



# Statement on Inclusive Education

*Inclusion at school is the foundation of  
inclusive futures and welcoming communities.*

# Statement on Inclusive Education

## Purpose of this statement

This statement outlines the key principles of inclusive education which form the basis for the Inclusive School Communities (ISC) Project. The ISC Project seeks to facilitate greater inclusion of students living with disability and build the capacity of at least 12 South Australian schools to advance their school inclusion practices.

“[[I]nclusive communities start with inclusive neighbourhood schools that value diversity and respect the right of ALL students to be welcomed and to belong<sup>1</sup>.”

## What is inclusive education?

“Inclusive education is central to achieving high quality education for all learners, including those with disabilities, and for the development of inclusive, peaceful and fair societies<sup>2</sup>.”

Inclusive education means that children and young people from ALL social, cultural, community and family backgrounds, and of all identities and all abilities are able to:

- attend and be welcomed by their local school;
- access and participate fully in a high-quality education;
- learn and engage in the same curriculum and all other aspects of school life alongside similarly-aged peers;
- learn in a safe and supportive environment free from bullying, harassment or discrimination; and
- achieve academically and socially with support and adjustments that are tailored to meet the individual strengths and needs of every student.

Inclusive education is:

- A human right
- Best for everyone
- Based on evidence
- Supported by law<sup>3</sup>

## Inclusive education is a human right

The right to access a quality inclusive education is encompassed in Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), to which Australia is signatory<sup>4</sup>.

General comment No. 4 of the UNCRPD refers to inclusive education as:

*a) A fundamental human right of all learners. Notably, education is the right of the individual learner, and not, in the case of children, the right of a parent or caregiver. Parental responsibilities in this regard are subordinate to the rights of the child.*

*d) 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<sup>5</sup>.*

Segregation of students living with disability, in special classes or units in mainstream schools or in special schools, is a form of discrimination and not compatible to their right to inclusive education; as outlined in paragraph 13 of General Comment No.4: “the right to non-discrimination includes the right not to be segregated and to be provided with reasonable accommodation<sup>6</sup>”.

It is clear that the obligation to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels requires more than the enactment of discrimination laws – it requires an in-depth transformation of the Australian education system at the state/territory and national levels.

1 All Means All (no date), For parents – Why include?, available at: <http://allmeansall.org.au/for-parents/>

2 UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24 General Comment No. 4

3 Community Resource Unit (2018), What is inclusive education?, Education fact sheet 1, <http://cru.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Fact-Sheet-1-WHAT-IS-INCLUSIVE-EDUCATION.pdf>

4 UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24 General Comment No. 4

5 Ibid

6 Ibid

## Evidence for inclusive education

The case for inclusive education over ‘special education’ models is strong and is evidenced by four decades of research showing that when students living with disability are included, all students learn and achieve more. Children living with disability perform better on all measures and benefit academically, socially and emotionally from education in regular classrooms in the general education system rather than segregated, disability-specific settings<sup>7</sup>.

A 2016 systematic review of the research comprising 280 studies from 25 countries found students living with disability who are educated in inclusive settings:

- develop stronger skills and higher achievement in language and mathematics;
  - have higher rates of attendance;
  - are more likely to complete secondary school;
  - are less likely to have behavioral problems;
  - have increased social skills; and
  - experience more positive peer relationships.
- And as adults, students living with disability who have experienced an inclusive education are:
- more likely to be enrolled in postsecondary education;
  - more likely to be employed; and
  - more likely living independently<sup>8</sup>.

“There is clear and consistent evidence that inclusive educational settings can confer substantial short- and long-term benefits for students with and without disabilities<sup>9</sup>.”

An inclusive education gives every student the best chance of lifelong wellbeing and happiness, as well as success later in life.

## Inclusive education differs from other approaches

Inclusive education means that students can access and fully participate in teaching and learning experiences, together and on an equal basis with their similarly-aged peers. This is supported by overcoming barriers to a student’s engagement and learning, by providing reasonable adjustments and teaching strategies that are tailored to meet the individual strengths and needs of every student and are compliant with the goal of inclusion<sup>10</sup>. Inclusion is embedded in all aspects of school life and not only teaching practice, including culture, policies and every day practices<sup>11</sup>.

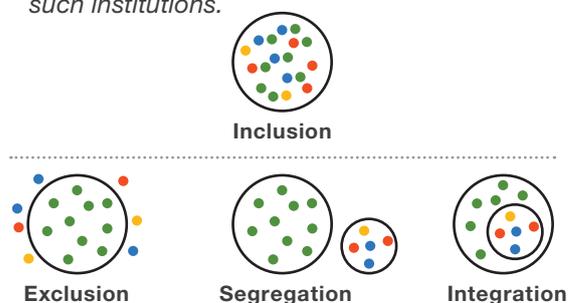
“The central message is simple: every learner matters and matters equally.<sup>12</sup>”

Inclusive education differs from exclusion, segregation or integration, as specified in General comment No. 4:

*Exclusion occurs when students are directly or indirectly prevented from or denied access to education in any form.*

*Segregation occurs when the education of students with disabilities is provided in separate environments designed or used to respond to a particular or various impairments, in isolation from students without disabilities.*

*Integration is a process of placing persons with disabilities in existing mainstream educational institutions<sup>13</sup>, as long as the former can adjust to the standardized requirements of such institutions.*



7 Family Advocacy (2018), Same classroom same opportunities, Briefing Paper, p. 3.

Hehir, T et al. (2016), A summary of the evidence on inclusive education, Instituto Alana, pp. 3, 4.

8 Hehir, T et al. (2016), A summary of the evidence on inclusive education, Instituto Alana, pp. 2, 3, 4, 7.

9 Hehir, T et al. (2016), A summary of the evidence on inclusive education, Instituto Alana, p. 2.

10 Ibid\_Queensland Government (2018), Inclusive education policy, Department of Education, p. 1.

United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2017), A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education, p. 13, available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002482/248254e.pdf>

11 Ibid

12 United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2017), A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education, p. 12, available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002482/248254e.pdf>

13 UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24 General Comment No. 4

## Objectives of the ISC Project

“Inclusion at school is the foundation of inclusive futures and welcoming communities<sup>14</sup>.”

The ISC Project hopes to facilitate SA schools to move towards the progressive realisation of inclusive education and inclusive cultures in which all school community members are included and valued. When schools make the proactive and continuing commitment to inclusive education, their communities including students, families, and staff benefit from a whole school transformation – this also contributes to broader community inclusion.

*This means that ALL children are able to attend any school and access a quality inclusive education where their individual strengths and needs are supported; and every student belongs and is able to learn and thrive.*

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