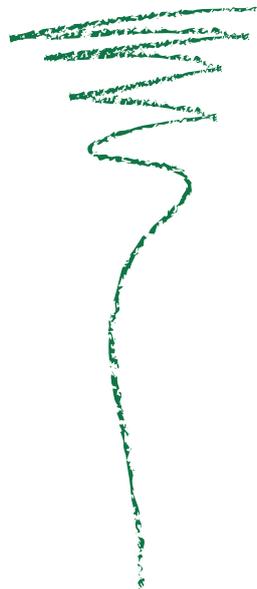
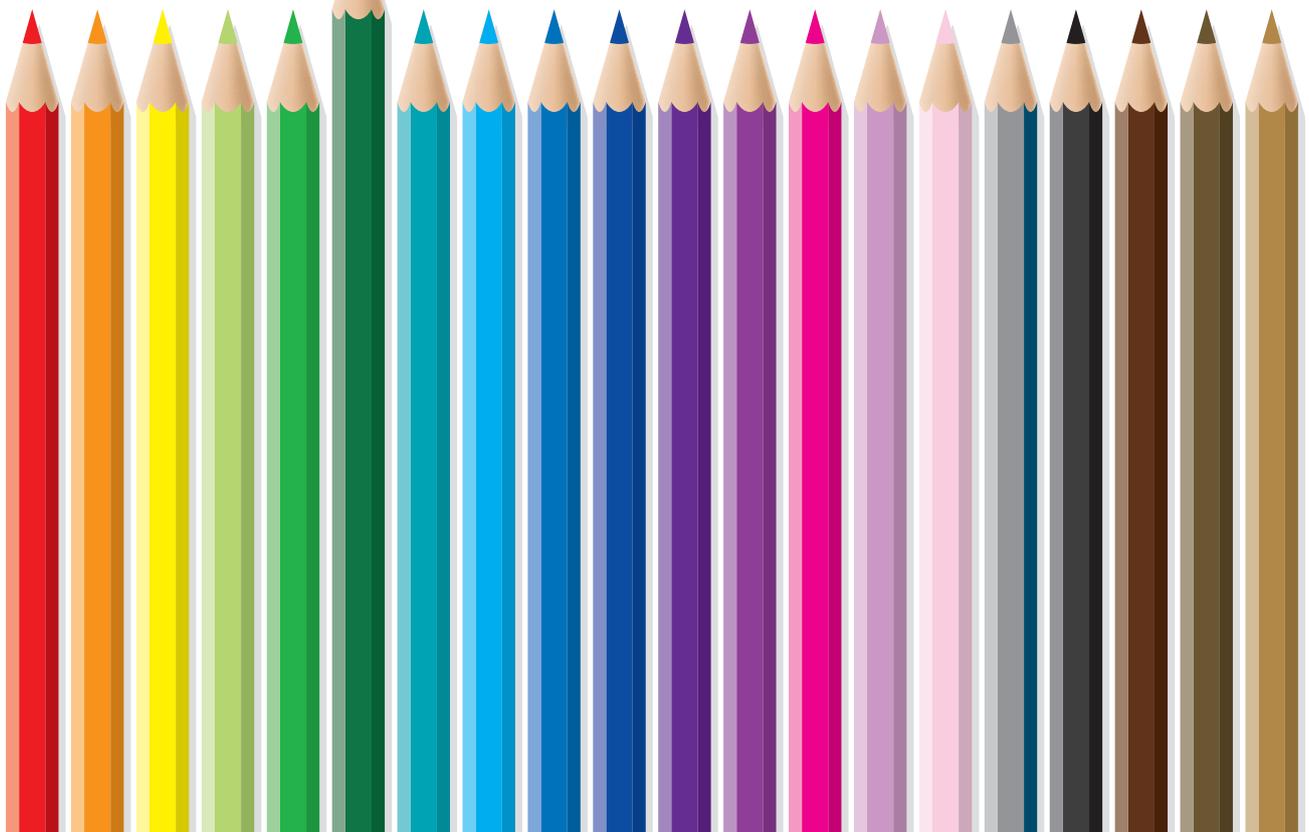


I CHOOSE INCLUSION

A guide for parents in their search for an inclusive education



2011



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Queensland Parents for People with a Disability

Queensland Parents for People with a Disability is a state-wide family and systems advocacy organisation which is funded by FaCHSIA under the National Disability Advocacy Program. QPPD's mission is to vigorously defend justice and rights for people with disabilities by exposing exclusionary practices, speaking out against injustices and promoting people with disabilities as respected, valued and participating members of society.

The pursuit of genuinely inclusive education has been a long-term priority for our organisation. We support Queensland parents in their dream to have their children educated in local schools alongside their non-disabled peers and we assist parents to develop skills in advocacy and knowledge of the legal frameworks underpinning inclusion. We provide information about how they can develop effective partnerships with educators. Our systemic advocacy efforts have been wide-ranging and have included campaigns, representations to state and federal government, participation in ministerial taskforces and roundtables, and production of discussion papers and research.

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A particular thanks to the parents who each day continue to choose, or dream of, inclusion. This booklet is dedicated to them.

Disclaimer

While the information in this booklet was accurate at the time of publication, policy and school procedures change regularly. You are advised to check for updated information about current legislation, policy and practice and how this is likely to apply to your individual circumstances. The information provided in this booklet has been prepared from parents' experiences and publicly available information; it should not be considered legal or professional advice.

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Foreword

QPPD has a long history of advocacy for inclusive education¹. QPPD believes that inclusive schooling provides the best pathway for a life where a person with disability will be valued and seen as belonging to their community. We also believe that through more children being educated in regular neighbourhood schools, we are building communities where the gifts and contributions of people with disability will find recognition. We also know through well-founded research that inclusive education provides the best educational outcomes for our children. These beliefs find resonance in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability, which recognises and upholds the rights of students with disability to access regular education – their right to belong to the centre and not the margins.

Despite all these advantages and clear supporting arguments, the pursuit of inclusive education is not straightforward. While certainly some schools welcome and include students with disability well, many parents and students face unnecessary barriers in accessing their neighbourhood school. Further, even where goodwill and welcome exist, it is likely that advocacy will at some time be required to achieve or maintain that inclusive path. Parents seeking inclusion need quality information and support to be effective in this goal and we hope that this booklet will inform, encourage and inspire you. In this booklet, you will read that sometimes achieving inclusion can be a challenge, but we hope you will not be deterred from choosing inclusion because our systems still do not fully support this path. Being mindful of the obstacles is necessary but it is not the whole story and we also want you to know that inclusion, even if hard-won, is worth our efforts.

We want this booklet to act as a reminder of why the struggle for inclusion is a worthwhile one. We want to provide you with solace and strategies in the hard times. It is written from QPPD parent members to you – other parents – because we have lived the choices and know how daunting it can be to withstand professional advice and systemic obstacles. It is written with every encouragement to you to stand firm in your dreams because we have seen the wondrous results of inclusion and the fruits of this in the lives of our sons and daughters; and we desperately want each successive generation of children with disability to reap those same rewards – and more.

QPPD fervently believes that inclusive education is possible and best for all students, though we also know that many families are forced or discouraged into making other choices – or face circumstances where the option of inclusion no longer seems tenable for their son or daughter. If you are one of those parents, please know that QPPD does not judge or reject you. While we will continue to advocate against models which consign people with disability to special separate environments, we also respect that parents are conscientious in their role of making decisions in the best interests of their children. We also know that searching for inclusion and a good fulfilling life is mostly not about single decisions but is a “whole of life” journey and it is never too early – or too late – to seek an inclusive path or to work for community belonging. Please see QPPD as a safe place to dream and be supported in those dreams, and join with us in working for a more welcoming community.

This booklet represents our sincere wish for your son or daughter or loved family member to find welcome at their local school – a hope that they will be supported to learn, participate and contribute as a valued member of that school community. It also represents our solidarity with you as parents in the struggle to make this come true. Finally, it represents our belief that all our sons and daughters with disability not only deserve to take their place in inclusive school communities, but just as importantly that each one of them through their own unique gifts will enrich and strengthen those same school communities.

Dream big, stand strong, be wildly proud of your precious child, and know that in choosing inclusion you are making a difference, not just for your family but for those who follow.

Lisa Bridle, President QPPD 2011

¹ This history is captured in *All Children Belong Together* available at www.qppd.org

About this booklet

INCLUSION:

1. *It's the right thing to do*
2. *It's good for the school and essential for society*
3. *It has long term outcomes: living together starts with learning together*
4. *It's good for the child with disability*
5. *It's good for other children and for teachers*
7. *It doesn't cost any more overall*
8. *It's a worldwide trend*
9. *It's policy*
10. *It's the law*

(Jackson, 2003)

QPPD has produced this booklet to help parents access an inclusive education for their son or daughter, and then make it work for their child.

Each section contains factual information as well as advice and perspectives from other parents of children with disability about their experiences in education. The booklet draws on research done by QPPD for the Diving for Pearls research project, as well as pulling together the thinking of experts on inclusive education. Often it will be the parent voices that will be most helpful for other parents as they strive to achieve the best for their child.

This booklet has some strong messages for parents as they support their child through their education.

1. Inclusion is good for everyone

Section 1 of this booklet outlines the research about the benefits of inclusion. Including children with disability meaningfully and thoughtfully in a school benefits the child with disability, the other students, the school itself and the wider community. Inclusion in education is one of the first steps to achieving a full life as a part of a community. This section defines inclusion, and summarises the legal and policy environment that aims to ensure children can access an inclusive education in a school of their choice.

2. You need to choose the school that is right for your son or daughter

Section 2 helps parents grapple with choices about schools, and with the enrolment process, so that their son or daughter has the best chance of true inclusion in the school the parents choose for them.

3. School procedures should work for your child

Education systems have procedures and resources designed to support inclusion for students with disability. Section 3 of this booklet outlines what is required of schools and how to make sure these procedures and resources benefit your child.

4. Inclusion takes effort from parents

Parents are the natural "advocates" for their children – the people who will stand up for their child's rights and push for the best interests of their child. Section 4 of the booklet contains advice on working with schools to make inclusion a successful experience.

5. Sometimes you will have to fight for your child

To achieve real inclusion for their son or daughter, parents often have to advocate for their child. Section 5 of this booklet outlines advice from parents who have been through the education system about what to do if things aren't going so well.

6. Inclusion is the law

Section 6 presents key laws and policies that support inclusion for students with disability.

7. There is help available

Section 7 suggests websites and resources to help parents along the way.

I.

Introduction to inclusive education

Parents of children with disability have a number of decisions to make when their child is starting out in the school system or changing schools (e.g. moving location, or transitioning into secondary school). One of these decisions is the choice of school. This involves deciding between state schools, Catholic schools, independent schools or, for some parents, home schooling. Then, within the state school system there are special schools, regular schools with special education programs, and regular schools with no specified program.*

A fundamental choice in this decision-making process is between an inclusive (regular) and a segregated (special) education. It is likely that many people including friends, family and professionals will have an opinion on which is best. It is helpful to understand what inclusive education is and why you would choose this path, so that you can make up your own mind and make a well-informed decision.

Families can feel uncertain about what inclusive education means, and whether inclusive education is right for their child. Confusion about inclusion is understandable because widely varying school processes are called 'inclusive education'.

The following pages seek to clarify what inclusion means, and to share parents' vision of inclusion and their experiences. When parents have a clear picture of what they want for their child, and clear expectations for their child's schooling experience, they are better able to articulate their expectations and to push (advocate) for their choices.

Sometimes knowing what something is NOT helps to clarify parents' vision for what they DO want. As well as providing information about what inclusion IS, this booklet provides information about what is not inclusion.

This section also provides a brief summary of the laws and policies that protect your child's right to an inclusive education.

QPPD is clear that inclusive education is a right for all children. This section will tell you why.

* For more information regarding schools available in specific Queensland regions go to <http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/maps/>

“The sense that so many people wished Sam well, were moved by his success, was a strong and visible sign that Sam belonged – a valued contributing school member.”

“One of the good things to have come from his attendance at a local, mainstream centre has been the way he is known in his local community. We can be at the local park, shopping centre or market and another child will say “There’s Tom,” and we will then introduce ourselves to the other parents. To me this is a part of our being part of our local community.”

“Fortuitously this time I came across a school ... with a strikingly different approach. They appeared to genuinely care about getting to know the real Harrison veiled by his disability. He was not a problem to be managed. They valued parental opinion and suggestions and embraced outside input.”

“Seeing how well some teachers do this makes me believe it is possible for everyone.”

“Inclusion must mean more than just being at the school. To be included requires investment in understanding the unique disability of the child and making suitable adjustments. Supports should be in place to aid success.”

Ia. What is inclusion?

In 2002 Education Queensland described inclusive education as “Education for All: A process of responding to the uniqueness of individuals, increasing Presence, Access, Participation, and Achievement in a learning society” (Disability Initiatives Update). This definition captured important elements of inclusive education but left out the most vital feature...that the learning “society” or environment in which this process takes place is the general education system, i.e. regular schools and classrooms.

Inclusion.com says that inclusion is about ALL of us. It goes on to list the following features:

- Inclusion is about living full lives – about learning to live together
- Inclusion treasures diversity and builds community
- Inclusion is about our ‘abilities’ – our gifts and how to share them
- Inclusion is NOT just a ‘disability’ issue.

QPPD believes that students with disability experience inclusive education when:

- they are seen as people first, rather than just as a disability label
- their capacity to develop and learn is recognised
- their education occurs in regular settings and with access to the general curriculum
- they are encouraged to lead typical lives
- they are part of regular educational services alongside their peers
- it is recognised that they make a positive and valuable contribution to their schools
- extra supports and assistance are provided, when necessary, so that they can participate fully in regular educational services.

In recent years, education policies have been strongly influenced by inclusive philosophy. This does not yet mean, however, that inclusive policy is always evident in practice. In spite of inclusive education rhetoric, families continue to experience exclusionary practices at the school level. Parents have found that creating an inclusive culture requires more than just the development of legal and policy documents.

Parents who speak of inclusive experiences talk of:

- feeling that they and their children are welcome at the school
- being listened to by teachers
- establishing a good relationship with teachers and school administration
- experiencing good communication with teachers and other staff
- benefiting from flexibility of teachers and other staff
- knowing teachers understand disability issues
- being involved in the decision-making about their children
- seeing their children being supported in the regular classroom
- watching their children participating in regular classroom and school programs, doing modified work that makes this participation meaningful
- seeing their children continuing to learn (sometimes at a different rate to other children)
- enjoying the achievements of their children.

“I walked out of the place and burst into tears. I didn’t even know what had happened to me at the time. It took me a while to realise that we (me and Tim) had been judged and excluded.”

Ib. What is exclusion?

Unfortunately, 'inclusion' is a term that has come to be interpreted in many different ways.

It is **NOT** inclusion if:

- it happens in a special school environment (even though special schools may be welcoming)
- students with disability are 'dumped' in regular programs without preparation or support
- special education services are provided in separate or isolated places
- children are physically present in classrooms but their individual needs are ignored
- students' safety or well-being is jeopardised
- unreasonable demands are placed on teachers and administrators
- parents' concerns are ignored
- students with disability are isolated in regular schools
- students with disability are placed in schools or classes that are not age-appropriate
- students are required to be "ready" and to "earn" their way into regular classrooms based on cognitive or social skills
- you are expected to be grateful for an enrolment.

It is **EXCLUSION** when:

- an enrolment is refused because a child has a disability
- an enrolment is discouraged on the grounds of funding, hardship, not being able to meet a child's individual needs etc
- parents are directed to another school which is deemed more appropriate because of a special education focus
- students are educated in separate classrooms
- students are not given the support or modification required to access the general curriculum
- students are separated from peers at lunchtimes
- students are not supported to participate in extra-curricular activities such as camps, sports, excursions.

Families who speak of **NOT** feeling included talk of:

- **feeling unwanted in the school and/or by specific teachers**
- **being told their children would be a problem or a burden**
- **being told their child would be better somewhere else; being directed to a different school**
- **being told their children would not cope**
- **being left out of decision-making; not having 'real' input**
- **experiencing poor communication with teachers**
- **dealing with inflexible teachers**
- **their children spending little or no time with students who don't have a disability (either in the classroom or lunchtimes)**
- **their children being in regular classrooms or activities but not participating in the classroom work or activities**
- **their children experiencing time-wasting with a lack of educational outcomes.**

Why parents seek inclusive schooling:

“Because school is a key stage in life’s journey. An inclusive life is more strongly built from an inclusive school life.”

“So that he can grow up and be involved in/with his local community...learn from modelling the other children...be recognised as a participant and contributor in his community.”

“I felt very happy, happy to see my beautiful girl off doing fun things kids her age do.”

“I couldn’t see that he would be prepared for a real world other than being in it. I didn’t believe in the promises of special ed. I didn’t think he needed to be ‘fixed’ to gain entry into the mainstream. To me he already belonged.”

“For me and my family to be able to choose the life we want and to be supported when necessary to do that.”

“Best way for Harrison to learn to be with his peers, social skills, how to fit in with society. To establish a network of typical friends and participate in typical activities.”

“Being known is a safeguard.”

“In comparison to the special school arena the inclusion within normal school has helped my child to blossom and prove that even though she can’t speak ...she is still capable of learning, creating, and to a lesser amount teaching her peers.”

Ic. Why is inclusion a better choice?

from “Inclusion or segregation for children with an intellectual impairment: What does the research say” (Jackson, 2008)

Academic

Academic outcomes from hundreds of individual studies consistently reveal that children educated inclusively made greater academic progress than those who were segregated. Segregated environments still achieved progress but not to the same degree. Additionally the degree of integration was a significant predictor of progress. The greater the proportion of time a student was included, the greater their performance. This occurred even in the children with the most severe impairments. Another finding was that the degree of specialist support provided was not significantly related to student progress.

Social impact

Studies have shown that skills in social behaviour are directly related to the degree of integration. Children at segregated schools have fewer friends and tend to see them only when at school. This is not surprising as students at segregated schools travel in from a much larger area than students attending their local mainstream school. Those at segregated schools also reported feeling lonelier. **Children in general education classrooms have a wider friendship network, composed mainly of non-disabled peers.** In mainstream settings social interaction is more often initiated by the child without disability and the extent and pattern of social interactions can be facilitated by adult intervention.

Impact on other children

Inclusion has no effect on the levels of time allocated to the other children in the class and has a neutral to positive effect on their academic progress. The children without disability developed improved self-esteem, tolerance, acceptance of difference, personal principles, social skills and patience and did not pick up any undesirable behaviour.

INCLUSION

1. **It’s the right thing to do (a moral issue)**
2. **It’s good for the school and essential for society**
3. **It has long term outcomes: living together starts with learning together**
4. **It’s good for the child with disability**
5. **It’s good for other children and for teachers**
7. **It doesn’t cost any more overall**
8. **It’s a worldwide trend**
9. **It’s policy**
10. **It’s the law**

(Jackson, 2003)

I.d. The legal and policy environment

Section 6 of this document outlines laws and policies relating to inclusive education, as summarised below.

- The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 protects individuals from discrimination. Within the Act, the Education Standards 2005 set out the rights of students with disability to participate in education courses programs on the same basis as students without disability.
- The Standards require schools to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate students with disability.
- The Standards state that schools do not have to accommodate a student with disability if doing so would cause “unjustifiable hardship” in terms of cost or safety to others.
- The right to inclusive education is implicit in the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was ratified by Australia in 2008. The Convention enshrines the right of people with disability to access an inclusive, quality, free education on an equal basis with others.
- Education Queensland has developed policies that articulate a commitment to making inclusive education work.
- Catholic dioceses and schools have their own education policies and procedures. The overarching Queensland Catholic Education Commission released a position statement in 2009 desiring Catholic schools to be open and accessible.
- Independent schools vary in their policies and procedures, but like other schools are bound by the Disability Discrimination Act and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

I.e. Commonly raised objections

Parents have reported to QPPD that they have faced the following objections and fears when seeking inclusive education:

- 1. Your child would be better suited to enrolment in a special school, where there is more access to therapy, resources, smaller groups and specially-trained teachers OR to a split placement with part-time enrolment in a special school.**

Answer: Parents have found that access to therapy, resources, and effective teaching can be limited even in a special school. There is no empirical evidence to suggest that learning outcomes are improved in a special setting, in spite of smaller numbers. Research (Jackson, 2008) suggests that students with disability will achieve better educational outcomes in regular rather than special schooling. In regular schools, students have better role models for learning and are more likely to be exposed to academic challenge and higher expectations.

Split placements must be considered with caution; students can be disadvantaged by having to fit in with two different environments.

- 2. Our school doesn't have the funding to support your child and / or we already have a number of children with disability at this school. You would be taking the funding away from them.**

Answer: Parents report that resourcing varies between schools. There is some autonomy in schools regarding their budgets which suggests that schools prioritise their spending differently and can find funding when there is a commitment to inclusion. To suggest one student would take funding away from another can feel like emotional blackmail – it is unfair and misleading. If extra funding is absolutely necessary, education systems can be lobbied for more. However it must be remembered that an inclusive culture is more than just a funding issue. Providing support to a student is part of the reasonable adjustments which education providers must comply with under the Education Standards (2005).

- 3. We can only provide support for reduced hours.**

Answer: It is a mistake to equate "support" with teacher aide hours. Adult support is not the only successful strategy in inclusive classrooms. In fact it is sometimes to the detriment of good inclusive practice. It is important that teachers become skilled in teaching learners with different abilities and that classroom programs are designed so that ALL learners can participate.

"At both enrolment interviews we were told that it probably wasn't the school for my son."

“I have received a lot of flak from other people who seem to think it would be better for my daughter to go to a different school [to her siblings]. I stand my ground and my gut feeling keeps telling me to keep them at the same school. I shouldn’t have to be worried whether I have made the correct decision.”

“First school (state school) made a suggestion my son would be better off at a special school.”

4. There are other schools that are better equipped to teach your child.

Answer: It is Education Queensland policy that parents are entitled to enrol their child at the school of their choice. It is the school’s responsibility to provide the accommodation and support consistent with the legislation.

5. You would be disadvantaging your child if you sent them to this school.

Answer: There is NO empirical evidence to suggest that regular schools disadvantage any student. In fact there is a large body of research to support the inclusion of students with disability. There is no reason for you to feel that you are making a decision against your child’s best interests.

6. Your child wouldn’t be able to cope here.

Answer: Schools are legally required, under the Education Standards of the Disability Discrimination Act, to make necessary, reasonable adjustments. This objection reflects low expectations rather than a genuine prediction based on knowledge of your child.

7. Your child won’t have friends

Answer: Children are more likely to have friends when they spend time together in shared activities over long periods of time. It is part of a teacher’s role to support the development of relationships.

8. You are being unrealistic.

Answer: Parents have found that inclusive education CAN happen and has been possible for children with significant impairment when there is the will to include. Seeking inclusive education is in line with policy and the law.

2.

At the beginning: choosing and enrolling in a school

Choosing a school can feel daunting. This chapter runs through the process of choosing a school and enrolling at it, to help you pursue inclusive education for your son or daughter.

2a. Choosing a school

Although parents will have different expectations when choosing a school, QPPD's recent survey found that common priorities were:

- local schools (i.e. proximity to home)
- good educational support for their child's needs
- a welcoming, caring attitude.

The survey also found that many parents felt they had no choice or were influenced in their choice by educational staff.

While educators may have valuable information to consider, parents are the primary decision-makers and it is families who will have to live with the results of that decision (e.g. long drives; distance from neighbourhood friends, missing out on ordinary school rituals and experiences). Remember, parents have the right to enrol their child at the school of their choice. Begin your decision-making in the same way that you would for a child without disability e.g. the neighbourhood school, a religious / private school, the family school.

Visit the schools that meet your initial criteria. Talking to the principal and teachers gives you a sense of what the school has to offer and of the school's attitudes and values concerning students with disability.

Your first meeting with the school is an important one.

- **Be confident and clear that you want a regular class and access to the general curriculum rather than a separate class and a special curriculum**
- **Ask about *what* support will be provided so that this can be successful rather than *if* support will be provided**
- **Speak about the contribution your child will make to the school rather than being apologetic about possible issues**
- **Ask about the general culture of the school community rather than their experience with special education**
- **Embrace your authority and express your vision (see section 4a for more information).**

“I had been to every high school within 10 minutes driving distance from home, trying to find a suitable place. The last one I visited (and the one we have chosen) was so incredibly different to the others....I was so relieved to find such a welcoming place. The other schools had said all of the ‘right’ things about inclusion, but were not really welcoming. It was all about the attitude; there was no talk of how hard it might be or funds or resources – it was just a sense of ‘he’s welcome here and he belongs here.’”

“Wanted Indigo to learn; have friends; have same opportunities as her sister and peers. I thought/think congregate educational settings for students with disability are like a 12 year babysitting option, that lead to exclusion from the rest of life opportunity.”

“Don’t be put off; while you may initially feel unwelcome, don’t be discouraged. Go back; don’t trade your hopes for your child; don’t settle for welcome at the expense of inclusion in a neighbourhood school.”

Consider talking to existing parents in the school as this gives a more rounded view. Even if you haven’t made up your mind, put your child on the waiting list for schools that you think might be a possibility.

Some traps in this decision making process have been:

- **choosing a school based on a specific teacher or principal.**
When that individual leaves, the situation changes.
- **choosing a school because other children with disability go there.**
Good inclusive practice is threatened by disproportionate numbers of students with disability in the school community.
- **choosing a school because it has been promoted as having specialist facilities and staff.**
Parents have found that the facilities and staff (particularly therapists) are not always as promised. QPPD has found that schools with special education programs are more likely to exclude students with disability from the general classroom and curriculum.
- **taking the option that is recommended.**
Holding out for your preference can have positive outcomes.

2b. Enrolment

Enrolling with Education Queensland

Students with disability are entitled to enrolment on the same basis as students without disability.

“Education Queensland provides equitable educational opportunities to ensure that all students have access to, participate in and gain positive outcomes from schooling... Eligible children and young people are entitled to enrol at their closest appropriate school.”(Education Queensland’s Enrolment Policy SMS-PR-027)

Schools are required to provide parents with an enrolment package and to offer them the opportunity to meet with the Principal Education Officer, Student Services to discuss the school-based programs available in the district.

Enrolment can be refused but this should not be on the basis of disability.

“A student’s application for enrolment may be refused by the principal of the school on a number of grounds e.g. not meeting requirements for age, semester allocation, and enrolment management plan requirements. The Director-General may also refuse enrolment of a student in a particular school, a number of schools, or all schools if the student poses an unacceptable risk to the safety or wellbeing of the school community.”(SMS-PR-027)

Even when a prospective student does appear to meet all entry requirements for enrolment in a special school, according to SMS-PR-027, parents must be made aware of the Department’s Inclusive Education Policy, so that if they decide to enrol their child into a special school this is a fully-informed decision. Eligibility for enrolment in a special school does not mean this is the only choice or will be the best option for your son or daughter. As already outlined, evidence suggests that an inclusive option is preferable even for students with significant impairment.

“I have discovered that a quick way to identify a good/not so good school environment for my son is to state the diagnosis. A good school will have staff who smile and reassure me. At a not so good school I get the feeling that the staff have immediately gone into politically correct (hidden text: get them out of here) mode.”

“I have come to the conclusion that you cannot tell what a school will be like until you go there.”

“We chose this school being our local ‘community’ school. Most local kids go there. It is important that he grows up being part of the community and known amongst his peers as well as those of his brother and sister.”

“Went to a lot more schools before accepted.”

“I was a bit bamboozled by all the paper work and aide issues that were signalled as part of the enrolment process.”

For a full copy of EQ’s Enrolment Policy (SMS-PR-027) and related documents go to: <http://education.qld.gov.au/strategic/eppr/students/smspr027/>

For information regarding enrolment in a Catholic School go to:

<http://www.qcec.qld.catholic.edu.au> (Under the ‘QCEC & Committees’ drop down box, click on ‘Policies and Positions’)

For enrolment in a Brisbane Catholic Education school see the Parent Guide at: www.bne.catholic.edu.au (under Students & Parents)

When parents have talked about enrolment, some have described positive, welcoming experiences. It is important, however, to be aware of the following:

- **Parents have been directed by education staff to a special school (in spite of the policy directive to draw attention to the Inclusive Education Policy) NB Parents do not have to accept an enrolment in a special school if that is against their wishes.**
- **Parents have been directed by education staff to an alternative school NB Parents can enrol their child on the same basis as children without disability.**
The influence of educational professionals is not always direct. It can take the form of an unwelcoming, negative attitude at the time of enrolment enquiries or ‘gentle persuasion’ that can feel like emotional blackmail (e.g. “you would be disadvantaging your child/other children”).
- **Parents have been offered dual enrolments (i.e. where students’ time is split between a regular and a special school) QPPD would not generally support dual enrolments, particularly against parents’ wishes, as they have the potential to disadvantage students in a number of ways (e.g. having to adjust to different rules, expectations, social groups). Students may feel like they don’t belong in either place.**
- **Parents have been offered part-time enrolments QPPD would not generally support part-time enrolments, particularly against parents’ wishes. Reduced time in the school disadvantages students with disability who can be the very ones who need more support, consistency and/or extra time to learn. It can also be stressful for parents due to organisational / work issues.**
- **Some parents have found the enrolment process to be more lengthy and complicated.**

“The best advice I can give is to stay connected to people who value your goals and who will support you in pursuing your dreams. For me, knowing other parents who were choosing inclusion and were a little further down the track has been gold.”

“It has been so critical to be clear about my vision. I would say to write it down. Hold onto the gifts and beauty of your child as this will help you resist negative ideas imposed by others. This is particularly true at times when you are facing assessments or transitions when the talk may be dominated by negative views or a lack of vision by others.”

2c. Facing the crowd

Unfortunately you are likely to meet numbers of people who will not understand or support your choice of a regular education setting. Many people expect that students with disability should attend a special education setting and think these places better cater for and “protect” students with impairment. It can be difficult dealing with intrusive comments which judge your choice and undermine your own ideas of what is best for your son or daughter. It can be particularly challenging if those questions or outright judgment come from people within your own family or close friends – or from people in positions of authority who have a great deal of say in your child’s education. It is, therefore, important that you have strategies in place to deal with those “naysayers”. It is important to remember your own authority and your long-term legitimacy (see section 4a). You have access to information about the advantages of inclusive education and effectiveness of inclusive practices that many people will not have. Many opposing your choice are relying on outdated stereotypes and limited ideas of what is possible for people with disability. This is particularly true if a person is seen as having higher support needs because some people will not be able to imagine how your child can be included. Their low expectations do not make them right.

It can be helpful to rehearse responses so you are more prepared. Work out the extent to which you want to engage with particular people. You may, for example, want to invest more time in trying to educate and bring on-board your family than you would an acquaintance. At the same time, casual encounters can be an opportunity for you to practise telling people about your hopes and dreams. Some parents have chosen a spiel like:

“I want my child to grow up in our local community so they are known and valued. I know that children with disability learn best in regular classrooms so I chose what would be best for their education and development. I wanted all my children to be able to attend school together.”

Being able to bring hurtful discussion to a close is also important. Some parents have been told that their child’s inclusion will impact on other students. Here you might want to say something like “I’m sorry you think that. Inclusion doesn’t have to take away from other students and I think my child has every right to benefit from the resources of the school. It is my role to look out for their best interests”. You don’t have to have an answer for everything and you should not have to feel apologetic for your choices. It is OK to simply acknowledge the difference of opinion and hold onto your child’s right to belong and benefit from regular education. You will not be able to convince everyone. Don’t hide away to avoid confrontation but try to identify some allies to smooth the way in certain situations.

Sometimes opposition will come from someone in a professional role. Remember that person may have a vested interest (for example through commitment to special education) or just suffer a lack of vision themselves. Do not let professional authority distract you – the history of disability is full of examples of where professionals have got badly wrong what is “best” for people with disability.

It is normal to feel some doubt or emotional fallout from these encounters, so it is important to look after yourself and emotionally re-group. Keeping a sense of humour is critical. Remind yourself that other people’s perceptions can change and keep your eye firmly on your own goals. Being well informed about how inclusive education works best, legislation, and examples of successful inclusion will help you be more confident in your arguments.

3.

What to expect: school procedures

Parents can feel uncertain about the processes, support options, language used and staffing arrangements in schools. The following pages outline what you can expect to encounter and what other parents have said about their experiences with school procedures.

Links to relevant documents will be provided whenever possible.

It is helpful to know something about school procedures BEFORE entering the system because with more information, you can:

- feel more confident working with teachers
- make better decisions
- be more effective in meetings
- know who to approach for specific issues
- understand what is being talked about in meetings
- be more effective at advocating for your child.

Both Education Queensland and Catholic Education (Brisbane Archdiocese) have produced guides for parents. These guides contain useful information regarding school procedures, education acronyms, staffing roles etc. QPPD recommends that you obtain a copy.

It is QPPD's view, however, that both documents focus too heavily on special, separate and/or alternative options for students with disability.

QPPD urges parents to focus primarily on the opportunities, choices and supports that are available for all students in the general education system.

<http://education.qld.gov.au/> **Under Schools and Services there is a link to Student Services.** On that page, under Learning and Disability Support, there is a link to the Guide for Parents.

www.bne.catholic.edu.au **Under the Students & Parents drop down box there is a link to Inclusive Education.** At the bottom of that page is a link to the Guide for Parents.

Some parents have spoken of good communication and partnerships with teachers. You have the right to be involved in discussions, to have input into the decisions that are made and the profile that is developed if you wish to participate. QPPD recommends that you take up this right to be involved.

“Yes, when we finally had a school that valued my thoughts and opinions, then planning meetings are a truly collaborative process with mutual respect of participating parties, and outcomes, although they may not be ideal, are far more meaningful and satisfying.”

Some parents have told QPPD, however, that they find the process difficult and that their information/suggestions are ignored and even questioned. Keeping records of past work; work at home or even video footage can be useful in supporting your suggestions/observations.

“The special education system is heavily focused on identifying impairment or a child’s deficits. This can be emotionally devastating and can discourage parents from pursuing inclusion. Even if it is not directly stated, the process can give a message that your child is too impaired to cope with inclusion.”

3a. Education Adjustment Program (EAP)

“The Education Adjustment Program (EAP) is a process for identifying and responding to the educational needs of students with disabilities. Adjustments are made for students with disabilities to enable them to access the curriculum, achieve curriculum outcomes and participate in school life.” (<http://education.qld.gov.au/students/disabilities/adjustment/>)

The EAP supports educators to:

- identify students (from Prep-Year 12) who meet criteria for the EAP disability categories
- report the education adjustments they are providing to meet the teaching and learning needs of these students.

Steps in the EAP include:

1. Verification: a process of confirming that a student’s identified impairment and the associated activity limitations and participation restrictions, which require significant education adjustments, meet criteria for one or more of the six EAP disability categories.
2. An EAP profile: developed to describe the adjustments that are made to assist the participation of students with disability. This profile is submitted for approval.
3. Validation: undertaken to ensure that the information gathered through the EAP process is valid and reliable.

N.B. The EAP process has implications for the resourcing of the school to accommodate students with verified disability. Adjustments do not, however, always require funding.

For comprehensive information about the Education Adjustment Program go to the Education Queensland website (www.education.qld.gov.au). Under Quicklinks (at the bottom of the page) click on Student Services and then go to Learning and Disability Support.

Catholic schools in the Brisbane archdiocese also use an EAP process which is outlined in the Brisbane Archdiocese document, “A Guide for Parents: Supporting Children with a Disability”. For a copy go to www.bne.catholic.edu.au. Under the Students & Parents drop down box there is a link to Inclusive Education. At the bottom of that page is a link to the guide.

It is important that you are involved in the Education Adjustment Process (EAP). You have vital information and insights to share because you:

- **have known your child the longest**
- **know what has been successful in the past with other teachers**
- **know what has worked successfully at home**
- **are more likely to see your child holistically – not as a sum of their deficits or limits**
- **are likely to see how your child’s strengths can be used in planning.**

Some parents who have been genuinely included have found the IEP process to be a mutually rewarding and positive experience.

“Being prepared for meetings and thinking about what information I can provide about Sophie has been really important. I have mostly found teachers very open to my input but I do try to be well prepared, to keep an eye on what I want from the process for Sophie and also modelling a positive approach.

It took a while for me to break the habit of focusing on Sophie’s limits but while I don’t deny the challenges, I do see my role as keeping the broader picture in view – that Sophie is a student with the same need to participate, learn, have friends and be challenged.”

3b. Individual Education Plan (IEP)

From EQ Website <http://education.qld.gov.au/studentservices/learning/disability/iep/>

Teachers are required to plan for the specific learning needs of all students, including those with disability, and to document the adjustments when significant support needs have been identified.

“An IEP is a tool that may be used to document planning for specific individual educational needs arising from a disability. Individual schools and the student’s educational support team use professional judgments to determine whether the IEP process would provide an effective planning approach for students with disabilities.” (Education Queensland)

Check with your preferred school, as Individual Education Plans are usually not mandatory. Education Queensland states that the IEP process is a valuable one for collaborative planning. The IEP process focuses on a team approach, bringing together parents, educators, specialist staff and students (where appropriate).

The stages of the process include:

- information gathering
- team meeting
- design (writing goals, identifying strategies and resources)
- implementing the plan
- evaluation of the plan.

More detailed information of this process can be found at the Education Queensland website listed above.

In Education Queensland schools, the IEP can be recorded in the system as an attached report, or the information is documented as support provisions and printed as an Individual Student Plan (ISP). In independent schools (ISQ) IEPs continue to be mandatory. As a parent you have the choice for the IEP to be reviewed as you or your child deem necessary so that it continues to be relevant to the changing needs of your child.

Your role in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process involves providing information about your child that will be useful for planning. It is also important to contribute your views on suitable goals for your child and strategies and resources that will assist your child to meet those goals.

Some parents who have been genuinely included have found the IEP process to be a mutually rewarding and positive experience.

Some parents, unfortunately, have found this process to be tokenistic. For example, they have been asked to sign IEP documents that they have had little or no input into, or have been invited to meetings but their suggestions have been ignored.

Resourcing, and the way it is used, is an issue that is often raised with parents.

“So many times they tried to make me feel guilty and greedy when I advocated for resources for my daughter. ‘You will be taking away resources from other students,’ they would say. Over the years I learnt to respond and say that I don’t accept this and it is a systemic problem. They need to take it up with their district office and stop trying to burden me with their inappropriate argument. Eventually they stopped. I would also remind them that when I contact them to advocate for my child I do not appreciate them sharing the issues they face in their job with me, they need to find peer support for their dilemmas.”

“This school had a special education program which at the time seemed well set up and the staff seemed knowledgeable. Unfortunately this was not the case when our son started to attend.”

“There also needs to be a better range of service provisions. For example, the only special education units in our area put kids with ASD and Intellectual Impairment in the same groups, but these two groups of students have very different needs.”

“Funding is retrospective causing anxiety and difficulty for schools to respond in a meaningful way.”

3c. Support for inclusion – Education Queensland resourcing

While some state schools have separate Special Education Programs, students have the right to enrol in any state school, whether they have specific specialist facilities or not. To support inclusive education in schools that do not have a special education program, the following are provided (from the Education Queensland website; under the Programs and Services page):

- advisory visiting teachers (AVT)
- speech-language pathologists
- occupational therapists and physiotherapists
- registered nurses
- school transition officers
- guidance officers
- orientation and mobility teachers.

(<http://education.qld.gov.au/student-services/learning/disability/programs.html>)

Education Queensland does provide Special Education Programs (SEP) in some schools. This refers to a “clustering of students with disabilities and specialist teachers”. QPPD’s position is that grouping students on the basis of a disability category, particularly against their parents’ wishes, does NOT represent inclusive practice. While a school with a SEP might seem like the ‘best of both worlds’, clustering or grouping works against inclusion and can undermine teachers’ commitment to include in the regular classroom. The Education Queensland webpage clearly states that “not all state schools have a special education program; however students with disabilities are entitled to enrol in any school using the same eligibility criteria as all other students.”

The Education Queensland website recommends that parents contact their school / district office for information regarding local support.

State wide assistance includes:

- specialist services coordinated through Education Queensland’s Disability Services Support Unit (DSSU) e.g. specialist information, professional development, and a loans service for trial of equipment
- transport assistance.

For more information regarding support go to:

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

No matter which education system parents approach, many parents have found that funding was raised as a barrier to inclusive schooling.

“I care for my sons 24/7 and do not withhold care until I get extra funding. This says to me that if some teachers can and will teach my sons successfully with what they are allocated then so can others. There is an attitude that allows teachers to stand tall erroneously when they perpetuate the fallacy that they need more funding to provide my sons with an education.”

3d. Support for inclusion – Catholic Education resourcing

The Brisbane Catholic Education booklet, “A Guide for Parents: Supporting Children with a Disability”, describes the resourcing and support that the Archdiocese of Brisbane provides for inclusive education. (For other areas of Queensland, QPPD advises that parents contact their specific school regarding resourcing and support.)

The parent guide refers to the specific disability categories that are used for the purpose of allocating additional funding resources. These categories are drawn from the broader Disability Discrimination Act definition of disability (please see page 12 of the guide) and include: Autism Spectrum Disorder; Hearing Impairment, Intellectual Impairment, Physical Impairment, Social Emotional Disorder; Speech Language Impairment, and Vision Impairment. It also states that sometimes “funding may be allocated for a very particular resource” (p 11 of the guide).

Other supports provided include:

- Integration and Inclusion Programs Resourcing Allocations (for students with verified Intellectual Impairment and students verified with Autism Spectrum Disorder)
- Occupational Therapy Program (if students with a verified disability are not eligible for non-school programs e.g. Cerebral Palsy League)
- support personnel (e.g. Support Teacher: Inclusive Education; Consultant: Inclusive Education; Speech Pathologist; Visiting Teacher: Hearing Impairment; Guidance Counsellor)
- Transport Assistance
- Some schools have access to Disability Services Support Unit (DSSU) equipment loans.

For more information regarding support go to: the Brisbane Archdiocese document, “A Guide for Parents: Supporting Children with a Disability”.
www.bne.catholic.edu.au Under the Students & Parents drop down box there is a link to Inclusive Education. At the bottom of that page is a link to the guide.

Parents have found that within the school community there are other people who may have a part to play in their child's schooling. For example:

- tuckshop convener
- grounds keeper
- administration staff (at reception)
- other parents
- teacher librarians
- chaplain.

It is worthwhile to invest in good relationships in the wider school community as each of these school members may have a positive role in creating inclusive experiences.

3e. School procedures – general information

You are likely to work or come in contact with a range of staff members over the time that your child is at school. These will include:

- leadership staff (e.g. principal)
- classroom teachers
- special education teachers
- therapists
- guidance officers
- teacher aides.

For a comprehensive list of staff members and their roles in the inclusive education process go to the Guides for Parents (see link below).

It is also likely that terms and acronyms will be used by education staff that may be unfamiliar to you e.g.

- SEP (special education program)
- IEP (individual education program)
- EAP (education adjustment program)
- DSSU (Disability Services Support Unit).

For a comprehensive list of terms, acronyms and their meanings go to the Guides for Parents (see below).

Although there will be certain processes required of all schools in a specific system (Education Queensland, Catholic Education, Independent Schools Queensland), individual schools will vary in their onsite procedures and the manner in which these are carried out. It would be helpful for you to find out about these procedures as soon as possible so as to be more confident in your communication with the school. For example:

- How do you get in touch with teachers?
- Is there a specific contact person for your child?
- How does the school share information?

<http://education.qld.gov.au> Under Schools and Services there is a link to Student Services. On that page, under Learning and Disability Support, there is a link to the **Guide for Parents**.

www.bne.catholic.edu.au Under the Students & Parents drop down box there is a link to Inclusive Education. At the bottom of that page is a link to the **Guide for Parents**.

4.

How to get what you want

(adapted from the writing of Michael Kendrick and Marg Ward)

It is usual for parents to hand over a major part of the responsibility for the education of their children to teachers. The line between what is school business and what is family business is generally fairly clear. When seeking an inclusive education for children with disability, however, the roles become blurred.

Parents can be unsure of the part they have to or would like to play; and as a consequence find themselves acting or being expected to act in the role of teacher, therapist, advocate, problem solver, teacher aide, etc. rather than just as a parent.

In an inclusive school, there should be no expectation that parents will take on extra roles (unless of course, they would like to and this is a usual part of the school culture). QPPD does believe however that, as a safeguard against the bureaucratic thinking of educators, it is vital that you:

- dream for what may seem impossible
- think lovingly, passionately and intuitively about your children
- espouse your sons' and daughters' beauty, gifts and talents.

You may also find that, if your sons and daughters cannot speak out for themselves, you will need to:

- ensure that teachers meet your child's needs
- name what good schooling is for your children
- have a clear idea of your expectations
- get answers if you have doubts or unanswered questions.

You will also need to think about the confronting of authority. Advocacy (standing up for your child's rights and needs) is not optional when you have a child with disability. Due to long legacies of discriminatory treatment, at some point you will be called upon to challenge unfair treatment or less than ideal circumstances. It is possible that there will be circumstances when the authority of education professionals will seem to overshadow your authority as a parent. It can sometimes help to remember that you have a natural authority of your own which can go a long way to reducing this imbalance of power.

The following pages explore the roles of parents and some of the typical situations that you might experience in the inclusive education journey.

“It was important that people wanted to know, understand, support Harrison; not just manage a ‘problem’ and important to go with my gut instinct...I don’t have too much hope or belief in the ‘experts’”.

“The specialist teacher took the position of expert and told me what observations were noted in relation to my son and that a determination had been made...I listened to the expert and when the expert had finished I asked how well they knew my son. The specialist teacher said that she had observed Edward a few times. I went on to explain that I had known Edward his whole life and I would not be accepting the advice given ...I refused to sign the documents and asked for new [ones] to be drawn up.”

“Schools need to listen to parents, as they know their child best, and not think they are a whinger when they push ideas that may assist their child and the school.”

“Where will that leave my son? I feel once a school gets the funding they just dictate what a parent has to accept. I know my son better than they think they do.”

“At the school Levi now goes to I was told before he started that parents have the final say; staff may advise and express their opinions but when parents are involved the parents ultimately have the final decision (within reason). Previous experience had of course taught me to be sceptical but at this current school my natural authority is very much respected.”

4a. The natural authority of families

(adapted from an article by Michael Kendrick, CRUcial Times, Issue 6, July, 1996)

It is helpful for parents to appreciate their own natural authority and be willing to act on it. What follows are some common sources of authority that parents can call on when they are acting in their children's interests.

1. Parents have the authority to be highly engaged because they also tend to have greater responsibility for the wellbeing of their family members.
2. Parents know their family member the most fully and over time. They have long-term observation, insight and personal relationship.
3. Parents typically care about or love their children more than other people do. It is their expected, legitimate role to care for and stand up for their own children.
4. Parents have a stake in outcomes in that they have to live with the long-term consequences of school decisions (as do their children).
5. Parents are expected to advocate for their own family members and are granted considerable presence in decision-making processes.
6. The family is an authoritative witness to the performance of professionals and systems and may have special insight into events.
7. Parents bring a wide range of talents and experiences which can give them additional authority on many matters.
8. Parents can be best positioned to see the entirety of their child's life. They can often see the incongruities of different interventions.
9. Family members are often free of the vested interests which call into question the credibility of other parties.

While these common sources of authority do not, in the end, resolve the question of ultimate authority, they do offer you some measure of security that your views should matter as much as, or more than, others who also claim authority in deciding what will happen to your child. Because it would be very difficult for you to advocate if you are doubtful about the legitimacy of taking on the role, these points may help to strengthen your resolve to hang in there.

Embrace your natural authority.

(from an article by Margaret Ward, CRUcial Times Issue 24, July 2002)

If you are unsure of your authority as a family member, I suggest you make two lists on a sheet of paper. In the first column, list all the people who have been constant in the life of your son or daughter. In the other column, list all the people who have come and gone over the same period.

My guess is that your first list will be short, naming your family members. There may be others, if you are lucky, and perhaps a few faithful friends or ‘extended family’. This list is valuable because these are the people who can even begin to claim some authority in your son or daughter’s life. The other list will be enormous and frighteningly irrelevant.

Although parents have described positive meetings, it is likely that at some time you will experience difficult ones.

“Attended many many meetings to keep my daughter in the classroom with her peers participating in regular curriculum....Felt at times angry, frustrated, determined, focused, helpless, thrilled....‘on guard’ most of the time.”

4b. Meetings

Extra meetings with teachers and other professional staff are a necessary and important part of good inclusive schooling. These can be an effective way for parents and teachers to share information and to jointly plan and make decisions.

Parents have reported however, that school meetings can be overwhelming, so:

1. Be sure of the purpose of the meeting. If you don't know what it is, ask. If something else is brought up, ask to discuss this other issue at another time.
2. Don't go alone. Take an ally – a partner; a friend; a formal advocate. Your ally can take notes; speak up on your behalf; discuss the meeting with you afterwards. Make sure you are clear what you each will do in the meeting (e.g. who is doing the talking; who is taking notes).
3. Keep focused on your child and their needs. Listen to, but don't be sidetracked by, the issues of the school.
4. Find out who will be at the meeting. If there are people there who you don't know, find out who they are and why they are there. There may be people who don't know your child.
5. Be prepared. Know the research, legislation and policy. Have written notes. You may need to take examples of work; school records etc.
6. Have a plan – think about your options beforehand, your bottom line and what you would be willing to compromise on.
7. If language or terms are used that you don't understand, ask for clarification. Ask that others avoid professional jargon.
8. Speak positively. Commend the school on their strengths and successes. Build on what is working well.
9. Clarify what will happen next. Who does what? When?
10. Remember; you are an authority on your child... just because a teacher says something doesn't necessarily make it so. Don't be afraid to challenge what is said and to put forward your perspective.
11. Keep a record – who you have met with, the outcomes, what you have agreed to do.

QPPD suggests that you be wary of the following:

- **Being caught off guard:**
 - Going to a meeting that you expect will be one way (e.g. an informal discussion and finding that teachers have a different purpose in mind (e.g. a formal 'placement' meeting)
 - Having other issues raised that are unexpected (e.g. talking about behaviour at meetings that were called to discuss curriculum)
 - Having issues raised when you are at school for other reasons (e.g. tuckshop; pick-up / drop-off times) and are therefore unprepared.
A possible response to these situations could be: “Yes, I think it is important to discuss ____; but it was my understanding that today we were to talk about _____. Can we make another time to discuss your other concerns? I am available on _____.”
- **Being outnumbered; having many professionals present:**
Having others involved in your child's schooling present at meetings can be a good thing and can assist in decision-making. It can however be harmful when people are called in to “stack” the meeting when a difficult decision has to be made or teachers want to put pressure on parents.
- **Being asked for input but having that input ignored or outweighed by professional input:**
Remember that you are the expert on your child and have positive information to share.
- **Asking for meetings and being ignored:**
Make sure that what you are requesting is reasonable and doable for the teacher. Clarify if there are other ways to share information that would suit better (e.g. email). As a last resort, contact the principal to clarify the school's process for arranging times to meet with teachers.

“Many times I was aware of the thoughtful way teachers set this up for success”

“You catch more bees with honey – while it is not always achieved, if you can build a strong and respectful relationship in the school you are more likely to succeed at an inclusive education.”

“Apparently they have learnt a lot by being challenged by us. I have tried to make the most positive experience it could be for my son’s sake... The great thing is that they were responsive once they got to know us. My son has had some fabulous teachers, but he has taught them also.”

“It has been a positive experience from the start. I think if you go in with a happy attitude and ask what can I do for you, to help my son in your classroom ... then you should be off to a good start.”

“Parents need to have a good working relationship with the school and need to spend more time there.”

“I’m really happy with the school. I communicate regularly via email on issues of concern – both academic and emotional/personal issues...I always attend parent teacher meetings and chat with staff and thank them regularly for their support and care. I think as a parent I have been able to make a big difference by being involved in Chloe’s education.”

4c. Working with teachers

A healthy relationship between parents and teachers is an important factor in successful inclusion. While parents vary in their capacity and availability for working with teachers, the recent QPPD survey (2010) found that many parents who had experienced good inclusion spoke positively about their involvement in the classroom and school communities.

Here are some points for parents to consider when working with teachers:

- A vital component of healthy relationships is good communication. Good communication involves both being able to speak up and being able to listen.
- With the teacher, find regular times and ways to communicate. Work out the best way for you both (e.g. written diary, email, face-to-face meetings).
- Help out whenever you can (both with information and with practical assistance e.g. excursions).
- Be involved in the school community (e.g. P&C, tuckshop, school events).
- If you have an issue, speak up without criticism or blame.
- Pick your battles; give the teacher space.
- Congratulate good examples of inclusion.
- Achieve a balance in understanding that your child counts and is also only one of many.
- Understand that teachers will vary in their skills, experience, and capacity.

Some common mistakes that parents make:

(from workshop notes, Wills and Jackson, 2009)

- expecting teachers to know how to include
- expecting that curriculum is easily modified
- mistaking ‘values’ problems for ‘knowledge’ problems
- only getting involved when there is trouble
- expecting teachers to value parents’ expertise
- not knowing who can help (both at the school, and from outside agencies)
- not planning enough time for thinking.

Many parents have described positive and successful working relationships with teachers. It is important to acknowledge this as well as the issues you face.

The education system can be heavily focused on the negatives. *“I think the education system failed my son because the system was aware of his strengths and weaknesses and focused upon his weaknesses instead of his strengths...The benefits to Edward of his [abilities] around his music were not explored.”*

So some parents have gone out of their way to change the focus on their child and build a positive, valued image of them as a learner and school member.

“A sign of whether someone truly knows your child is not how much they can tell you about their diagnosis or their disability label, but what they would choose to buy them as a birthday present... ask your teacher sometime.”

“Whenever I am asked to talk to school staff about my child’s disability I always start by describing her personality and then I give some information on the disability. This is to help them see the child and not the disability because when they see the child they do a much better job... I see my role as being her ambassador.”

“At the beginning of each year, I prepare a little updated summary for the incoming teachers and support staff about Adam. It includes information about our family, his past schooling, his interests and passions, his successes and achievements, what extra-curricular activities he has been involved in and a bit I call “How to get the best from Adam” ... which is about Adam’s needs or challenges but talks about these in a very positive and solution focused way. I try to paint a picture of Adam which shows him as a having lots of ordinary interests, great passions and a whole history of being loved and appreciated for his gifts (not only by his family but by friends and community) – rather than the student with Down syndrome they are likely to see. I work on modelling how I want Adam to be seen and I find it gives teachers common ground when they know Adam outside school. Many of the teachers pick up on those interests (camping, swimming, his cousins) in activities.”

4d. Talking about your child

Inclusive schooling is not just about responding to a child’s diagnosis. Focusing solely on disability categories and ‘special needs’ does not tell us what we need to know. High expectations, optimism and a focus on gifts and strengths are more helpful to children and also help parents and teachers to create inclusive experiences.

How you speak and write about your child will have an impact on how others see them.

When communicating with teachers and other parents about your son or daughter remember to:

- let labels go – see the child first
- speak and write positively about your child – focus on what they can do rather than what they can’t
- don’t apologise for your child
- don’t apologise for expecting inclusion
- use language carefully, e.g. “It takes my son longer to get used to routines than other kids” rather than “My son has intellectual impairment”
- be solution rather than problem-centred
- keep your child’s gifts, talents and interests as the focus of communication.
- avoid talking in terms of burden – focus on what your child has to offer; what they bring to the class and school
- focus on similarity rather than difference – draw people’s attention to commonalities with other children
- be a model for how you would want others to speak and write about your child
- try to make sure that written records contain helpful, positive information. Examples of successful strategies are more helpful to future teachers than lists of disability-related problems
- based on your child’s strengths and talents, negotiate learning outcomes that are achievable so that your child and their teachers can experience success.

The education system can be heavily focused on the negatives. So some parents have gone out of their way to change the focus on their child and build a positive, valued image of them as a learner and school member.

“Peers were so proud of her (and their) achievement and so pleased with themselves and happy. One of those moments when I felt ‘Yes – this is the right place for Kathy’ - we made the correct decision.”

“Become empowered and stay strong by associating with like-minded advocates.”

“Sally went to the grade 8 camp – welcomed, wanted, and included. She had fun fun fun. This was significant because she was left out from Grade 7 camp. Nothing had changed about Sally and it shows what a difference it makes if a school is willing.”

“At the end of the year she [the teacher] was as teary as we were – so grateful for the opportunity to learn. She left the school sometime after but became a strong advocate for inclusion at a different school. It seemed testament to the importance of being prepared (as a family) to hang in while people learn.”

4e. Keeping the vision

(including notes from Wills and Jackson workshop, 2009)

Many parents who seek inclusion say that they have times of doubt. It is important, therefore, to revisit your vision for your child regularly throughout their schooling experience.

It will be particularly important to keep that vision clearly in mind when times are tough.

- If you have a vision for an ordinary life, included in the community, this will start with inclusion at school.
“Inclusive education, in early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary, adult and community education, is the foundation for social inclusion and participation of all citizens.”
(from the Blue Skies Scenario, Blue Skies Group, 2009)
- Your child is a unique, wonderful individual who has much to offer the world. Honour this. Celebrate this. Encourage others to recognise this.
- Look for positive examples of successful inclusion to inspire you.
- Talk to other parents who also have a vision for an inclusive education.
- Talk about your vision with others; particularly teachers and parents at your child's school.
- Think big.
- Think outside of what already exists and focus on what could be.
- Exclusion is our habit now but we can break that pattern and make inclusion a new habit.
- Let go of 'different' and 'special'. Focus on similarity and commonality.
- Remember that it is not your child that is the issue. The problem does not reside within your son or daughter but in the capacity of the system to include your child.

Your vision for your child will be an important tool in your decision-making. When deciding on an action or path to take, consider whether that action or path will lead you closer to your vision of an inclusive life or whether it will take you further away.

Having a plan for de-stressing; revitalising; enjoying the experience (in spite of the efforts required) is essential from the outset....

“When I had difficult days at school, I was so thankful for the friends at the end of the phone who knew exactly what I was going through because they had been there too. Somehow just talking about it all made things so much easier to deal with.”

“A long walk always helped to get things back into perspective.”

“You can never know the outcome of the decisions you make; you just have to do the best you can.”

...because inclusive schooling is likely to mean ongoing doubts and fears

“Even when things are going well; there is always the anguish of knowing that my child is not valued the same as the other students and that another incident will need me to advocate for her rights to be upheld.”

4f. Dealing with anxieties, fears, doubts

Pursuing inclusive education for your child will inevitably bring some stresses. Parents who choose inclusion accept that they are in some respects choosing a more challenging path, but that this is a long-term investment for a regular life in the community for their son or daughter.

It is really important to develop ways to manage stress, such as a hobby, meditation, yoga or walking. It's also important to revisit your vision for your child when things seem hard. Make time for relaxing activities. Make time for fun. Make time to spend with your child in ordinary, enjoyable family activities. School does not have to take over your family's whole life.

Beware of unfounded fears and anxiety, and try not to brood over issues. Confirm the source of your fear one way or the other. If it is unfounded then you can relax. If it is real, you can take action. And once you have decided on a course of action; follow it. Once you have followed your course of action; let go.

It is demoralising to dwell on problems and difficulties, or the things that are going badly. Refocus your energy and attention to the positives; keep photos, stories, letters, and positive memories close at hand to remind you why you have chosen this path.

It helps to get advice from someone you respect and who knows inclusion. Talk your concerns over with a friend or advocate.

Pick your battles. Let some things go.

Remember that this too, will change. Beware of feeling too settled when things are going well; and too despairing when things are going badly. Keep things in perspective. Schooling is not perfect for any child. Some years are better than others as are some teachers. This happens for children without disability too.

Allow yourself to make mistakes sometimes...everybody does! Reframe these as learning opportunities.

Ensure you have a break sometimes to refresh and re-energise and to be away from the pressure of school and negativity.

*“If opportunity doesn’t knock, build a door.”
(Milton Berle)*

“I made the right decision about regular school... and was relieved knowing Cassy had a larger group of students ‘looking out for her’...happy that Cassy had developed friendships.”

4g. Fostering friendships

For many people friendship is the most important and sustaining aspect of their lives, particularly during their school years. For children with disability, the experience of friendship at school can be limited, and students can be lonely and isolated. The fear that children will be rejected, alone and even bullied, and the belief that the cause of this is the child’s disability, have been powerful factors in decisions to keep children with disability segregated. Choosing a special setting, however, often means that the student is denied the opportunity to make friends within their local community, and will be mixing with other students who themselves find friendship difficult.

While it is true that many children with disability find making friends more difficult because of their impairment (e.g. communication difficulties), it is also true that isolation is not a natural consequence of having a disability but a product of low expectations and exclusionary attitudes and practices. Fostering friendship takes work. It should be a joint responsibility between parents and school. Waiting and hoping for it to happen is likely to result in disappointment.

Here are some thoughts on helping friendship to happen:

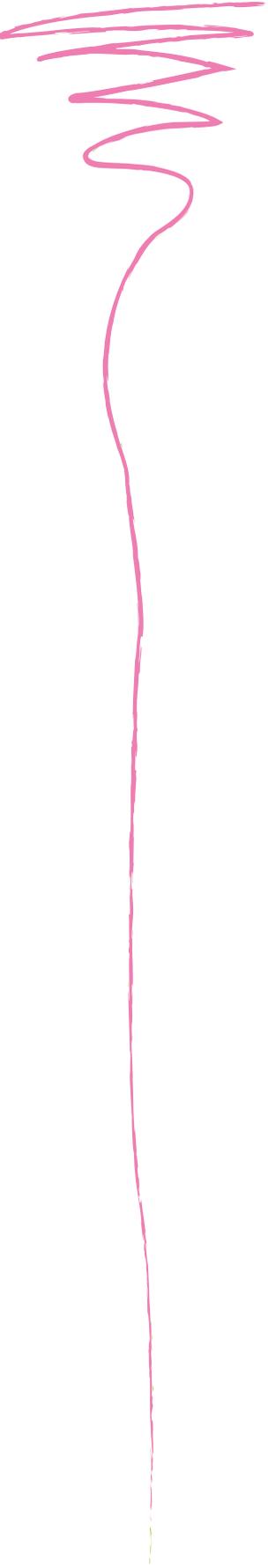
- Expect that your child will have friends; believe that this can and will happen.
- Friendships are mutual. Focus on what your child has to offer in a friendship rather than what they can’t do. What is it that you love about your child? Why do you like spending time with them?
- Friendships need space to develop. Allow other people the pleasure of getting to know and spend time with your child. Let people in.
- Friendships develop between people who share common interests. Arrange for your child to explore their interests with others.
- Friendships develop over time. Support your child to be in long term activities with others.
- Don’t be afraid to ask. Invite other children over. Arrange outings with other children.
- Plan activities in which your child will do well.
- Invest in widening your own circle of friends and acquaintances as well as your son’s or daughter’s.
- Look for opportunities and make the most of them. If someone expresses an interest, follow it up.

The following guide is compiled from QPPD documents about friendship.

- Dream a little. Think what it would be like to have other students taking an interest. What would they be doing? Who would they be?
- What would others find attractive about your son or daughter? What gifts do they have to offer? In what situation are they at their best?
- How can you support your son or daughter to be more skilful in relating to others?
- How does your son/daughter’s life compare with other children the same age and gender? What does your child do all week?
- What are the current interests of other young people?
- What do other students do who share the same interest as your son/daughter?
- Who is in your son/daughter’s life? Who are they in contact with? How often? Are there people already in contact who could be more involved?
- Are there any naturally-occurring relationships that could be nurtured? How?
- Who else could assist?
- Who could make a difference? Which students have influence in your son/daughter’s class? How can you connect them more to your son/daughter?
- Where do other students meet at school?
- Where do other kids hang out on weekends?
- When do things happen?
- How can you show others the best way to include your son/daughter?
- How can you encourage your son/daughter to reach out; make arrangements (e.g. phone lists; facebook)?
- What specific support would your son/daughter need to have stronger relationships? Who could supply this and how?
- How will you fade your support? And monitor friendships?

5.

Troubleshooting



Inclusive education as a way of educating students with disability is in its infancy. We have a dominant history of separate, special education so many people feel more skilled and comfortable with that approach. Many teachers and parents are trying to undo these traditional ways of thinking, but this will take time. We are all still learning how to get inclusion right. It is understandable then, that there will be times (maybe many) that are difficult.

QPPD is clear that these times are NOT reasons to give up on inclusion. These are times when parents need to stay clear and strong in their vision and to be confident in their advocacy, communication and problem-solving skills.

The following pages raise some common thoughts about and advice for difficult times.

“I find it helpful to remind myself that when I go into meetings I am on my child’s side and hers alone. Often no-one else is, so it is important I remain loyal to her best interests. I go in with clarity and saying, whatever the outcome, I have to go home, look her in the eye and tell her what I have accepted. This makes it very easy for me to NOT accept a dud deal for her as I make myself accountable to her.”

“I learnt as a parent not to be aggressive but to be prepared with all information. Made me a tougher person – having to deal with all that.”

“Edward did not finish Year 12; school was a most difficult experience for my son and I often wonder if my input into his schooling was a negative in his life. I will never know and so we move on and try to repair the damage...”

“Deputy HOSES made me feel ashamed, guilty, inadequate. I was upset and annoyed that circumstances had not been appropriately planned for and managed; very annoyed when found Harrison had to be excluded the whole morning and was not being directed or constructively occupied at all.”

5a. When teachers and parents disagree

The relationship between teachers and parents is an important factor in successful inclusion. However, even in a good relationship, it is possible that there will be times when teachers and parents disagree because:

1. parents and teachers know the child in different contexts
2. parents and teachers have different priorities
3. parents and teachers may have different expectations.

Some tips for parents to consider when they disagree with teachers:

- Respect the teacher as a professional. Consider their viewpoint even when you don’t agree.
- Expect that the teacher will respect your viewpoint and your natural authority as parents. Be confident to discuss your views.
- Express your viewpoint clearly, with your reasons; without criticism or blame.
- Remember that while you may be feeling anxious about raising a different viewpoint with teachers, they (especially new teachers) can be equally anxious when meeting with parents.
- Find out your school’s policy on dealing with disagreements.
- It is best to talk directly to teachers, rather than about them behind their back.
- Avoid criticising teachers in front of children.
- While it may be helpful to talk about issues with other parents, it is not constructive to criticise teachers in front of other parents in the school.
- Choose an appropriate time and place to discuss the disagreement with the teacher.
- Refer to conflict resolution network strategies such as <http://www.crnhq.org/pages.php?plD=10>
- If necessary seek third party assistance from someone external to the school if problems are not resolved within the school.

Conflict in itself is not necessarily a bad thing and can lead to a positive change...

However, often parents fear that conflict will disadvantage their child or are themselves damaged by the experience.

Think about strategies to help you cope when things aren’t going so well – see section 4f.

“My child was unable to participate in a planned excursion due to failure to organise accessible bus and venue. It was a genuine mistake by the school which had always been very inclusive. This time, before I could react strongly, my child emailed the school leaders responsible and told them very bluntly how angry he was and that he wanted them to fix their mistake. The school reacted instantly, fixed the problem.”

“Fake it till you make it – no one knows they can do this until they begin. This is not about a perfect education; but the same ‘hit and miss’ education everyone gets.”

“Year 3 was a tricky year – the teacher was anxious and it seemed that for a whole term I only heard of the complaints – behaviour ‘incidents’ and the work Steven was not coping with. It took a long time for me to stop bracing myself for bad news. Eventually though I saw that the teacher was noticing success and was excited not nervous.”

5b. What is reasonable to expect?

In line with the Education Standards (DDA) and the UN Convention (CRPD) – see Section 6 – it reasonable for parents to expect:

- that schools are designed for inclusion
- to enrol their children at the school of their choice and on the same basis as other children, that is, full enrolment (given their knowledge of their own child, parents may decide that full-time enrolment would be too difficult. It is reasonable to expect that this should be the parent’s decision not the school’s.)
- to be welcomed at that school and not redirected elsewhere (it is reasonable to expect that information about other options will be given; although without pressure to take other options)
- to have a positive conversation about what accommodations will be necessary for their children’s active participation in the life of the school
- to participate in meetings and decision making processes.

It is also reasonable for parents to expect that:

- their children will learn in regular classrooms rather than in separate, special education classrooms and will only be withdrawn in keeping with what is usual for children generally (unless flexible withdrawal allows for more successful time in the general classroom, as requested by parents)
- their children will participate in all regular classroom activities (including projects, presentations, homework etc.) and learning (modified when necessary so that it is meaningful)
- their children will participate in regular playground and extracurricular activities (e.g. sporting days, camps)
- their children will be safe
- they will have access, under relevant legislation, to information kept by the school about their children.

It is not reasonable to expect that:

- a child will have a full-time aide (except in a few exceptional circumstances). This would usually not be desirable anyway
- individual teachers will have all the answers
- teachers will be available to talk at any time
- teachers can focus exclusively on one child.

**Inclusive education is a learning journey for teachers too.
Make sure your expectations are reasonable.**

“Keep saying and demonstrating what you know is true: inclusion is right and achievable.”

“An unspoken assumption that my son would not go [on year 6 trip to the snow], or if he did, one of his parents would have to go also. Knowing our son would want to go, and would not want his parents to go; wondering if we would have to take the extreme step of threatening to stop the entire excursion unless our son was included and supported; feeling sickened and scared. But we did – checked the policy; told the school it had to comply’ and it did. Our son had a great time; the school learnt full inclusion wasn’t so hard. So be brave! Fight for what is right.”

“Even after many years of promoting inclusion it can easily be taken away!”

“We are the leaders in a social revolution. Our efforts need courage and we must stand on the side of our sons and daughters as we walk the path less travelled.”

“I contacted QPPD when my daughter started Grade 1. I hadn’t ‘named’ what I wanted as inclusive education but what I wanted for her was to have the same academic and social opportunities as her sister...I didn’t believe she belonged in a Special School and somehow I found QPPD who over the years has supported me to develop my skills so that today my daughter is in a mainstream high school....I am truly glad that I was able to recognise when to troubleshoot.”

5c. Advocacy

It is likely that parents seeking an inclusive education will at some point (most likely at many points) have to take on the role of advocate for their children. Advocacy is not something parents typically seek. It can be emotional and exhausting. However it can also be a fruitful and empowering experience, and a factor in creating inclusive experiences, as QPPD’s recent survey shows.

Michael Kendrick reminds us that one of the most challenging elements of advocacy is the very real prospect that at some point parents may have to confront authority. “This can cause anxiety, dread, insecurity and many other emotions... In many cases, it can lead to the advocate, both consciously and not so consciously, avoiding situations that hold the promise of conflict with people in authority... Such an outcome is highly undesirable though not uncommon. For those being advocated for it may well mean that their needs and interests can be compromised if not otherwise damaged.” (Advocacy and the Challenging of Authority, 2003)

Given the potentially weighty consequences of avoiding speaking up on behalf of your child, it becomes all that more important for you to become skilful as an advocate. The Association for Children with a Disability (“*Helping you and your family*” (2009) www.acd.org.au) has some tips on how to be an effective advocate, which have been adapted as follows:

- Know policies and legislation.
- Prepare. Be clear about what you want. Write it down.
- Find at least one support person who shares your vision.
- Find out who is responsible or accountable for the decision and action you seek.
- Use proper channels.
- Listen to other people’s points of view.
- Think about what others may raise and how you might respond.
- Don’t always expect conflict but be prepared with a positive strategy if you do strike disagreement.
- Be open-minded; others might suggest solutions that you may not have thought of or different ways of doing things that may be just as effective.
- Try to stay calm, but draw on strong emotion if you need to.
- Ask a friend or professional to help you with advocacy if you need some support.

“When the beach is continually polluted with spillage from oil tankers you can take two approaches. You can keep on cleaning up the beach or you can hop in the boat and go out to stop the tankers. Both are necessary but which will be more effective in stopping the spillage?”

Our advocacy for inclusive education can be the same... Do we continually try to fix up the issues at our own school? And for our own child? Or do we hop in that boat and go to the heart of the problem?”

5d. Systems advocacy

(From State-wide Parent Advocacy Network SPAN)

Systemic change is likely to have positive outcomes for individuals. Some tips on how busy parents can affect legislation with minimal time and energy are summarised here:

- Be informed. Families can learn about legislative issues through the media and the publications of advocacy organisations such as QPPD. Many sources summarise legislative issues in an easy-to-read format to help parents be up-to-date without much effort. Then, when an issue of importance to them appears on a legislative agenda, they are ready to respond.
- Contact your state legislator or Member of Parliament. A quick phone call or a one-page letter to an elected official's office is all it takes to express a view. Elected officials pay attention to communications from constituents. QPPD can provide telephone numbers and mailing and e-mail addresses of MPs.
- Share your family's story. Parents don't need to provide detailed information about policy. When parents tell a representative about how proposed legislation would affect them and their child, however, it puts a “face” on the issue.
- Use campaign opportunities to tell your story. In an election year, political candidates are at fairs, speaking at community meetings, and knocking on doors. Parents can share personal stories about what education and other government services have done for their family. In addition, they can explain about their need for additional services and funding.
- Follow up. When things go well in the family because of action taken by a representative, parents can tell him or her. A phone call or short thank-you note will be greatly appreciated.

“In Year 5, I went to meet the teacher as requested to make an appointment. I noted as I went into the classroom there were two tables with chairs outside of the class. I made the time to meet with the teacher and asked about the tables and chairs outside of the class. ‘I send the disruptive children out there; they can still see what is happening.’ I said to my son in front of the teacher, ‘Do you go out there?’ He told me he had been outside since February; six weeks past. I went and spoke to the principal about this and their knowledge of this practice. I noted the next day as I walked around the school the desks were removed. I made a formal written complaint on behalf of my son. The outcome was positive.”

“Don’t try to micromanage the school – It will end badly. Catch the big fish. Don’t complain about everything you are unhappy about.”

“Write an email but DON’T send it straight away. Address it to yourself so it doesn’t go to the school. The next day when you have calmed down, read it again and if you need to, make it less confrontational and seeking a cooperative approach to address the issue. This has worked really well for me. I get my anger out in the email but I don’t send it for another day or two until I have calmed down.”

5e. Making a complaint

(adapted from Barry Dwyer, IF YOU HAVE TO COMPLAIN)

It is QPPD’s experience that at some time in their child’s schooling, parents are likely to be faced with a situation that is less than satisfactory. If you are unhappy with something that is happening with your child, consider the following advice:

- Keep an open mind. Check your perspective.
- Avoid impulsive, angry letters; these can lead to defensiveness or, in extreme cases, to legal action against you.
- Make an appointment, or at least think carefully about the best time to voice your concern.
- Approach the teacher or principal in a polite manner.
- Begin by expressing an overall appreciation of the work being done. Even in a complaints situation, remember the positives.
- The challenge is to come to a shared resolution of the issue.
- Try to avoid “going over people’s heads” initially, but if you are not satisfied, go to the next level of complaint.
- If sorted out, write a note of thanks. Build good will for the future.
- Offer continuing support.

The Education Queensland publication “Making a Complaint; Information for Parents and Carers” recommends that parents:

- Provide complete and factual information in a timely manner.
- Use a calm and reasonable manner.
- Avoid frivolous or vexatious complaints; and misleading or false information.

The following steps are suggested by Education Queensland:

1. Discuss your complaint with the class teacher
2. If the complaint remains unresolved, see the Principal
3. If you still have not reached a resolution, contact your local District Office
4. If there has been no resolution, you can lodge a complaint with the Queensland Ombudsman (GPO Box 3314, Brisbane, Q, 4001; Phone 1800 068 908)

For a full copy of EQ’s “Making a Complaint” go to: http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/about/pdfs/making_a_complaint.pdf

In Catholic Education and independent schools, complaints are dealt with at a school level with relevant personnel involved as deemed appropriate. If you feel your complaint is not dealt with satisfactorily by the school, you can contact the office of Catholic Education or the Diocesan office in your diocese for more information.

5f. Discrimination

There are two bodies you can complain to if you feel your child is experiencing discrimination – the state-based Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland (ADCQ) or the national Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). Disability advocacy organisations may be able to advise you which body is most appropriate for your case.

The Anti Discrimination Commission Queensland

(from the Anti Discrimination Commission Qld website http://www.adcq.qld.gov.au/main/complaints_inclvideo.html)

If you feel your child is being discriminated against at school, you can lodge a complaint with the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland (ADCQ). The ADCQ can investigate complaints and help you and the school to resolve the issue. The ADCQ cannot take sides or decide whether discrimination happened or not.

The Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland's role is to:

- resolve complaints of discrimination and other contraventions of the Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 and
- promote human rights in Queensland

The ADCQ is not a tribunal or court. Complaints are managed by ADCQ conciliators who assist people to resolve issues by mutual agreement, using a conciliation process which is confidential, free and impartial. ADCQ conciliators do not act as advocates. Complaints need to be made in writing, or on tape. If the ADCQ accepts your complaint, a conciliator will manage your case and contact all parties involved. If a complaint cannot be resolved through conciliation, the person who made the complaint may refer it to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (QCAT) for a decision.

There is no automatic right for any party to be legally represented before the Tribunal, and leave must be sought to have a lawyer appear for any party. Legal costs are generally not ordered in cases before the Tribunal, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

For more information, call the ADCQ on 1300 130 670 or go to their website <http://www.adcq.qld.gov.au>

The Human Rights Commission

Complaints can be: submitted online directly to the Australian Human Rights Commissioner; or emailed to newcomplaints@humanrights.gov.au ; or posted to: Director, Complaint Handling Australian Human Rights Commission GPO Box 5218 Sydney NSW 2001

The Human Rights Commission

(from the Human Rights Commission website www.humanrights.gov.au)

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) leads the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. The AHRC also has major responsibilities under the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Complaints about discrimination and breaches of human rights can be made to the AHRC.

The AHRC also performs a wide range of functions to assist individuals and organisations to understand their rights and meet their legal responsibilities.

Should you wish to lodge a complaint with AHRC about a school matter, you should include the following information:

- your name, address and telephone number
- who you are complaining about and their contact details
- what happened to you, when it happened and who was involved
- what law you think has been breached and how
- whether you have made a complaint anywhere else and, if so, what happened.

Complaints can be: submitted online directly to the Australian Human Rights Commissioner; or emailed to newcomplaints@humanrights.gov.au or posted to:

Director, Complaint Handling
Australian Human Rights Commission
GPO Box 5218
Sydney NSW 2001

What happens next?

The AHRC will send you a letter to acknowledge that your complaint has been received. If you do not receive an acknowledgement of your complaint within seven (7) days, you can send an email or call on 1300 656 419 (local call) or 02 9284 9888.

After receiving your complaint an Investigation / Conciliation Officer will be allocated to look into your complaint. The officer will contact you to discuss how the matter will proceed.

If the AHRC is unable to resolve a complaint, the party who made the complaint can request that the complaint be referred to the Federal Magistrates Court to be determined. Leave of the Court is not required to be legally represented before the Federal Magistrates Court. Generally, whoever wins the case before the Federal Magistrates Court will have legal costs awarded in their favour.

6.

Further information – laws and policies

Families can feel uncertain about

- 1) what their entitlement is with regard to inclusive education and
- 2) what they can expect from the system.

The following pages give brief summaries of the laws and policies regarding education for students with disability. Each page also contains links to full documents.

It is helpful for parents to read these documents because if you are better informed:

- you will feel more confident in meetings
- you can be a more effective partner in decision making
- you can be a more effective advocate
- you will understand more about what you can expect from the system
- you can play a role in informing teachers about their legal requirements
- you are better placed to challenge exclusionary practices.

“Knowing that the legislation states that Harrison is entitled to be included and access everything that school has to offer on the same basis as his peers, and that not doing so is discrimination, has certainly helped a more timid soul such as myself stick to my guns irrespective of what is thrown back at me.”

6a. The Disability Discrimination Act – Education Standards

From the Australian Human Rights Commission website <http://www.humanrights.gov.au>

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1992 protects individuals across Australia from direct and indirect discrimination in many parts of public life, such as employment, education and access to premises. The Act makes harassment on the basis of disability against the law. It also protects friends, relatives and others from discrimination because of their connection to someone with disability.

A plain language Guide to the Disability Discrimination Act is available on the HREOC webpage.

From the Disability Discrimination Act Education Standards website
<http://www.ddaedustandards.info/index.php>

Disability Standards on Education (the Education Standards) became Federal law in August 2005. The Education Standards set out the rights of students with disability under the Disability Discrimination Act in the area of education. They also set out the obligations of education providers like schools and universities under the Act to assist students with disability in the area of education.

The main aim of the Education Standards is to give students with disability the right to participate in educational courses and programs on the same basis as students without disability. This means a person with disability should have access to the same opportunities and choices in their education that are available to a person without disability. This includes activities like excursions and camps as well as classroom programs.

There are three key obligations:

- to consult (in order to understand a student's disability and to work out if adjustments are needed to assist the student)
- to make reasonable adjustments (to allow students with disability to take part in education on the same basis as other students)
- to eliminate victimisation and harassment (so that students and families feel safe in the education environment).

For a full copy of the Education Standards go to:

www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/Programs/Documents/Disability_Standards_for_Education_2005_pdf.pdf

Although the term 'reasonable adjustments' provides only vague guidelines for what is required by schools, some parents have found that the curriculum is adjusted well for their children:

"Last teachers have been a godsend – modified and followed the same program but adapted. This term it is all coming together for her."

"She goes at her own pace, as do all of the children in the class. She may do less complicated activities but nevertheless participates at her level of ability on the same topic that is being taught."

6b. Education Standards - Reasonable Adjustments

From the DDA Education Standards website
http://www.ddaedustandards.info/oblig_adjust.php and other sources.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Education Standards require schools to make "reasonable adjustments" to allow people with disability to take part in education on the same basis as other students. Similarly, under the Anti-Discrimination Act (ADA) Qld, schools must look at what special services or facilities a student with disability may require in order to take part in education on the same basis as others. The intent of the DDA standards and the ADA is to give students with disability access to the same opportunities and choices in their education that are available to a person without disability.

Examples of reasonable adjustments or special services or facilities that have been put in place to help students with disability work in mainstream classrooms include:

- providing interpreters or note-takers for deaf students
- allowing extra time for exams
- allowing a student to use a laptop or ipad in class or exams instead of hand-writing
- the teacher using a microphone to transmit to earphones for a student with a hearing impairment
- providing a teacher aide to support a student in class or with particular activities
- adjusting classwork and homework to a level suitable for the student
- improving physical access, e.g. providing a lift or an accessible toilet.

The Education Standards require schools to consult and plan with people with disability and their families or associates to determine what adjustments will be needed.

Schools should have access to advisers who can help them work out what adjustments or supports will help a student with disability be included. If you feel that an outside expert opinion would help, ask the school to get it.

The Education Standards do not explain exactly what 'consult' means, but they do give some suggestions. For example proper consultation might also include:

1. regular meetings to make sure all is going well and change supports if needed. Records should be kept of these meetings
2. professional reports about the needs and supports that can help a student. This might include having an occupational therapist to assess types of furniture and equipment that can best help a student with a physical disability. It might also include psychological reports to help design good learning strategies for students who might have learning difficulties.

If an adjustment can be made to allow a student with disability to participate in education on the same basis as other students, then the education provider is required by law to make that adjustment if it is "reasonable", i.e. if it doesn't impact too much on the needs of other people, and if it doesn't cause unjustifiable hardship to the school.

Many parents, however, have found that teachers do not know how to make adjustments and/or are reluctant to make them. Their children have been expected to fit into a prescribed curriculum (without the necessary adjustments for meaningful participation), an expectation that goes against the spirit of inclusive philosophy and the intention of the Education Standards.

“I am continually asking for a modified program but they won’t do it.”

How do schools decide if an adjustment or the provision of special services or facilities is reasonable?

The school needs to consider:

- the barriers, needs or challenges confronting the student
- the views/suggestions of the student and his/her family
- the effect of the adjustment on the student, the class and the teacher
- whether the adjustment genuinely allows the student to participate on the same basis as other students
- whether the adjustment will damage the academic standard or remove an essential element of a course.

Adjustments are required to be made within a reasonable amount of time. They will often need to be reviewed as circumstances may change over time.

If an adjustment is judged to be unreasonable the education provider is not required to make it even if it means a person will not be able to enrol in a course or school. However if you believe a decision is unfair you can complain to the Australian Human Rights Commission or the Anti-Discrimination Commission (Qld) about it. Many other students and their families have taken this course and had decisions made in their favour, compelling the education provider to make the required adjustments or compensate the student in some way.

6c. Education Standards – Unjustifiable Hardship

The Disability Discrimination Act’s Education Standards (2005) say that an education provider does not have to carry out an obligation under the Education Standards if that obligation would cause it unjustifiable hardship, either in terms of cost or safety of other people. Similarly, the Anti-Discrimination Act (Qld) also states that schools do not need to provide special services or facilities to a student with disability if it would impose an unjustifiable hardship.

In determining if the supply of special services or facilities would impose an unjustifiable hardship, all the circumstances of the case must be looked at including:

- the nature of the services or facilities
- the cost of supplying them
- the financial circumstances of the school or education authority (e.g. Education Queensland for a state school)
- the disruption that supplying the services or facilities might cause
- the nature of any benefit or detriment to all people concerned.

Determining unjustifiable hardship is not a decision that schools can take lightly. The Standards say that an education provider should be careful not to use this exception without proper consultation and research. “If an education provider wants to use this exception, then the education provider has to prove that the obligation would cause it unjustifiable hardship. This might mean the education provider has to prepare and show financial reports, bank account details, impact statements and quotes to prove it is fair to use this exception.” (http://www.ddaedustandards.info/except_hardship.php)

“It was my belief that it was her right to attend her local school with siblings and neighbourhood friends... and that she would make greater progress in all areas when learning and playing alongside her peers.”

“I knew what the alternatives were and I was philosophically opposed to people being boxed into a system whereby people are marginalised, labelled as others and stigmatised as different.”

In the mid-1990s some schools won court cases to exclude students with a disability on the grounds of 'unjustifiable hardship'. Times have changed and it is believed that if the cases from the mid-90s went to court today the outcomes may be different. Some school / education staff may use the outcomes from earlier cases to form opinions without factoring in contemporary developments in the provision of adjustments, special services and facilities.

Unjustifiable hardship is a fluid rather than a fixed concept; each interpretation will depend on many variables and it is not possible, therefore, to present a tick and flick list for families to use. Some families have told us that the school of their choice cited unjustifiable hardship as a reason for not enrolling their son or daughter. Many education staff may not understand the complexity of 'unjustifiable hardship' and may indeed breach their legal duty to include and accommodate in attempting to interpret the 'legal' application to individual cases.

If there is a dispute, unjustifiable hardship may ultimately be determined by a Judge or Tribunal who will use fact and law to make the determination. If there is a dispute, unjustifiable hardship is NOT finally determined by a school or by education staff. If families believe education staff are not in a position to sustain their claim of unjustifiable hardship they might consider seeking advice from the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland or disability advocacy organisations.

6d. UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

QPPD believes that it is useful for parents to be aware of the UN convention and its central tenet that students with disability are entitled to inclusive education on an equal basis with other students – within the general education system. We would argue that the following principles have significant implications for how education systems are designed.

Guiding Principles of the Convention

1. Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons
2. Non-discrimination
3. Full and effective participation and inclusion in society
4. Respect for difference and acceptance of people with disability as part of human diversity and humanity
5. Equality of opportunity
6. Accessibility
7. Equality between men and women
8. Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disability and respect for the right of children with disability to preserve their identities.

Article 24 Education

Article 24 of the Convention is clear that persons with disability are not to be excluded from the general education system – that they are to access an inclusive, quality and free education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live. Australia ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008, which means education systems have a legal obligation to adhere to Article 24.

For a full copy of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities go to: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/disabilities-convention.htm>

“My son was diagnosed and therefore labelled in early primary school. His teacher at the time was very supportive and had a good understanding of inclusion and inclusive education policy. He was in her class for two years and was always welcomed by the teacher and the other children in the class. It was a really positive time during my son’s early schooling.”

“I felt so proud of Richard achieving so successfully. The careful preparation but unobtrusiveness of the teacher - true inclusion.....I sent a thanks to the principal for this teacher’s ability and skill to include.”

Other parents have not been so lucky and have found that inclusive policy has not been put into practice in their school.

6e. Education Policy – Education Queensland

Inclusive Education Statement (2005)

Education Queensland’s Inclusive Education Statement articulates the nature of inclusive education and the Queensland Government’s commitment to making it work.

The statement:

- supports all students to attend school to engage with and contribute to a school’s cultures, curriculum and communities
- recognises diversity of individuals and groups in each school and community as a strength and context for learning
- maximises educational and social outcomes of all students through identification and reduction of barriers to learning, especially for those who experience disadvantage, are at risk and/or vulnerable to marginalisation
- promotes development of an inclusive curriculum to respond to needs of all students
- aims to equip all students to understand and value equity and diversity so that they have knowledge and skills for positive participation in a just, equitable and democratic global society.

For a full copy of EQ’s Inclusive Education Statement go to:

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

CRP-PR-009: Inclusive Education

This Education Queensland policy identifies the processes, responsibilities and procedures to enable Education Queensland staff to implement EQ’s Inclusive Education Statement 2005. It says that inclusive education:

- recognises and actively addresses injustice and disadvantage
- responds to the uniqueness of individuals so all students can access schools and participate to achieve learning outcomes and to develop skills to work and live productively and respectfully with others from a range of backgrounds, abilities and cultures.

For a full copy of CRP-PR-009 go to:

<http://education.qld.gov.au/strategic/eppr/curriculum/crppr009/>

6f. Education Policy – Catholic Education

Each Catholic diocese and school has their own education policies and procedures. The overarching body, the Queensland Catholic Education Commission advocates that Catholic school authorities commit to establish policies and procedures that incorporate inclusive educational practices into their operations.

The Commission’s Inclusive Practices in Catholic Schools in Queensland; Position Statement (2009) articulates a desire for Catholic schools to be open and accessible, catering for students with a diverse range of personal characteristics and experiences.

- the uniqueness and the diversity of students as children of God
- the need for belonging within a community
- a whole school approach to planning, curriculum development and school organisation
- access to reasonable, differentiated resources and learning opportunities to facilitate the participation of students
- Catholic social teaching and practice to be informed by legislative requirements, educational philosophy and societal expectations.

“It all seems to come down to the attitude of the leadership of the school. If the principal is not supportive of difference, then the learning experiences can be very negative.”

“Some say they are pro-inclusion but when you ask, they send you somewhere else.”

Either way, knowledge of policy is an important strategy for parents who want inclusive education.

“Stay focused; be clear about what you want & why; know your education policies”

The Inclusive Practices Position Statement reiterates the DDA Education Standards requirement for schools to accommodate students with disability by making reasonable adjustments that do not impose unjustifiable hardship on the school.

The statement also says “... there will be children with needs beyond those which can be met by Catholic schools.” While this position is not in breach of the Education Standards which currently contain similar clauses, it is arguably not in the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. Given that schools and school systems prioritise how they direct resources, the Convention demands a commitment by all school systems to direct resources to support inclusion.

Despite this clause, you should not be discouraged from seeking enrolment in Catholic schools. Many students and their families have described positive attitudes and inclusive experiences at these schools, and you should be able to expect that your son or daughter’s enrolment will be accepted at a Catholic school as readily as in any other system.

For a full copy of the “Inclusive practices in Catholic schools in Queensland” policy document go to: <http://www.qcec.qld.catholic.edu.au>

(Under the ‘QCEC & Committees’ drop down box, click on ‘Policies and Positions’)

6g. Education Policy – Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ)

An independent school is a non-government school that is governed, managed and accountable at the level of the individual school. Its governing body is autonomous. Independent schools will vary in their policies and procedures regarding students with disability.

However, the Independent Schools website outlines some common characteristics and commitments:

- providing a well-grounded general education
- fostering students’ moral and spiritual development
- providing students with pastoral care; promoting discipline
- catering to the needs, aptitudes and interests of the individual student
- developing strong home-school partnerships
- achieving the best possible outcomes for all students.

You are advised to ask individual schools for their policy on Inclusive Education.

NB Legislation does not exempt private schools from their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act and the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

Some parents have found that their teachers are aware of inclusive education policy and how to put it into practice.

7.

Information and resources that support inclusive education

Inclusive education has been discussed, debated and developed for many years. Much research has been done. Many books have been written and numerous groups have been formed on the basis of a vision of inclusion. The following pages contain but a few of the ideas and resources that you might find helpful in your journey.

How QPPD supports inclusive education:

- website with links to information and resources
- library with resources on inclusive education
- contact with other families who are seeking inclusion
- workshops for parents and professionals
- advice and strategies based on many years of experience in working for inclusive education
- connection with like-minded people
- representation on education reference groups
- advocating for inclusive practice at a systems level
- being alert to and speaking out about exclusionary practice.

NB QPPD does not do individual advocacy but can talk you through strategies to assist with your advocacy.

7a. Websites

<http://www.inclusion.com/>

Inclusion Press creates person-centred resource materials for training events, public schools, high schools, community colleges, universities, human service agencies, health organisations, government agencies, families, First Nations organisations - nationally and internationally.

<http://www.inclusiveschools.org/>

The Inclusive Schools Network (ISN) is a web-based resource for families, schools and communities that promotes inclusive educational practices.

<http://www.paulakluth.com/>

Dr. Paula Kluth is a consultant, author, advocate, and independent scholar who works with teachers and families to provide inclusive opportunities for students with disability and to create more responsive and engaging schooling experiences for all learners.

<http://www.cast.org/udl/index.html>

CAST is an educational research and development organisation that works to expand learning opportunities for all individuals through Universal Design for Learning.

<http://www.ii.inclusioneducativa.org>

Inclusion International is a network of over 200 family-based organisations working to promote the social, cultural, economic, and political rights of people with intellectual disability. The vision of the organisation is "a world where people with intellectual disabilities and their families can equally participate and be valued in all aspects of community life."

<http://www.csie.org.uk/>

CSIE is an independent organisation promoting inclusive education as a basic human right of every child.

<http://www.qppd.org/>

Video footage: Learning Better Together (ihc, NZ)

Video footage: Post School Inclusive Education (AACL)

<http://www.include.com.au>

Include is a firm run by inclusion expert Dr Bob Jackson. This site has helpful information about inclusion, and links to the firm's services.

<http://www.spannj.org/>

SPAN is the New Jersey-based Statewide Parent Advocacy Network.

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) was created in 2002 to be a central and trusted source of scientific evidence for what works in education.

7b. Books, articles, guides

Available on the Resources page of QPPD website www.qppd.org

1. Diving for pearls: An account of parents' quest for inclusive education (QPPD, 2011)
2. All children belong together (QPPD, 2009)
3. Inclusion or segregation for children with an intellectual impairment: What does the research say? (Bob Jackson, 2008)
4. Why does it have to be so hard? A mother's reflection on the journey of inclusive education (Lisa Bridle, 2005)
5. Education for children with a disability – A guide for parents (Education Queensland, 2010)
6. A guide for parents supporting children with a disability (Brisbane Catholic Education)
7. A parent's handbook on inclusive education: Everyone belongs in our schools (British Columbia Association for Community Living, 2006)
8. Helping you and your family: Information, support and advocacy (Association for Children with a Disability, 2009)
9. Pocket Guide to Advocacy (Alberta Association for Community Living, 2010)
10. Better education for all: When we're included too (Inclusion International, 2009)
11. Students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms (Shaddock, Giorcelli, & Smith, 2007).
12. Inclusive education statement (Education Queensland, 2005)
13. Inclusive practices in Catholic schools in Queensland (Position statement of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 2009)
14. Disability Standards for Education (2005)
15. Convention on the rights of persons with a disability (2008)
16. The natural authority of families (article by Michael Kendrick, CRUcial Times, Issue 6, July, 1996)
17. How to get what you want (adapted from the writing of Michael Kendrick and Marg Ward)

7c. Current thinking – Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Fiona Anderson

Until recently, the most common approach to inclusion in mainstream schools has been through differentiated teaching; where teachers start with a prescribed curriculum, program or plan aimed at the “average” student, and then adjust it for children who need adaptation.

More recently, some teachers, policy makers and academics have used a different premise, called Universal Design for Learning, which designs a range of approaches and outcomes into the curriculum in the first place.

If your child with disability can't hold a pen and write, turn pages in a text book, open worksheets, hold a ruler, read fluently, speak, use a protractor ... it's too hard to access the regular curriculum and learn. Right? Wrong.

A universally-designed curriculum is designed right from the start to meet the needs of the greatest number of learners, making costly, time-consuming, retro-fit changes to curriculum unnecessary. Universal Design for Learning advocates state that in many classrooms, it is the curriculum that is disabled, not the learners. The curriculum is disabled because its main components – the goals, materials, methods, and assessments – are too rigid and inflexible to meet the needs of diverse learners, especially those with disability. Most of the ways to remediate the curriculum's disabilities – teacher-made modifications, alternative placements – are expensive, inefficient, exclusive and often ineffective for learning.

Universal Design for Learning recognises that people learn in different ways. It offers ways for teachers to customise their teaching to meet a wide range of needs from a diverse group of students, some of whom may have disabilities:

- multiple means of representation to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge
- multiple means of action and expression to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know
- multiple means of engagement to tap into learners' interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn
- flexible digital media (computers and ipads!) makes it easier than ever to provide these multiple alternatives and customise teaching and learning to meet learners' needs.

How often are parents told their chosen school doesn't have the “special programs” to teach students with disabilities?

In reality, most programs aren't “special” and can be readily grasped by any teaching professional. They just involve planning and doing things differently. There are many exciting developments in Universal Design for Learning which have the potential to transform participation in learning and knowledge-sharing for students with disability and without.

Conclusion

The future for inclusive education in Queensland

Research by Robert Jackson for QPPD in 2008 showed that the inclusion of children with disability has been accompanied by some dramatic improvements in the life conditions and opportunities for people with disability. This is likely to be a reflection of reform and changing attitudes and expectations.

Increasing numbers of people with disability are going to post-secondary education and increasing numbers of adults with severe disabilities are achieving success in the work force.

Jackson found that we are now in a position to know confidently that inclusion is preferable for those with disability and has benefits for their mainstream classmates too. Forced segregation is now illegal and considered immoral in most western countries.

It is time to move on from the question of “should we include?” to “how can this best be done?”

This booklet aims to help parents as they press for meaningful and successful inclusion for their sons and daughters – as they expect inclusion and work with educators to find the best way to achieve it for their child.

As parents we do not seek something extraordinary. All we seek is the right for our children to receive a quality education in local neighbourhood schools... Inclusive education is the absolute cornerstone of an inclusive life path as well as an essential tool in building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.

“QPPD acknowledges the significant progress in inclusive policy development in recent years and the sustained efforts of educators within Education Queensland and elsewhere in support of inclusive education. Nevertheless, despite this, exclusion, rather than inclusion, continues to be the reality for too many.

We dream for a day when our children’s gifts, talents and contributions will shine brightly – in the same classrooms and playgrounds as other children.”
(Lisa Bridle, *Diving for Pearls*, 2011)