

Inclusive Education

Opportunities for Every Victorian child to reach their full potential

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Inclusive Education Working Group

Overview

Every Child, Every Opportunity is the current maxim for the Victorian Government's Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development. It is so all embracing and positive that no-one could disagree with it. It provides a message of hope and inclusion, and of excellence for every Victorian child.

The reality in Victoria, however, is that every child is **not** receiving every opportunity.

This paper aims to commence a discussion that is well overdue in Victoria. A conversation about how we can provide a better education for every child than we do today. This paper outlines a vision for ensuring opportunity for every child through inclusive education- a simple notion that education should be open to all. It is a vision that is being implemented in other jurisdictions- from Canada to Denmark and even in Queensland. It is a vision that should come to Victoria.

This paper will highlight key issues about inclusive education and a call for action for the Victorian Government, and Opposition parties, to move towards implementing a truly inclusive education system for all Victorian children.

For while we have stated commitments to supporting children with a disability- including comprehensive Education Standards designed to give students with a disability the very same rights as every other student- we do not have genuine equality of access or of outcomes.

It also sets a challenge for the Government, Opposition and the community more broadly. If we value education we must value it for everyone. **Every child** must have **every opportunity** at school.

The State of Disability in Victoria.

It is not easy to find statistics about the number of Victorian children with a disability. The nature of disability does not assist an easy definition as disability is a continuum and something that affects many Australians in varied ways. There are also children who may not have a diagnosed disability but who have additional needs. Any child who has either a disability or special needs that impacts on their ability to meaningfully engage with a mainstream service system are the very children that our State should be quick to support with the assistance required to allow full participation.

Current statistics show that at least 5% of Australian children have a disability of some sort¹ while others show a national average of 8% with 7% in Victoria. That means that 67,170 Victorian children have a disability². Boys are more likely than girls to have a disability with statistics showing that 10% of boys compared with 6.5% of girls³.

What is clear however, is that Victorians with a disability, and their families and carers, struggle. Those with a disability are more likely to rely on Centrelink benefits and a range of social and other supports such as accessing emergency relief.

Our son was enrolled full time in mainstream government schooling from prep (and as) bullied, eventually (being) diagnosed with severe anxiety disorder and depression from the age of seven. We got some integration funding but effectively all the funding was wasted. There were no outcomes for our son. Just pain and suffering. 12 days in the classroom for one year, a handful in the next two years our son was denied the opportunity to even think of life goals for himself, to even realise any real sense of himself. There was a total disconnect between what the medical professionals understood about our child and his needs and the imperatives for his future and the Principals' preparedness to be involved. The parents, parent advocates and the medical professionals all took responsibility and a duty of care for our son – with the notable exception of one Principal we had for one term, the Principals did not see him as their concern. Now in his early twenties our son is still trying to come to terms with the outside world and find himself and where he belongs. He still has had no education to speak of.

Much of this welfare dependency is due to limited or poor education in earlier years. Only a generation ago it was still acceptable for a child with a severe disability to not attend or complete a mainstream education. The deficiencies in education for those children have significantly reduced their ability to participate in the social and economic life of the State.

The State of education for Victorians with a disability

While the current Government has provided additional investment to support children with a disability to access education the reality is that support is fragmented and piece meal. There are also waiting lists and eligibility requirements that are exclusionist. Indeed, there is often a sense that the system is more focused on managing the scarcity of resources available to children with a disability than adequately catering for them all. This is unacceptable.

¹ http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/raising_a_child_with_a_disability.html

² <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/researchinnovation/vcams/children/7-9disability.htm>

³ Ibid

Victoria lacks a transparent set of data that shows the extent to which all children are not only meeting benchmarks, but reaching their full potential. The data that does exist has not been promising. The State of Victoria's Children reports that while overall students perform well there are significant gaps- almost a quarter of all children were classed as being "developmentally vulnerable"⁴. More concerning was the statistic that over two thirds of students with a disability experienced difficulties at school⁵.

A high school student with a mild intellectual disability, attends a school in a regional area. He has a Negotiated Education Plan and receives one-on-one help from a School Support Officer several hours a week. The other students make snide remarks when he leaves for his sessions with the SSO, and laugh at him when he makes a mistake in class. The school is aware that the other students bully and make fun of Jack, but hasn't made a strong effort to stamp out the bad behaviour.

Completion rates are 4 times lower for students with a disability and the anecdotal evidence suggests that in some schools more effort is directed towards keeping a student with a disability occupied than ensuring that they are learning.

There is disturbing evidence that students who are either under- performing or who may have a disability are being encouraged not to attend national (NAPLAN) testing⁶. With the increasing focus on addressing disadvantage and directing investment to disadvantaged communities based on these results, such evidence of exclusion is deeply concerning. It is also the very worst way to deal with children with a disability, the very children who are likely to be experiencing a range of other social and educational exclusions.

I wanted my child to sit the NAPLAN test. I was told by the school that my child was not entitled to any assistance yet I discovered the day before the tests began that this was incorrect. By then it was too late to organise the use of his laptop or a scribe to compensate for his poor handwriting due to his low muscle tone. My child had the right to be included in the NAPLAN testing and have his knowledge tested alongside his peers in Grade 3 across the country. He also had the right to accurately represent all that he had learnt so far but as his school did not adequately plan for his inclusion this did not happen. My child performed very well in this test situation and completed all testing where some of his neurotypical peers were unable to finish.

⁴ <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/govrel/Policy/children/sovcreport08summaryintro.pdf>, page 3

⁵ Ibid, page7

⁶ <http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/low-turnout-skewing-school-test-results-20100217-odwr.html>

In the past no other child on the Program for Students with Disabilities at my child's school has ever sat the NAPLAN even though they were entitled to.

The existence and expansion of Early Childhood and other intervention services⁷ has made a positive difference to the lives of those children able to now gain access but it has not provided the suite of services, nor policy reform, required to facilitate every child reaching their full potential.

6 years ago my son received early intervention services within both the mainstream and specialist kindergarten settings. Committed staff and therapists worked together to create a welcoming adapted environment in which with their support, he thrived. Without the strategies implemented by his early intervention team, to communicate effectively, manage his behaviour and play with the other children, it would have been difficult for him to successfully transition as he has, to a mainstream setting.

While there are examples of good practice and performance in Victoria it is far from uniform. Indeed the lack of quality and comprehensive data means there is a lack of evidence to suggest how far Victoria has come and how far it still needs to go.

Other systems have a stronger focus on data and include detailed information on the extent to which students are both completing and successfully completing their education. The United States National Council on Disability produced an Improving Educational Outcomes for Students with a Disability in 2004 that provides a template for looking optimistically at the state of educational performance and disability. The statistics are disturbing and shows drop out rates at 30% and high school graduation, rather than simply attendance, at 56%⁸

Access to education provides access to opportunity and to a future. Denial of an education commits a person to a lifetime of under achievement. For a wealthy country and a State where education is stated to be the Government's top priority we should have an education system that allows every child to excel by reaching their full potential.

What is Inclusive Education?

Inclusive education covers a range of educational practices from physical accessibility to the right of students to have access to education in their own community⁹. It is an approach to education that recognises the diversity of students and their needs. Many jurisdictions that

⁷ <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/commrel/policy/Blueprint2008/blueprint-one-year-on.pdf>
page 12

⁸ <http://www.educationalpolicy.org/pdf/NCD.pdf> at pages 4 and 5

⁹ <http://www.csie.org.uk/inclusion/what.shtml>

promote inclusive education do so in a manner that is much broader than ensuring open access for those with a disability. Inclusive Education is also about a commitment to social justice. The Queensland Inclusive Education Statement of 2005 defines it as an approach that “questions disadvantage and challenges injustice”¹⁰.

In many systems including Queensland the inclusive education statement or policy embraces gifted education. This approach on excellence is exactly what is needed to support children with a disability to thrive and highlights the emerging trend to see excellence in those with a disability and not simply deficit.

Teachers also need support to be able to recognise and respond appropriately to disability. The Queensland Education Statement 2005 supports this notion in practical terms¹¹ and it remains a critical aspect of any inclusive education system.

A vice principal in Victoria searching for assistance from the Department in formulating an individual learning plan, ultimately resorted to the internet and found a template from another state.

Australia has Disability Standards for education under the Disability Discrimination Act. These standards provide a way by which education providers can comply with the Act. While positive in the sense that the standards mandate equal rights for students with a disability as all other students, they have not served to actually deliver equality of access or outcome. These standards also allow providers to claim “unjustifiable hardship” as an argument for not providing full equality. The system is also a complaints based one putting the emphasis on the child (which almost always means their parents or guardian) to go through the process with the Australian Human Rights Commission and then to the Federal Court. This legal process can be very expensive and if families decide to proceed, they face the risk of carrying the full financial burden if they are unsuccessful. Complaints must also be individual and not collective and so even a successful complaint is unlikely to result in systemic change.

There are a range of ways in which a commitment to inclusive education can be demonstrated however most start from the position of having a universal educational guarantee. Such an approach, which sits in contrast to a highly rationed and targeted system as exists in Victoria, ensures that resources are delivered according to need.

Does Victoria have an inclusive education system?

¹⁰ <http://education.qld.gov.au/student-services/learning/docs/includedstatement2005.pdf> page 1

¹¹ <http://education.qld.gov.au/student-services/learning/docs/includedstatement2005.pdf> page 3

While Victoria has a range of policies and procedures to support children with a disability it does not have a holistic approach to inclusion. As a result it does not have an inclusive education system. In fact there are significant gaps through which children regularly fall.

From the commencement of early childhood education children receive support based on their ability to fit within a series of medically defined conditions. Students with multiple needs or whose diagnosis is not absolute often find that they receive only some or none of the support they need. The system does not encourage choice as the only choice is a series of supports that, if provided, are highly constrained and conditional and often require unpaid care to ensure the support works.

The inability for children to receive the early childhood support they need through programs such as the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services (KISS) means that they enter primary school at a disadvantage to children who haven't missed out on support or who do not need it to reach their full potential.

Two years ago my son was diagnosed as intellectually disabled with an IQ score of 63. We applied for an integration aide to help him with his school work and it was denied as a result of him being unable to hold a conversation. Last year at the end of term 3 he could not read or write and I approached both his teacher and the principal to get help for him and was told that he would learn in his own time. He is now in grade 4 and I believe that he really needs help if he is to go onto grade 5. It seems that I am falling on deaf ears when I try to get help for my son. When they gave us the report about the findings we got no support to decide how we would educate our son.

Parents of children with a disability report the significant extra stress of having to navigate a series of funding sources and education systems. Already faced with the additional expenditure in money and time of raising a child with a disability the need to become an advocate for that child is a role that many parents- especially those who are low income or disadvantaged- struggle to do.

The reality is that the current programs, including KISS and the Program for Students with a Disability (PSD), need significant investment combined with associated eligibility reform and professional development. While such changes would allow for more children with a disability to receive support such a change would not automatically deliver inclusion. Inclusion requires not just the ability of children with a disability to attend education but the ability for them to exercise choice and an equality of access to the full range of educational services available.

Current funding constraints reinforces the broader level of disadvantage experienced by those children with a disability from lower income backgrounds, rural and regional areas and students from an indigenous background.

What are the outcomes for children with a disability in Victoria?

There are scant resources that clearly demonstrate the educational outcomes for children with a disability in Victoria. The State of Victoria's Children report provides some disturbing evidence that confirms that outcomes are not universal. With a quarter of students developmentally vulnerable there is a need to ensure that their outcomes improve. Indeed while there remains evidence of students with a disability being excluded from testing we cannot even be sure that the published outcomes reflect the state of educational attainment for children with a disability or additional needs.

What we do know is that Victorian children are missing out on services and support due to funding shortfalls and eligibility controls that serve to redirect effort towards classification and rationing rather than on promoting the delivery of high quality universal services.

Child has borderline intellectual disability/motor skills delay/severe sensory integration issues/auditory processing deficit/severe expressive language disorder/moderate receptive language disorder/anxiety. The child did not qualify for the PSD and received no funding from DEECD even though the school actively appealed for funds. The child regressed academically and required psychological support for self-esteem problems. Mother attempted enrolment in a special education setting but application was not accepted due to the child not meeting the eligibility criteria.

The Blueprint is an important albeit aspirational policy document. While aspiration is an important, indeed critical, part of educational policy there needs to be tools to support the implementation of this plan right through the educational system. While the State is tracking the Blueprint "One Year On" it is clear that moves towards improving access and equity, choice and diversity is going to take more time.

Do other Australian States support Inclusive Education?

Inclusive education is still in its infancy in Australia though international jurisdictions are well advanced in their work towards inclusion¹². The nature of the joint funding and policy responsibility for education in Australia between the national and state and territory governments means that uniform national standards in any area of education have been slow to develop. The added focus on disability still needs to be highlighted at the national level.

¹² <http://www.aare.edu.au/03pap/mcl03296.pdf>

The Queensland Government's statement on Inclusive Education includes in part "Education Queensland is committed to achieving excellence by enhancing educational opportunities for all students. To this end, schools create environments where:

- all students feel a strong sense of belonging
- all students learn to interact respectfully with others
- all students learn to understand and appreciate diversity, and
- all parents and carers in the community can take an active role in the life of the school. "

Importantly and significantly the definition states that "Student Services supports the delivery of inclusive education by providing quality support and services to students, teachers and parents. This support enhances the learning and teaching experienced by all students, regardless of circumstance."¹³

While the Victorian Government has more increasingly focusing on education and the needs of low income and disadvantaged Victorians a focus on the benefits of the inclusion of children with a disability and the benefits of that inclusion to all children has not been a priority. With the evidence increasingly focused on the benefits of inclusive education to all students¹⁴ the call to action for inclusive education is clearly broader than just the impacts on children with a disability.

Who should Victoria look to for inclusive education?

It is clear that progressive education systems are moving towards a policy of inclusion over exclusion. While different jurisdictions have different educational systems, funding and program models and priorities it is clear that Victoria can learn from a range of approaches occurring overseas.

Case Study- Denmark

Denmark is a world leader in inclusive education. Their approach is built on the basis that the education system caters to all students with almost every child going to a mainstream school, the overwhelming majority attending Government schools. From building and physical inclusiveness¹⁵- there are classrooms for flexible use- to specific instruction on the

¹³ <http://education.qld.gov.au/student-services/inclusive/index.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.qppd.org/downloads/All%20Children%20Belong%20Together.pdf> (there are more papers on this)

¹⁵ http://tilgaengelighed.emu.dk/tilgaengelighed/English/fysisktg/expl.html#Legislation_and_standards

mandatory use of aids and equipment and learning alterations to assist students with special needs¹⁶ there is a significant amount of mandatory inclusion built into the system. The Education Department even provides comprehensive details of the specific nature of the support services and tools that are provided¹⁷.

Case Study- New Brunswick, Canada

In New Brunswick the Provincial Government has included benchmarks for inclusion as part of its overall educational plan¹⁸. As New Brunswick was a province that had underperformed compared to the rest of Canada across a range of educational criteria, this policy was designed to ensure practical measures to drive improvement. The Government has set specific targets for those with additional needs. For example, there is a target for 80% of students with identified learning plans to be meeting those plans with a requirement that interventions are in place for the remaining 20%. A parental quality measure that carries an approval target of 90% triggers access to all the supports that children need to assist with their learning. New Brunswick also recognises the continuum of special needs- from those with additional needs to be able to learn, to those gifted students who will benefit from additional support to meet their potential. This is an education system that does not have special schools but that provides additional support in mainstream settings.

Time for action on inclusive education in Victoria

With a strong education system and a range of professionals dedicated to improving the educational outcomes for children with a disability Victoria should be a world leader. And it can be. Inclusive education is an approach that seeks to maximise the educational outcomes of all children. It is a policy that is supported by a range of comparable jurisdictions. A focus on inclusive education provides the opportunity for Victoria to lead the country by again directing its effort and expenditure towards a social inclusion goal that focuses on better utilising our human capital.

Recommendations

¹⁶ <http://tilgaengelighed.emu.dk/tilgaengelighed/English/grundsk/paed1.html>

¹⁷ <http://tilgaengelighed.emu.dk/tilgaengelighed/English/grundsk/matr1.html>

¹⁸ <http://www.gnb.ca/0000/kidsfirst-e.asp>

1. That all Victorian students are guaranteed a high quality education - a fully funded choice based inclusive system that provides an entitlement to educational services that fit their needs.
2. That the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development immediately begin consultations to discuss the scope of such a guarantee and a mechanism to consult on its development.
3. That the Ombudsman instigate an own motion inquiry into the state of education for children with a disability with a focus on both access to support and educational outcomes
4. That the State Government, as an interim measure, ensure that resources are devoted to reducing the waiting lists for KISS and enhancing the suite of supports available for the KISS and PSD programs.

Annotated Bibliography

A number of websites were examined as part of the research for this project. All of those websites were accessed between early Feb and 5 March 2010.

To assist and for ease of reference this bibliography has been divided into sections rather than alphabetically.

Victorian Government

Statistics on students with a disability-

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/researchinnovation/vcams/children/7-9disability.htm>

General information on education:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/children/default.htm>

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/news/newsalerts/2009/educationplanning.htm>

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Education have a comprehensive policy and practice guide for staff with disabilities (in comparison to children?) -

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/divequity/disability.htm>

http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/hr/equalop/Disability_in_the_Workplace_-_Policy_and_Guidelines_2008.pdf

Inclusive Education case study, transition and partnership arrangement between kinder and school, Greensborough, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/showcase/earlyyears/proserv/inclusive.htm>

Signposts: Research points to how Victorian government schools have improved student performance, Paper No. 16 May 2009, (only two mentions of disability were in appendix 1 where the paper explained how the data was obtained and number of PSD students were a control measure)

http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/publ/research/nws/Signposts_report.pdf

<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/govrel/Policy/children/sovcreport08summaryintro.pdf>

The education blueprint one year on-

<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/commrel/policy/Blueprint2008/blueprint-one-year-on.pdf>

Data on number of children with a disability:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/researchinnovation/vcams/children/7-9disability.htm>

The Justice Statement (formed the basis of the Charter of Human Rights)

<http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/justlib/doj+internet/home/about+us/our+vision/justice+-+justice+statement+1+and+pdf>

Commonwealth Government

Disability Standards for Education:

http://www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/Humanrightsandanti-discrimination_DisabilityStandardsforEducation

Queensland Government

<http://education.qld.gov.au/student-services/learning/disability/parentguide/index.html>

<http://education.qld.gov.au/student-services/inclusive/index.html>

<http://education.qld.gov.au/student-services/learning/docs/includedstatement2005.pdf>

<http://education.qld.gov.au/student-services/learning/docs/qualityoutcomes.pdf>

NSW

There was a very low level of NSW Government material on inclusive education.

WA

<http://www.det.wa.edu.au/inclusiveeducation/detcms/portal/>

Current initiatives- <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/inclusiveeducation/detcms/navigation/current-initiatives/#toc1>

Tasmania

<http://www.education.tas.gov.au/curriculum/needs/inclusive>

International

<http://www.unesco.org/en/inclusive-education/>

European Union:

Education web portal- http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php

Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education produced an "Inclusive Education Week website for 2002". A series of articles were written for that website-
<http://inclusion.uwe.ac.uk/inclusionweek/articles/index.htm>

UK

A very interesting and comprehensive site and an organisation dedicated to inclusive education
<http://www.csie.org.uk/inclusion/what.shtml>

Denmark

Entry Portal inclusive education- <http://tilgaengelighed.emu.dk/tilgaengelighed/English/index.html>

Specific pages of interest:

[http://tilgaengelighed.emu.dk/tilgaengelighed/English/fysisktg/expl.html#Legislation and standard s](http://tilgaengelighed.emu.dk/tilgaengelighed/English/fysisktg/expl.html#Legislation_and_standard_s)

<http://tilgaengelighed.emu.dk/tilgaengelighed/English/grundsk/paed1.html>

Canada

New Brunswick- Education website- <http://www.gnb.ca/0000/index-e.asp>

Vision for Inclusive Education- <http://www.gnb.ca/0000/kidsfirst-e.asp>

Critical Research

Aniftos, M and McLuskie, L On Track towards inclusive education,
<http://www.aare.edu.au/03pap/mcl03296.pdf>

The UK based Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education have a series of publications for purchase that outline best practice in inclusive education- <http://www.csie.org.uk/index.shtml>

Victorian Community Sector

The Association for Children with a Disability has some interesting information- this submission was of particular assistance- http://www.acd.org.au/advocacy/content/acd_blueprint_submission.pdf

Miscellaneous Resources

Good overview with some links- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inclusion_\(education\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inclusion_(education))

Commercial website of Bob Jackson (academic in this area and this site contains a variety of his published papers) - www.include.com.au

A series of resources can be found at <http://www.include.com.au/resources.html>

Basic statistics on the number of children with a disability

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/raising_a_child_with_a_disability.html

ACER- Autism resources- <http://www.acer.edu.au/autism/index.html>

Sign language recognised as official language

<http://www.handspeak.com/byte/h/index.php?byte=signhistory>

Evidence of current outcomes

National Council on Disability Report in the US- <http://www.educationalpolicy.org/pdf/NCD.pdf>

US- prepared for the InterAmerican Development Bank:

http://www.inclusion-international.org/site_uploads/111900800114467256.pdf

Students with disabilities being encouraged not to show for NAPLAN testing-

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/low-turnout-skewing-school-test-results-20100217-odwr.html>