

family

A D V O C A C Y

Activating your P & C to help promote the inclusion of your child at school

Inclusion involves the whole school community, and benefits ALL students. Parents play an important role in raising and bringing attention to issues that might be impacting their children with disability within their school. When parents work together as a community, they can identify common issues and collaborate to improve their local school.

This resource aims to provide you with the what, why and how to start an inclusion sub-committee in your school's P & C, focusing on ensuring all children and families feel included. The "what" and "why" of inclusive education to lay the foundations, and the "how" will provide you with practical tools and tips.

You will also find a wealth of video and written resources in our [Access:Symposium](#) website, which is packed with experience, insights, ideas and case studies exploring inclusive education. This platform is committed to challenge thinking, share examples and stimulate the necessary conversations to bring on change.

THE WHAT - What does inclusion mean to you?

We start by sharing some quotes from a recent survey asking families what inclusion meant to them:

People with a disability being wholeheartedly included in all aspects of society - socially, in education, in work, in family life.

Where a person with a disability can join and participate like any other person with minimal focus on their disability and a full acceptance of them as a person that feels wanted and safe in that particular group.

Inclusion to me is everyone having the same opportunities and sense of belonging as their peers.

Ability to access any services like everyone in the planet. Valuing someone for their individual strengths and not measuring them against a 'norm'.

Where everyone is included and not separated on the basis of their disability or their differences.

Inclusion is to be embedded within the community in a meaningful way. This should be based on the person's passions and interests among peers, friends and family of their choice.

Inclusion does not have an othering rule- good for some but not others.

Belonging, having the same choices and opportunities as people without a disability, to participate in what life has to offer eg school, recreation, employment, along with everyone else, not in a segregated setting.

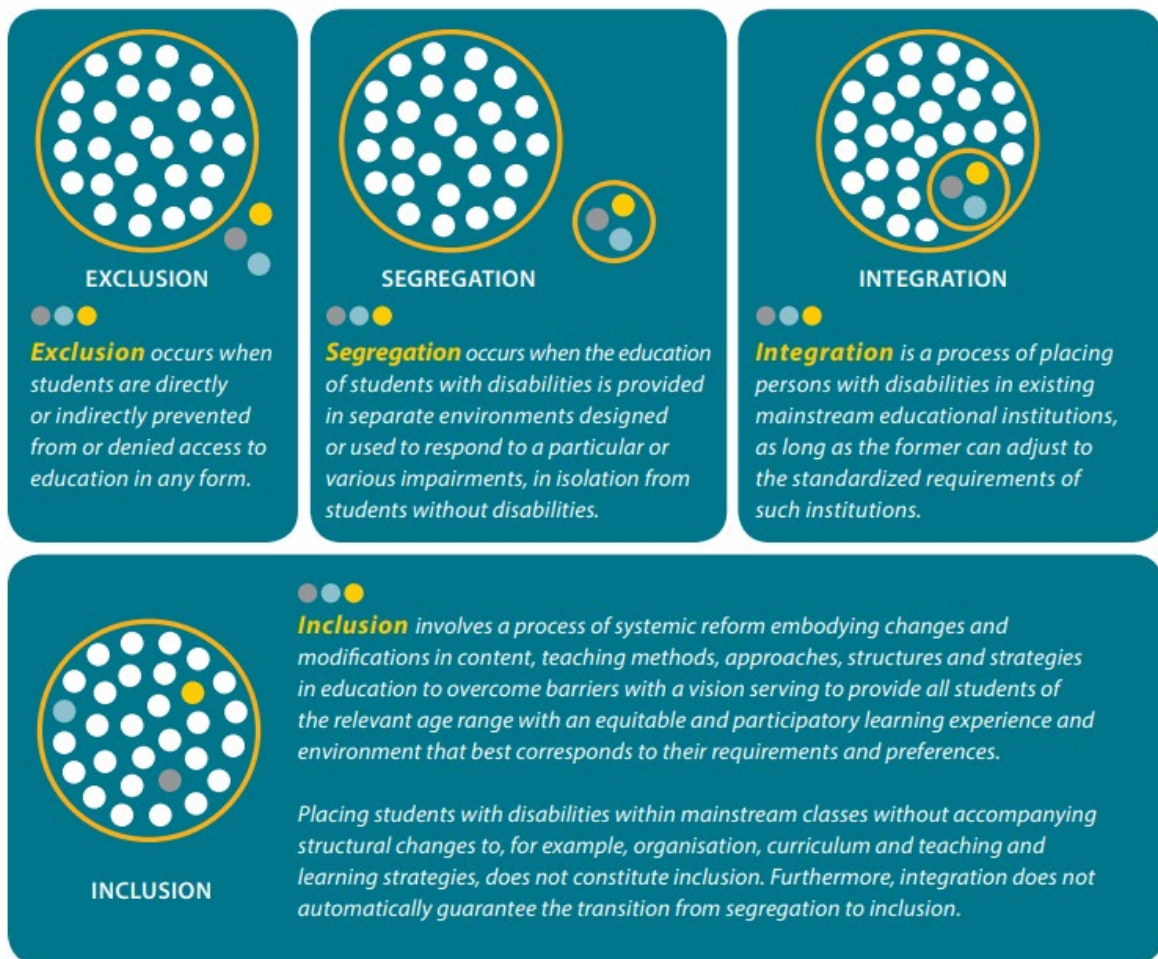
Inclusion is being accepted to be myself and accepting others for who they are.

Inclusion is about equity and access, planning and building systems and processes so that people with disability are not disadvantaged. Inclusion is the way we think, openly and genuinely about our desire to make life accessible

THE WHAT - Inclusion and Education

Inclusion is a concept in school and tertiary education most often associated with minority groups and people who experience disability, but in fact, inclusion is about everyone. Inclusion is a human right ([Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons 1975](#) and the [UNCRPD](#)), a legal entitlement to all ([Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#)) and a core pillar of educational policy ([Disability Standards for Education 2005](#)).

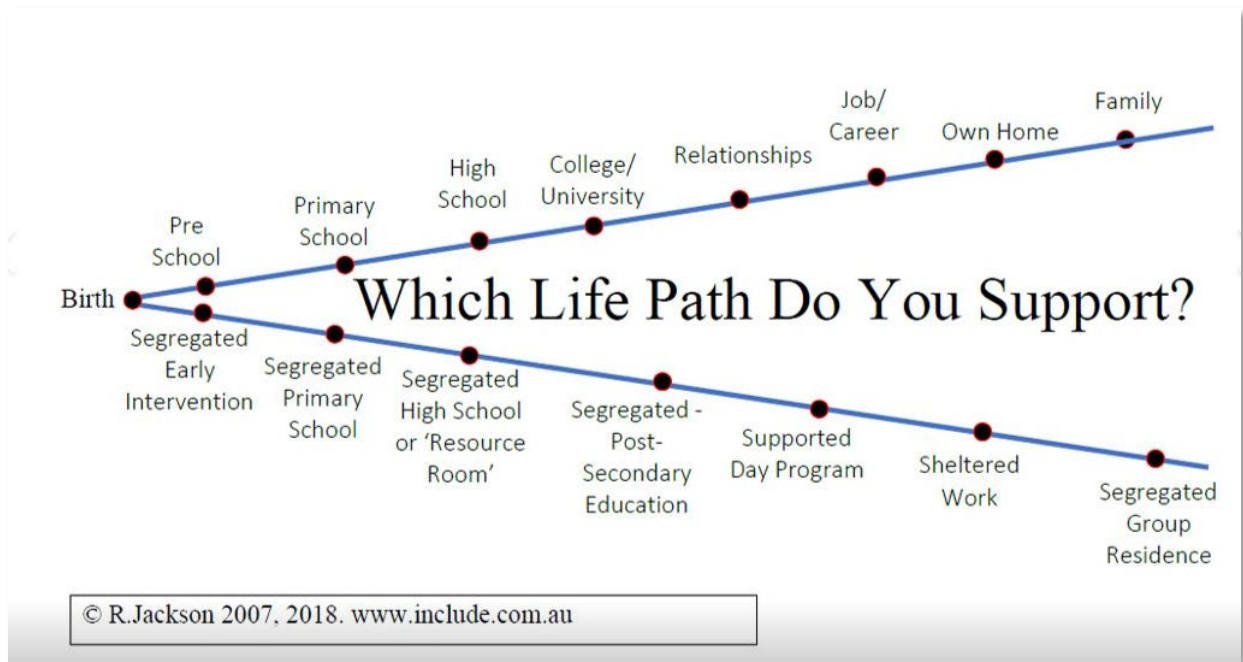
The definition of inclusion is clearly defined in [General Comment No. 4 \(GC4\) under Article 24 \(Right to an Inclusive Education\) of the UNCRPD](#) – depicted by the diagram below. The need to distinguish inclusion from exclusion, segregation, and integration is critical. Given there has been significant ambiguity as to what is meant by “inclusive education” and that ambiguity has complicated efforts to implement inclusive education systems, the purpose of GC4 is to provide Governments with guidance on the scope of their obligation to provide quality inclusive education for people with disability. GC4 came about after a two year process involving the review of a draft General Comment and submissions for State Parties (including Australia) interested NGO’s (including Children and Young People Australia) academics and disability advocates.



Source: United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities General Comment No. 4 (<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CRPD/GC/RighttoEducation/CRPD-C-GC-4.doc>)

The Disability Royal Commission has noted it will examine inclusion through a human rights approach, acknowledging Australia’s obligation as outlined by the eight principles of the UNCRPD.

The traditional model requires bringing the child to the special education services. Outcomes from established special education programs indicate that they just haven’t worked. The Disability Royal Commission heard the evidence of Ms Catherine McAlpine, (CEO of Inclusion Australia in Public Hearing 9) where she spoke about the “polished pathway” as a means of describing the relative ease of transition from special or segregated education into supported or segregated employment and congregated housing. She also gave evidence that people have to be “pretty determined” to reach the goal of open employment when their education has been in a special or segregated setting. As one family member noted, “the further you travel down the segregated path, the harder it is to come back to being part of the community”.



The diagram above shows the natural pathways of childhood and the impact of an ordinary pathway versus a segregated pathway¹. Every step taken down the segregated pathway is a step away from the “good life” being in community where natural safeguards occur.

The inclusion model requires bringing the special education services to the child. Inclusion cannot be viewed as a way of eliminating special education costs. Special education delivery must be reconceptualised. This requires a merger of governance of special and regular education and their funding streams. Full inclusion would encourage that special education services generally be delivered in the form of training and technical assistance to “regular” classroom teachers. Effective inclusion is characterised by virtual invisibility. Children with disabilities are not clustered into groups of persons with similar disabilities but dispersed proportionately in whatever classrooms they would otherwise attend.

Visit the “What is Inclusion” areas of our [Access:Symposium](#) website for more perspectives on inclusive education.

THE WHY - Inclusion and Education

People with developmental disability have faced discrimination, segregation and stigmatisation, and negative attitudes for millennia. History paints a very clear picture that segregation has come off the back of discrimination. Inclusive education will help to shift mindsets, change community attitudes, challenge stereotypes, reduce stigma.

¹ Jackson, R (2008). Inclusion or segregation for children with an intellectual impairment: What does the research say? Queensland Parents for People with a Disability.

There are many other reasons for and benefits to, inclusive education.

It is a human right;

it is supported by the law;

decades of research show it is in the interests of the child and provides better life outcomes;
children without a disability also benefit as well as school community;

it increases the likelihood of economic contribution in the post school years with less reliance on
the welfare system;

and it is better for society as a whole because our society is made up of diverse communities and
this reality should be reflected in our school

The positive benefits (short and long term) when the child is included in the regular class – comments from parents

Our daughter was in a mainstream school and was able to travel to an agricultural field day with her class and that lead to her career.

Friendships, and positives for how things can be inclusive. Being able to participate in a swim carnival regular race using a canoe when your disability has prevented you from being able to swim or walk.

My child has felt like he's one of the kids. Adults (teachers) including him has helped develop compassion and empathy in some of his classmates who've been more patient and understanding of my son than would have otherwise.

My child, J, went on many inclusive excursions. Ironically, the deputy principal of his primary school was not helpful but J had many natural friendships and the staff that attended were very aware of our family's definition of inclusion. It was very successful. Many successful excursions occurred eg. theme parks, camps, snow skiing, adventure parks flying on flying foxes, parliament house, universities; all were overnight excursions. He also attended short term excursions to the beach, rainforests, lookouts and nature reserves. He always travelled with his peers, sitting with his peers, laughing with his peers and getting in to trouble with his peers. He had a support worker close by but not in his face. I ensured the support worker was on the 'same page' as us.

Being part of the whole year excursion - having mainstream peers greet her with familiarity and genuineness. Long term - confidence and an increased sense of belonging. Perhaps for the mainstream peers a greater acceptance.

Incredible and numerous benefits, which I believe will be lifelong! He was happy, had fun, experienced friendship, learned so much by being part of a regular class, had to live up to high standards of appearance, punctuality etc (all good skills for future employment), got to play handball at lunchtimes with the other kids (who adapted the rules to include him, without any adult/teacher intervention), was a part of important school rituals such as formals, graduation dinner, athletics and swimming carnivals, school concerts and camps along with his peers. The long term benefit of being a student at the local primary school has been instrumental in him becoming a valued volunteer at the school for more than 7 years which continues to be a wonderful way to become known in the community. At high school he was able to experience a variety of sports including being introduced to spin cycle classes and a mainstream gym, which led to attendance at our local gym where he is well known, and is a regular in the spin cycle classes with the assistance of a personal trainer, another great way to be part of the community, not to mention the health benefits and increased physical ability. There have been immeasurable benefits, both short and long term, some of which we did not foresee at the time.

J has never been in a segregated class. At 3 years old he began his education at an inclusive preschool. However, he has experienced many segregated experiences. School cricket, soccer, athletic carnival were all initially off the school's agenda as he 'wasn't' physically able to contribute. He, his friends, his sisters, us and staff that 'got it' and recognised the segregation were quick to provide solutions. J didn't need to kick the soccer ball he could catch and throw it. His mates took it in turns to push him around the cross country course. As a result of this default expectation of true inclusion, J is now 21 years old, lives 300km away from the family home, with 2 flat mates in a house that is being modified. He drives his own modified vehicle independently, attends university, takes himself off to gym twice a week with a trained gym support worker and he goes to parties/pubs where sometimes accessibility is poor but he weighs up the risks and his friends do the muscle work.

You will also find videos and articles on “Why Include” on the [Access:Symposium](#) website.

THE HOW - Inclusion and Education

The [Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education](#) has already developed a 10 year plan, [Driving change: A Roadmap for achieving inclusive education in Australia](#) to help realise equitable education outcomes for students with disability and prevent violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of students with disability. The 10 year plan is underpinned by six pillars that are drawn from the evidence base and embed the rights of students as outlined in the UNCRPD:

1. Ensure inclusive education
2. Phase out segregated schools
3. Improve educational outcomes
4. Stop gatekeeping and other discrimination
5. Eliminate restrictive practice
6. Prevent suspensions and expulsions.

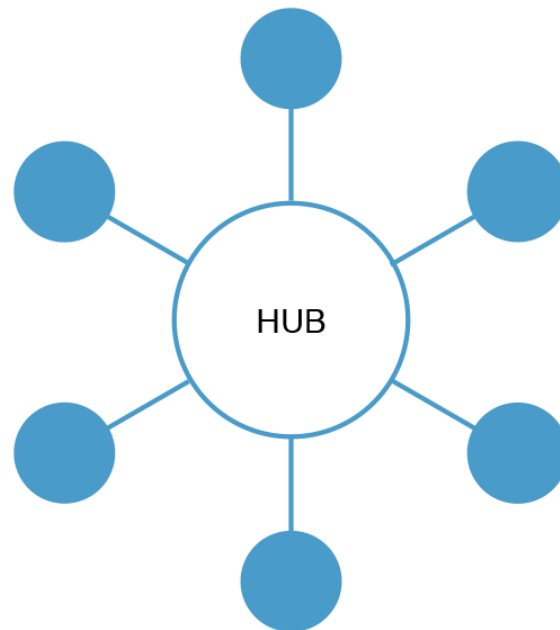
The Roadmap has two key sections: the outcomes that need to occur, stepped out over the next 10 years, and the key levers for change needed to realise these outcomes.

For more information about the Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education, of which Family Advocacy is a founding member, visit their [website](#).

THE HOW - 12 Habits of Highly Effective Inclusion	
Leadership	Children with disability flourish when leadership in the early learning environment ensures children with a disability are valued and disability is viewed as adding diversity to the class.
Natural Proportions	Children with disability should be spread out in natural proportions rather than being grouped together by the category of their disability.
Supports	Support needs to come direct from the teacher rather than aides (school learning support). We need to move away from 1:1 support.
Time for Planning	teachers should have sufficient co-planning time to ensure children with disability have adequate and appropriate support and reasonable adjustments made.
Mobile services	rather than taking a child out of the regular classroom, services should be delivered in the context of the regular classroom. Learning skills in a natural environment is more effective than practicing a new skill in an isolated setting once or twice a week.
Specialist Teachers	should be supporting the teacher in the regular classroom
High expectations	assume every child can learn without requiring evidence of their capacity. Inclusive education needs no prerequisite skills.
Collaboration	develop partnerships based on mutual commitment, trust and respect between the early learning centre and the student and their family/ guardian.
Peer Learning	To foster friendships and avoid micro exclusion in classrooms, instigate peer learning opportunities.
Changed mindsets	are required for inclusive education where traditional views of education are transformed.
Continuous reflection	required on practices, policy, values and beliefs and how they impact the inclusion of children with disability.
Student and parent voice	acknowledge the lived experience of the child with a disability and their parent, their experiences, their needs and their solutions.

(Based on Dr Leanne Longfellow's "12 Principles of Inclusion")

THE HOW – Advocacy tips



We are here to help

Consider Family Advocacy as the hub supporting centrally and you and your schools as the spokes.

Attend our regular meetings for people engaged in or interested in setting up a subcommittee. We will promote these on the [Family Advocacy Facebook page](#) and in the [Same Classroom Same Opportunity Facebook group](#).

Join these groups to stay in touch. Share anything you would like our comment on or to have an individual conversation.

Consider what are the main goals of the subcommittee

Such As:

- Building awareness of inclusive practices in the school
- Building capacity of the school
- Provide parent support
- Utilise knowledge of the parent base
- Improve Individual Education Plans or the school's processes around goal setting
- Provide education for educators and parents eg through guest speakers

With agreement on the goals of the subcommittee it should ensure that parents who do not seek an authentic inclusive education will not derail the subcommittee by looking to it for improvements in segregated activities and ideas. The clearer the goals the better this will be safeguarded.

Having said that, we do not want to be excluding interested parents (that wouldn't be inclusive at all!) so consider saying something like; "even if your child is in a support unit, you are welcome to be part of this subcommittee, but this is what this group is about, and these are our goals".

Build on successes of the school, share anything and everything good they are doing.

Align interests, what else is the school doing that you can link into that you can help them achieve? Eg multicultural day, indigenous awareness events, anti-bullying, community events etc.

Be prepared to talk about inclusive education generally – see earlier sections of this document and our [Access:symposium](#) website for presentations and resources to help share this information.

It can be an effective way of getting to know the school executive as the Principal and/or a deputy will attend the main P & C (they do not need to attend the subcommittees but they will hear of their work in the main meetings). The subcommittee could be used to get funding for the school for support resources in the classroom or the playground.

Be careful not to confuse your individual advocacy around your child with the work of the subcommittee which should be more general and broad. It can be helpful to reflect on what is [family business versus school business](#) as we don't want to hand over our responsibilities to the school. For instance, what therapies you may engage is not school business and we don't want this activity being conducted in a way that reduces your child's time in the classroom and playground with peers.

Getting started

Anyone can put a subcommittee together, and once a subcommittee is formed, they have to report and everything is minuted. It's another way of making the school better and increase wellbeing of all students.

Progress from the informal groups and get-togethers into a more formal format – eg keep your first outing a small goal to test the waters and see who are your allies. Start small and it will inherently change things generally.

Start the conversation – attend the P&C meetings, garner support from established groups and other parents (not just parents with disability) who attend the P&C, build up allies.

Get allies amongst the teachers, the learning and support team, SLSO, other staff.

THE HOW – more tips from a parent on how to bring schools on board

Start small, pick one or two easy things to work on

Remind people that everyone wants the school to work for their kid, that's why we are all there...

Talk about the positives about inclusive education, keep it real, easy examples, things we can do...

Say other places are doing this, give examples (sometimes this works, sometimes not!)

Remember it is your P&C, not the school's and you can have what sub committees you like

Know the P&C rules, yours and the [federation's](#) - they can be handy

Get to know the P&C - go along for a bit before jumping in

Have someone in the audience ask a question so that the topic gets discussed, all questions get recorded and need to be answered

Keep yourself informed about the department's rules, policies etc- ask the school what they are doing on X,Y or Z, what is in the school plan at the moment etc

Offer to help out, be part of the solutions.

Think about why the school may be oppositional, and what the sub-committee might do about it to help. For instance:

- Help with resourcing eg professional development, classroom aides etc
- Advocate with the school for changes
- Make resources easily available for them eg show them examples, link to latest resources
- Show how it will be less work for the school, how it will help the whole school
- When parents are active and more informed and kids are getting what they need, then there will be less concerns or issues to deal with

Go higher, wider, deeper, if you have done all the above and it doesn't work, you can approach the department, regional director, local member etc.

Contact us

Don't forget to contact Family Advocacy to discuss any of your individual advocacy needs.

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