Inclusive School Practices Toolkit

Understanding the Principles of Inclusion

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

The Principles of Inclusion for Children and Students with Disability in Education and Care (Principles of Inclusion) were developed on behalf of the Minister for Education by the Ministerial Advisory Committee: Children and Students with Disability (MAC: CSWD). They have been endorsed by the Department for Education, Catholic Education South Australia and the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia. The Principles of Inclusion are based on the belief that “Inclusive education builds the capacity of early childhood centres and schools to educate and support all students and contributes to stronger communities.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

It is essential to inclusion that school staff (including leaders, educators, teacher aides, office staff, and other site staff) understand the various policies and laws that apply to their role and meet their legal (and moral and social justice) obligations to students living with disability and their families. A school that embeds the Principles of Inclusion in their policies and practices is more likely to be an inclusive school that welcomes and engages all students and families, including students living with disability. This tool presents the Principles of Inclusion and ideas for exploring them with school staff.

## Ideas

Inclusive schools ensure their staff have the knowledge and skills to operate within the policy framework that applies to their role. School staff who understand the policy instruments and their legal obligations will be more willing and better equipped for supporting and teaching students who have additional learning needs. The Principles of Inclusion were informed by the international, national and state-based policies that establish a framework around people living with disability accessing and participating in education. See tool titled ‘Policy Framework around Students Living with Disability’ for an overview of the disability rights and inclusion policies relevant to education.

School staff who are familiar with the Principles of Inclusion have more confidence and capacity to apply them in their schools and are more likely to contribute to creating inclusive school communities. The following information is taken directly from the Principles of Inclusion. The complete document is available for download https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/principles-of-inclusion-2017.pdf

The Principles of Inclusion promote equity, access, opportunity and the rights of children and students with disability in education and care and contribute to reducing discrimination against them.[[2]](#footnote-2) They provide early childhood education and care centres (early childhood) and schools, as well as early childhood and school sectors, with broad and consistent criteria for inclusion to assess their progress against.[[3]](#footnote-3)

## *The Principles*

## All children and students who experience disability have:

## the right to access and participate in education.

## the ability to learn and the right to exercise their voice, choice and control in managing their own educational experiences.

## the right to develop to their fullest potential and to be active, valued citizens in the community.

## the right to an appropriate and adequate allocation of resources to enable their right to access and participate meaningfully in education.

## All children and students who experience disability, their parents/carers/advocates, teachers and members of the early childhood education and care centre and school communities have:

## the right to be safe – physically, emotionally, culturally and socially and to be treated respectfully.

## the responsibility to operate within the legal framework provided by the Australian and South Australian governments.[[4]](#footnote-4)

## Teachers, early childhood education and care centre and school communities and the parents/carers/advocates of children and students who experience disability have the responsibility for taking action for inclusive behaviour in their education and care setting.

## Actions

In 2019, a Community-of-Practice (CoP) of South Australian schools explored the Principles of Inclusion over three CoP sessions. JFA Purple Orange designed and facilitated activities with the school delegates of the CoP to prompt reflection, discussion and problem-solving using the Principles of Inclusion. Due to the staged entry of new schools into the CoP, the number of participants in this exercise increased from 10 to 22 over the sessions but it seemed to work just as well with a larger group. Most of the school delegates who participated in this exercise had heard of the Principles for Inclusion but weren’t familiar with them and hadn’t used them as criteria for inclusion to assess their site against.

The Principles for Inclusion activities may be replicated by other schools wanting to build staff capacity to understand, uphold and put the principles into action.

The exercise is outlined below.

The first part of the Principles of Inclusion exercise was run with the initial five schools in the Inclusive School Communities Project. Each principle was displayed around the room and school delegates worked through the following instructions:

1. Read each of the Principles of Inclusion. Reflect on how the principles are understood and put into action at your school.
2. Place a green dot on the *top principle* for your school – the one that is embedded in your school’s policies and practices. Staff and students understand this principle and put it into action. Everyone is committed to this principle and it is a part of your school’s culture.
3. On a post-it, write an example of this principle in action and stick next to your dot.
4. Place a yellow dot on the *bottom principle* for your school – the one that is hardest to grasp or that has been overlooked and needs attention. Staff and students don’t understand this principle. There seems to be many barriers to embedding this principle in your school’s policies and practices.
5. On a post-it, write a barrier to putting this principle into action and stick it next to your dot.

These activities were continued at the next CoP session with the ten schools that were present and JFA Purple Orange summarized themes from the activity. See Appendix A for a list of the principles in action identified by the schools. This is a useful resource to understand how the principles can be applied.

The final part of the Principles for Inclusion activities was run with 14 schools and involved in-depth exploration of the principles previously identified as needing attention. Small groups of 4-6 school delegates worked through the following instructions:

1. Read the principle and have one person from each school in your group explain it in their own words. Think about how you would describe the principle to a student at your school using appropriate language so they can understand how the concept applies to them at school.
2. Read the school practices relevant to the principle that were previously identified by CoP schools and come up with your group’s list on the butcher’s paper.
3. Read the challenges and opportunities relevant to the principle that were previously identified by CoP schools and come up with your group’s list on the butcher’s paper.
4. Choose one of the challenges/barriers for your group to focus on and discuss how this exists in each of your schools.

e.g., low expectations of students living with disability

1. Identify key themes in your group’s discussion about the challenge/barrier and record these on the butcher’s paper.

e.g., high expectations for all students are not evident in the school purpose and pedagogy and hence school staff are not practicing in ways that enable students to achieve academically and socially

1. Come up with a list of opportunities/ideas/resources for addressing the key challenge/barrier and identify one that you could take back to your school.

e.g., school leadership needs to improve induction and initial training for new staff as well as ongoing professional learning to ensure high expectations for all students is embedded – this must be visible in practice

The Principles of Inclusion activities, described above, were carried out over three CoP sessions in approximately 90 minutes. We found that the school delegates would have benefitted from more time to discuss, share ideas and resources, and problem-solve using the Principles for Inclusion as a guide. We recommend allowing 120-180 minutes, depending on the number of participants, and running the activities over one or two sessions only.

Schools are encouraged to use the Principles of Inclusion activities as they are or modify them to suit their context, with the aim of building staff capacity for inclusive practices.

## Appendix A: Examples of the Principles of Inclusion in Action Identified by a Group of SA Schools

All children and students who experience disability have the right to access and participate in education.

* We believe ALL children are fearfully and wonderfully made.
* Small sized classes with additional support in CORE subjects.
* Open enrolment policy.
* Curriculum change: differentiation, evidence-based, greater subject choice at senior, no exams, varied instruction and assessment.

All children and students who experience disability have the ability to learn and the right to exercise their voice, choice and control in managing their own educational experiences.

* Building student voice in this space.
* We are working very hard on triggers of behaviour – reflecting on behaviour.

All children and students who experience disability have the right to develop to their fullest potential and to be active, valued citizens in the community.

* Overall wellbeing of all students and staff and families is at the heart of what we do.
* Using ABC charts to understand student’s triggers.
* Passing on strategies previously used successfully.
* Holistic approach to education – family services, counselling, learning support, health care, outside service providers.
* Encourage/teach students to understand needs of others.
* Through school values and student leadership.

All children and students who experience disability have the right to an appropriate and adequate allocation of resources to enable their right to access and participate in education.

* Our school frequently audits how funding is being used and how effective it is.
* We have an SSO training program to ensure all staff are using best practice.
* Our school is working on using universal design and more training needs to be done on best practice.

All children and students who experience disability, AND their parents/carers, teachers and members of the education community have the right to be safe – physically, emotionally, culturally and socially and to be treated respectfully.

* Providing a stimulating learning environment through Cows Create Careers, Lego League, Game Maker, Makey Makey, Interactive Maths Games, and Numero.
* Wellbeing Committee meets weekly includes Futures Coordinator, Head of School, Heads of Houses, Head of Wellbeing, Head of Inclusive Learning, School Psychologist, School Counsellor, and School Chaplain.
* Use of Personalised Learning Plans for all students.
* Classroom environments R-2.
* Students write agreements about what a safe learning environment is and how they can contribute to a safe learning environment. They also write student contracts about where choices will lead.
* Multidisciplinary Team includes communication with Pastoral Care, Learning Support Team, parents, and class teachers – our students/parents often comment on feeling heard/safe.

All children and students who experience disability, AND their parents/carers, teachers and members of the education community have the responsibility to operate within the legal frameworks provided by the Australian and South Australian governments.

* Within our Early Years team connection with families is transparent.
* Every 4-year-old has an Individual Learning Plan.
* Support from leadership.
* Time invested in this.

Teachers, early childhood education and care centre and school communities and the parents/carers of children and students who experience disability have the responsibility for taking action for inclusive behaviour in their care and education setting.

* I feel like we are making progress with embedding inclusive behaviour through the engagement of student leaders in this space.

## More Information

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>

## Acknowledgement

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



1. Ministerial Advisory Committee: Children and Students with Disability (2017). *Principles for Inclusion for Children and Students with Disability in Education and Care.* <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/g/files/net691/f/principles-of-inclusion-2017.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ministerial Advisory Committee: Children and Students with Disability (2017). *Principles for Inclusion for Children and Students with Disability in Education and Care.* https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/g/files/net691/f/principles-of-inclusion-2017.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)