-secondary-school.pdf>

Students with disability -

<https://education.qld.gov.au/students/students-with-disability>

You can get help in your language by calling 1800 512 451.



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