Inclusive School Practices Toolkit

Inclusive School Leadership

This tool has been developed as part of the *Inclusive School Communities Project*, funded by the National Disability Insurance Agency. The project is led by JFA Purple Orange.

## Introduction

Inclusive education aims to ensure that all children and young people experience an education that enhances their learning and social relationships, and prepares them for a quality adult life in the community.[[1]](#footnote-1)

An inclusive approach enables all students to access and fully participate in teaching and learning experiences, together and on an equal basis with their similarly aged peers. School communities need to develop habits of inclusion to ensure students living with disability are not routinely excluded because they are perceived as ‘different’ or ‘other’. Perhaps the most critical factor in developing habits of inclusion is the role of the principal; they are central to facilitating systemic change and leading school staff to adopt attitudes and practices consistent with an inclusive school vision.

This tool explores the mechanics of inclusive school leadership focusing on the pivotal role of school principals. This tool is intended for school leaders to evaluate and reimagine their role in driving whole-school change towards inclusive education.

## Ideas

Inclusion must be embedded in all aspects of school life and valued and upheld by staff, students, families, and other school community members. Principals and others in leadership positions who welcome and value all students provide a context in which school change towards inclusion is possible.[[2]](#footnote-2) An important focus for inclusive school leadership is creating a climate of belonging:

… working with all stakeholders at school to assume competence and to value all students, building community purposefully in each classroom throughout the year, adopting a school-wide community-building approach, and enhancing the sense of belonging for all students, staff, and families.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Students living with disability and their families have told JFA Purple Orange that when the principal has a commitment to inclusion then that flows down – to staff, to students, and to all school community members. In a consultation we ran, a parent spoke about the principal’s role in acknowledging diversity and viewing it as an asset to the school: “The reason that we chose the school was when we spoke to the Principal, he said: It would be a privilege for us to have your daughter at this school and that the other children will learn as much from your daughter as she will from them.”

An inclusive school culture welcomes and values diversity and practices habits of inclusion and belonging.School leaders need to be values-driven and genuinely committed to every child being welcome and fully included in their school, regardless of their background and ability. In our work with South Australian schools through the Inclusive School Communities Project, we have observed that school leaders are vital in imparting a clear vision of what an inclusive school looks like and how it operates. The school principal’s leadership and proactivity are the most important predictors of success in setting a new course for their school and managing the change process.

Research suggests that principals and others in leadership positions can support their sites to move towards inclusion by attending to three broad tasks:

* Fostering new meanings about diversity;
* Promoting inclusive practices within schools/centres; and
* Building connections between schools/centres and communities[[4]](#footnote-4)

Furthermore, the South Australian Principles for Inclusion for Children and Students with Disability in Education and Care provide useful guidance about factors and considerations for successful inclusion of children and students living with disability, which includes the following examples of inclusive school leadership:

* inducting staff on the school’s inclusion principles and practice
* providing clear and consistent communication to staff on the expectation to apply inclusive education practices
* supporting, providing, brokering, recognising and rewarding professional development that builds the confidence and capacity of school staff to engage to students with diverse abilities and learning styles
* providing resources including time for collaborative planning as well as support personnel, materials and assistive technologies[[5]](#footnote-5)

## Actions

This section can be used by principals and other school leaders to prompt reflection on the current leadership actions and identification of ‘enablers’ or ‘blockers’ of successful school inclusion. This may lead to critical discussion among the school leadership team about the gap between the school’s current state and its vision; this should be an energizing process leading to tangible changes that move the school towards their vision.

The Inclusive Schools Network (ISN), a US web-based educational resource, provides a list of critical leadership actions for school principals in successful inclusive schools.[[6]](#footnote-6) *We have adapted some of the actions and language in this list to be appropriate for the Australian context and applicable to local schools, however some points are only relevant to schools with special education. Please note that the term ‘special education teachers’ is used below to encompass those with special education, inclusive education, developmental education, and disability qualifications and professional experience.* There are various ways the list below can be used by SA schools. One way is for principals and school leaders to read each point and identify which ones aren’t being acted on; this may help to discover priorities for leadership improvements.

* Review the research evidence and understand the most important aspects of inclusive education before launching your efforts in leading your school through your action steps.
* State your support, clearly and explicitly, for an inclusive philosophy and practice across all classrooms in your school in a school staff meeting or other gathering that involves all staff members.
* Assign special education staff to year level or department teams, instead of disability or program-specific teams.
* Provide planning time for teaching team of general and special education educators.
* Ensure that students including those in a special education setting and those receiving interventions in the general education classroom are participating in their year level Australian curriculum.
* Ensure all special education teachers receive relevant professional development regarding curriculum with their general education peers.
* Communicate that the use of appropriate instructional accommodations for any student who requires them is an expected instructional delivery activity for all educators in every classroom.
* Communicate that any student with an Individual Education Plan (IEP)/Negotiated Education Plan (NEP) must receive all specified accommodation and/or curricular modification and modified grading procedures as specified in the IEP/NEP.
* Convene meetings with general and special education teachers to complete the Step-by-Step planning forms for each student with an IEP/NEP to begin the staffing process for the next school year.
* The goal for all students including those in a special education placement is full inclusion in the general education classroom. Be sure to ask each set of teachers to consider more time in the general education classroom for each student and identify what is needed to make this happen.
* Use the information from Form 1 A Format to Guide Instructional Planning (<http://stetsonassociates.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/scheduling-form-1.pdf>) and Form 2 Analysis of Instructional and Personal Support Needs (http://stetsonassociates.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/scheduling-form-1.pdf) to create the schedule of instructional and personal supports for the next school year. This step should be completed in advance of the creation of the master schedule. Notify the teaching staff of their assigned students for the upcoming year.
* Take steps to include students and families in creating an authentic inclusive school that is embedded in and supported by the local community. Pay attention to social inclusion by creating specific opportunities for all students to develop friendships and a sense of belonging through shared activities, play and fun. Use students, staff, parents, and community to plan these activities.
* Provide data snapshots of increases in time students spend in the general education classrooms and in attendance, engagement, achievement, and graduation to your staff twice each year. Reinforce the whole-school vision for inclusion.
* Celebrate your successes and plan for continuous improvement.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Principals and others in leadership positions are essential to leading whole-school change towards inclusive education, however inclusion is “an evolving process in which all teachers have roles and responsibilities”[[8]](#footnote-8).

## More Information

An outline of a seven-part process for inclusive school reform, adapted from the Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) planning process excerpted from The Principal’s Handbook for Leading Inclusive Schools by Julie Causton and George Theoharis <https://www.brookespublishing.com/principals-handbook>

The Principles of Inclusion were developed on behalf of the Minister for Education by the Ministerial Advisory Committee: Children and Students with Disability (MAC: CSWD). The Principles have been endorsed by the Department for Education, Catholic Education South Australia and the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia.

* View the complete document (PDF) <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/g/files/net691/f/principles-of-inclusion-2017.pdf>
* View the one-page version (convenient for distribution and display) (PDF) <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/g/files/net691/f/principles-of-inclusion-2017-one-page.pdf>

Links to resources authored by Inclusive Schools Network that explore the many facets of the role of inclusive principals <https://inclusiveschools.org/category/resources/leadership-for-inclusive-schools/>

## Acknowledgement

This tool was written and edited by Letitia Rose, Project Leader at JFA Purple Orange.

1. McArthur, J. (2012). Leadership in the development of inclusive school communities. Leading Lights. Edition 3. Newsletter of the New Zealand Educational Administration and Leadership Society. (p.7) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Causton, J.C., & Theoharis, G. (2013). The Principals Handbook for Leading Inclusive Schools. Brookes Publishing. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ainscow, M. & Sandill, A. (2010). Developing inclusive education systems: the

   role of organisational cultures and leadership, *International Journal of Inclusive*

   *Education, 14*(4), 401–416. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ministerial Advisory Committee: Children and Students with Disability (2017). Principles for Inclusion for Children and Students with Disability in Education and Care. Retrieved from <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/g/files/net691/f/principles-of-inclusion-2017.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Inclusive Schools Network (2019). Leadership for Inclusive Schools. Retrieved from https://inclusiveschools.org/category/resources/leadership-for-inclusive-schools/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Inclusive Schools Network (2019). Leadership for Inclusive Schools. Retrieved from https://inclusiveschools.org/category/resources/leadership-for-inclusive-schools/ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. McArthur, J. (2012). Leadership in the development of inclusive school communities. Leading Lights. Edition 3. Newsletter of the New Zealand Educational Administration and Leadership Society. (p.7)

    [↑](#footnote-ref-8)