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**Abstract:** During the past two decades there has been a push to improve the inclusion of students with disabilities in the mainstream education system. These efforts have been supported by international human rights and Australia's own legislation; however the impetus to move forward and deliver an inclusive education has been hampered by the lack of a clear definition of what inclusion actually is.

QPPD, with the assistance of the author, and others, has fully defined inclusion by outlining the history, providing definitions, terms of reference, an approach to government (with the aim of filtering through the education system) and concludes by stating that there is still a long way to go before all members of our society can enjoy social inclusion. This article will help provide the impetus.

# **Queensland Parents for People with a Disability**

**All Children Belong Together**

**QPPD Overview of Inclusive Education  
1989-2009**

**April 2009**

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## **Queensland Parents for People with a Disability**

QPPD is a statewide systems advocacy organisation, established in 1981. QPPD conducted a number of advocacy ventures by parents during the 1980's covering issues including family support and respite, education, quality lifestyles for adults and guardianship. Since 1990 QPPD has been funded under the Disability Services Act from the Commonwealth Government to do statewide systems advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities. QPPD's mission is:

***QPPD vigorously defends 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.***

In addition to this systems advocacy focus, QPPD continues to develop a wide membership of families and friends across Queensland who remain in contact with the organisation. As well as personally supporting one another, these families take up issues collectively on behalf of sons, daughters and others, speaking out against injustices and promoting people with disabilities as valued and participating members of society.

### ***QPPD's advocacy principles***

Advocacy is speaking, acting, writing with minimal conflict of interest on behalf of the sincerely perceived interests of a disadvantaged person or group to promote, protect and defend their welfare and justice by:

- Being on their side and no-one else's
- Being primarily concerned with their fundamental needs
- Remaining loyal and accountable to them in a way which is emphatic and vigorous and which is, or is likely to be, costly to the advocate or the advocacy group.

### ***QPPD's beliefs about education for students with disabilities***

- We know students with disabilities are important because they are people first, regardless of the nature of their disabilities. In order to achieve a valued life in their families and local communities they need to be a part of regular educational services, but may need extra supports and assistance in order to participate fully.
- We also know students with disabilities are at risk of being labelled, abused, exploited, neglected or rejected. Because of this, educators will often attempt to provide for their needs in specialised places away from other students and with different cultural and social norms. Such placements can be offered as the first and only option, rather than as the last.
- We believe students with disabilities can develop and learn and should be encouraged to lead typical, ordinary lives with possibilities for a decent adulthood. Real lives are more likely to be achieved with children growing up together.
- We also believe that all students need educators with positive attitudes to counteract society's prejudices so that they are able to achieve their rights and entitlements as students and valued citizens of Australia.

## About the Author

Lynn Walmsley has been involved in QPPD's Education Sub Committee for the past 14 years. She joined when her youngest son was 3 years old. Her background is in Social Work in which she holds a MA, and she has specialised in Child and Family Work, Mental Health, and enabling productive Employment for people with disabilities. In addition to active involvement in many of the activities of the Education Sub Committee Lynn has served on several committees to further the improvement of the education of children with disabilities. These include Special Needs Advisory Council, Ministerial Advisory Committee - students with disabilities, Curriculum Reference Group of Education Qld and most recently the Review of Special Education Teacher programme at Griffith University. She maintains that her greatest passion comes from being a parent wanting her children to achieve their potential. Lynn receives continuous inspiration from her son and from other parents who share the same desire for their children to participate in an inclusive education. Systemic Advocacy requires persistence patience and the support of many others who share the journey. Any progress made in this endeavour has been due to the support and teamwork of many people who hold the vision for a future where the rhetoric of inclusive education is a lived reality.

Special thanks to Maria McCaffrey for her enduring support for this project, who along with Michelle O'Flynn (QPPD's current President) and Dr Lisa Bridle were involved in the editing of this document.

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## **All Children Belong Together**

### **QPPD Overview of Inclusive Education 1989-2009**

#### **Introduction**

QPPD has undertaken extensive consultation and research for over two decades for students with disabilities. QPPD knows that:

1. Children (all children) learn best when they learn together.
2. The fundamental question regarding students with disabilities needs to be “how” to include.
3. Inclusion is being present and participating in the mainstream, with the necessary supports and adjustments, so that it is socially and academically successful, for each student.
4. Inclusion has been mandated and it is everyone’s responsibility to ensure that it occurs.

The concept of inclusion is extremely simple; it describes the full participation of people with disabilities in society. It encompasses all that this suggests for every member of society; education, work, family and social life, being a member of the local and wider community. Participating in institutions, clubs, and events of one’s choosing makes for a rich and meaningful life. Yet this most basic expectation is for most people with disabilities a struggle to obtain. Constraints on people with disabilities abound in our society, many of which are inherent in social systems and structures. The historical exclusion of people with disabilities is still subtly

and unsubtly perpetuated today despite the progress over the past few decades which has facilitated a much larger presence of people with disabilities within our society. (Ref 1)

The reason we are focusing on education is because it is fundamental in our lives as a pathway to obtaining the “good things” in life. These include productive work (with the challenges and satisfaction that brings) and the less tangible things such as having friends, networks and participating in the community to which we belong. Often the contacts and friends we make during our education are a source of ongoing work and life opportunities. Education is a major ingredient in obtaining “a good life”; it is something most of us take for granted. The right to a quality education is a fundamental right enshrined in many Human Rights declarations.

These documents include:

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- The United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities  
<http://inclusion.uwe.ac.uk/csie/un-stdd.htm>
- The UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action  
<http://inclusion.uwe.ac.uk/csie/slmca.htm>
- A United Nations Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities  
<http://inclusion.uwe.ac.uk/csie/un-draft-convention-alert.htm>  
( Ref 2)

Furthermore, in Australia we have our own Disability Discrimination Act 1992, which includes Standards for Education. (Ref 3)

The most recent Human Rights Declaration is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities 2007. This was ratified by the Australian Government on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2008. (Ref 4)

### **Social Inclusion**

We also now have a commitment from our own Federal Government to deliver **social inclusion** in its fullest sense to every Australian. We quote from the Federal Government Website on Social Inclusion: "The Australian Government believes that all Australians need to be able to play a full role in all aspects of Australian life. To be socially included, all Australians must be given the opportunity to:

- secure a job;
- access services;
- connect with family, friends, work, personal interests and local community;
- deal with personal crisis; and
- have their voices heard.

The Australian Government's social inclusion agenda aims to launch a new era of governance to mainstream the task of building social inclusion so that all Australians can share in our nation's prosperity. Promoting social inclusion requires a new way of governing. Australia must rethink how policy and programs across portfolios and levels of government can work together to combat economic and social disadvantage in Australia." (Ref 5)

As one of the early priorities identified to obtain social inclusion is employment for people living with disabilities, it is obvious that in order for people with disabilities to obtain employment status, (the same as everyone else in this society) quality education must also be a priority. **QPPD knows that inclusive education, done properly, is the obvious route to social inclusion.**

Education starts early in a child's life with kindergarten and playgroup participation. The early pathways chosen tend to set the future pathway for an inclusive experience. In the usual course of events children go to pre-school, primary school, high school, and then on to post-school education and/or work. This formula applies to all people, and yet for many children with disabilities their 'pathway' is not typical, and the choices are severely limited. For some people they are non-existent.

### **Choice**

Choice is a complex concept, as explored in our publication "There's Small Choice in Rotten Apples" (Ref 6). It is often said that parents have a choice when, in fact, they do not have easy access to the relevant information available. Often, options are presented so that "choices" benefit someone other than the child. Choice also presupposes that information is presented in an unbiased and knowledgeable manner. At other times choices are removed by lack of true support and they become "conditional choices".

### **Why an Overview and Position Statement on Inclusive Education?**

For many years QPPD has vigorously defended the right of children with a disability to participate in education alongside their age peers at their local school in mainstream class rooms. The time has come to reinforce our consistent message because the ongoing progress toward real inclusion in education has been hampered by the use of the word “inclusion” to **inappropriately** describe every instance where students with disabilities attend school.

As QPPD representatives, we frequently hear reference to “the debate on inclusion” and the word “inclusion” is used in discussions, at seminars, and referred to in policies, without an agreed upon definition or properly understood use of the word. Therefore in this overview of inclusion we will look at definitions of the word to gain clarity of what we are talking about and seeking. We will also state that for us the debate has ended and that the State of Queensland needs to get on with the vitally important job of ensuring students with disabilities can participate in their education on the same basis as their peers.

It is time to reclaim inclusion, in its true sense and to point out where confusion occurs. Very often policy makers and academics are confused in their deliberations on inclusion. This confusion also causes difficulties for many parents, who are caught in a system which does not as yet fully and properly support all children with disabilities in education on the same basis as their peers. Many parents/caregivers have experienced the results of this muddled thinking around inclusion, which makes it extremely difficult for them to

understand the implications of making various choices for their children.

### **A Brief History of Past Efforts to Achieve Inclusion**

We have reviewed the archives back to the early 1990s when there was a surge of impetus toward inclusion for people with disabilities by the enactment of the Disability Discrimination Act of 1992 (Ref7). Of course prior to this Act, extreme dissatisfaction by families and people with disabilities had festered for a very long time. Many committees were formed, ‘how to’ kits (on teaching strategies and how to develop inclusive school communities) developed, and the curriculum started to be overhauled for students with disabilities. Many papers and publications were developed by academics and organisations in the field of supporting children with disabilities. The Education Department itself conducted a conference on Inclusive Education.

QPPD had prolific input into advocacy development for parents. These were for example Wolfensberger’s Social Advocacy Events, workshops by leaders in the inclusion movement from other countries such as Michael Kendrick, Bruce Uditsky, Jeff Strully, Marsha Forest and Jack Pearpoint, and many others. There was a great deal of lobbying for better policies and practices, and materials written for parents. QPPD spoke with parents both in person via extensive travelling advocacy, and by phone networks Queensland wide and there was vigorous activity to support parents in their desire to obtain a quality education in mainstream local schools.

Obtaining an Inclusive Education for students was made extremely difficult by the requirements of the “Placement



Policy” of Education Queensland which required that students be directed to particular schools if they were to receive adequate support, transport and other necessary resources. However despite this obstacle, it was a time of optimism and hope for many parents, an atmosphere that suggested positive change was occurring.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s there was a second wave of impetus by parents and allies concerned about the slow progress toward inclusion, resulting in a Senate Enquiry on the matter, and a Queensland Taskforce on Inclusive Education resulting in the establishment of a three year Ministerial Task Force on Inclusive Education.

Unfortunately the robustness of these efforts has been hampered by the lack of a commonly agreed definition of what inclusion actually is. Whenever attempts were made to accurately define and agree upon a definition, some representatives of Education Queensland seemed to be intent on side-stepping the need for definition. That is, it has been constantly stated that children with disabilities are included wherever they are “placed” or go to school. This lack of shared agreement on definition seems to be a major stumbling block in progress to a cultural shift towards inclusive education.

There are however a few notable exceptions to this inappropriate understanding of inclusion, and these exceptions seem to occur where there are educators dedicated to achieving inclusion within their own schools. With the right commitment and values driving a school via its Principal, it is entirely possible for schools to become inclusive. This was accomplished at

Caboolture East School between 2003 and 2006, with the support of the acting Director General for Queensland at that time, Roger Slee and Premier Peter Beattie.

It took one year for issue identification and solution design to be completed. They created the “D for D” model (teacher diversity for student diversity). Caboolture East used its own data to create an instrument for changing the structure of the school to best meet the needs of **all** students. It was done using the **existing resources**, but in a more creative, productive manner, driven by passion and commitment to inclusive education, matching teacher skills with students’ needs.

Inclusion using a whole school approach benefits the entire school and emphasises the need for the development of leadership skills and a deep knowledge and appreciation of true inclusion by the school Principal.

### Exploring Definitions

At a recent brainstorming session of parents and allies in Queensland in 2008, the following words were amongst a long list used to describe inclusion: being welcome, belonging, participating, having friends, being valued for your talents. In fact for many parents the welcome is vitally important as it sets the tone for what is to come in a particular setting.

The following definition comes from The Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education UK: “All children, with and without disabilities or difficulties - learning together in ordinary pre-school provision, schools, colleges, and universities with appropriate networks of support. Inclusion means enabling all students to participate

fully in the life and work of mainstream settings, whatever their needs. For inclusive education to be effective, government, local education authorities and schools have to adapt their approach to curriculum, teaching support, funding mechanisms and the built environment.”(Ref 8)

Professor Robert Jackson uses the following definition of inclusion in the Literature Review “Segregation or Inclusion”:

“For this review the decision has been made to use a definition that would apply to any child regardless of race, religion or impairment. Inclusion means physically present in the same classroom as peers for the same proportion of time; socially belonging and immersed in the same curriculum material. (Definition formulated by Jackson, Chalmers, & Wills, 2004; Wills & Jackson, 1996). In addition, the child should be under the same school and class rules, although it needs to be stressed that it may take more time and attention to teach some children these rules.” (Ref 9)

What all these definitions have in common, is that inclusion is more than just attending a mainstream school; it is about being welcome, participating, belonging and learning alongside ones peers and interaction with those peers. It is about being supported in ways which do not ‘interfere’ with the student making friendships and being ‘known’ by their peers. When inclusion is working people are thinking, how this student can do this or what supports, adjustments or modifications are needed to enable this to happen, what we can do to assist them. When inclusion isn’t embraced the language is negative. For example we hear “it’s too hard”, or “it’s not for them”, “he belongs in a program, not at

my school”. Other excuses are about financial costs, or the mistaken belief that it will be unfair to other students.

### **So Lets Examine more fully what Inclusion actually IS?**

This has been stated eloquently by Colleen Tomko so we quote her here: “Inclusion is part of a much larger picture than just placement in the regular class within school. It is being included in life and participating using one's abilities in day to day activities as a member of the community.

It is being a part of what everyone else is, and being welcomed and embraced as a member who belongs. Inclusion can occur in schools, churches, playgrounds, work and in recreation.” She specifies that in school, “Inclusion does not occur by placement in the regular class alone, rather it is a desired end-state. It must be created with proper planning, preparation and supports.

The goal of inclusion is achieved only when a child is participating in the activities of the class, as a member who belongs, with the supports and services they need. Inclusion is not a trade-off of supports and services for placement in the regular class and is not a trade-off of achievement of individual goals. No matter where a child with a disability is placed, an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) must be developed around the child's needs. The IEP objectives must continue to be met in the regular class. The same applies to the related services a child needs, they must continue to be provided for in the regular settings”.

She quotes Kunc 1992 who states the following;

*“The fundamental principle of inclusive education is the valuing of diversity within the human community.... When inclusive education is fully embraced, we abandon the idea that children have to become "normal" in order to contribute to the world.... We begin to look beyond typical ways of becoming valued members of the community, and in doing so, begin to realize the achievable goal of providing all children with an authentic sense of belonging. (Kunc 1992, pp. 38-39).*

Inclusion in school requires a shift in the paradigm, instead of getting the child ready for the regular class, the regular class gets ready for the child. It's not a decision of zero or one hundred percent, but what ever balance that can be achieved to maximize meeting all of a child's needs. The regular class is not looked at as how it is, but how it "can be".

Adaptations are made to the materials, the curriculum and/or the expectations of the activities for the individual child, maintaining achievement of all individual and academic goals. The purpose isn't simply social or academic, but to meet all of a child's needs together where ever possible. Through inclusive education children with disabilities remain on a path that leads to an adult life as a participating member of society. Meeting all their needs together increases their ability to achieve academic and physical growth to their potential, and it enhances their overall quality of life. Inclusive education teaches all children team work and how to interrelate and function together with others of different abilities. They learn to value diversity, see the ability of others to contribute, and it gives children a sense of unity” (Ref 10)

Furthermore Temko stresses that it is also important to utilise strategies such as Vision Building, Circle of Friends, MAPS, Paths, Self-determination, and Person Centred Planning to build successful inclusion in addition to the more traditional resources. In Queensland we are very fortunate to have access to these concepts and ongoing education on inclusion and person centred planning, via organisations such as ‘Pave the Way’ and CRU (The Community Resource Unit).

Families utilising these strategies and parents working collaboratively with schools that are on board for inclusion pave the way for successful inclusion. QPPD strongly agrees with these strategies and resources, which are very familiar to us, here in Australia, by those developing and utilising inclusive practice. We concur with these statements of what inclusion actually is. They are extremely important as a starting point to achieving inclusion for children with disabilities. They highlight that there is so much more to inclusion than just being physically present in a mainstream classroom.

Over the past few years QPPD has conducted many events and workshops for parents and educators utilising our own Australian expertise of people such as Bob Jackson and Darrell Wills. We have also had wonderful input at our events from people such as Sandra Seymour and Paul Cain. They are academics with vast experience in the practical application of the concepts of inclusion.

Events QPPD provided for the benefit of the whole educational community were: “The Illusion of Inclusion” June

2004 and “Building Belonging” June 2006. Despite these efforts to provide a fuller understanding of inclusion at governmental level, and to move inclusion forward the momentum has been extremely slow. The reasons for the lack of full implementation of policies remain a mystery, given the obvious benefits to all.

Throughout 2007, 2008 QPPD has provided workshops on Inclusion, focusing on the practicalities of inclusion led by Professor Robert Jackson, for parents and teachers. These sessions have been extremely well attended and appreciated. Pockets of better practice have occurred and could be widespread with wholehearted understanding and support by entire schools, rather than just resting on the individual teachers.

To further reinforce the benefits of inclusion we recommend the article “Inclusion, it’s not for everyone?” again by Colleen Temko. She says “If the general thought is that inclusion makes people feel good, then why wouldn’t it be for everyone? A goal of education is to help children reach their potential and become productive members of society. When people feel good, they have a greater capacity to function to their potential in every aspect of their lives. There are sports, clubs, assemblies, and other non-academic activities that help children become well rounded and more receptive to learning. If overall needs are important for all children, they are equally important to the growth of a child with a disability too. Meeting all of a child’s needs should not be conditional upon placement. Being physically placed in the regular class should never mean that any needs are sacrificed. Additional needs can be met that cannot be met in an excluded setting”. (Ref 11)

Alberta and other parts of Canada also have a particularly strong history of Inclusion. The fruits of their work over the past 20 or more years are now being seen by the widespread acceptance of students with disabilities attending Universities.

Here in Australia, the situation regarding Inclusion varies from State to State, school to school, year to year. In Queensland the government has been extremely slow to embrace Inclusive Education despite an upsurge of demand from parents, allies, people with disabilities themselves, academics and educators. This groundswell led to the Taskforce on Inclusive Education which made many recommendations endorsed by the Minister of Education and the Arts at that time, Anna Bligh.

**The Taskforce on Inclusive Education 2004** supported recommendations which were:

- 1) That the Queensland Government publicly supports the vision and benefits of an inclusive society. Dec 2004 (responsibility of Education Queensland)
- 2) That the Minister adopts and promotes a vision of inclusive education for diverse learners and leads the implementation of comprehensive system changes to achieve that vision. MAC Students with Disabilities to be convened by Sept 2004 (Responsibility of DETA)
- 4) That the Minister takes steps to ensure that the importance of communities, and particularly families, in contributing to the creation of inclusive education environments for diverse learners is translated into effective policy and practice. Policies to be reviewed and updated as necessary

- by end 2005 (responsibility Education Queensland)
- 5) That schools implement policies to embed collaborative relationships with parents/caregivers to enhance their participation and where possible that of their child, in making decisions about the child's education. Policies to be reviewed and updated as necessary by end 2005 (responsibility Education Queensland)
  - 6) That schools provide accessible information about their dispute resolution processes and that an independent complaints mechanism be developed and implemented so that in unresolved cases parents/caregivers have access to a system of due process. June 2005 (responsibility Education Queensland)
  - 7) That the Queensland Studies Authority develops by Dec 06 syllabuses and other documents that support the development of an inclusive curriculum that emphasises achievement of educational outcomes within key learning areas for all students. Documents reviewed and updated as necessary by end 2005 (responsibility QSA)
  - 8) That the Minister establish a rigorous research program in all schooling sectors of Queensland along the lines of the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study, which examines the link between the range of pedagogic practices in classrooms for students with disabilities and the relationship of these practices to student outcomes. Research programme to commence in 2005 (Responsibility DETA)
  - 9) That Ascertainment as a process for the allocation of resources, be phased out by 2005 and that a new resource allocation methodology be developed. Three year transition commencing 2005 (Responsibility DETA)
  - 10) That professional development programs focusing on strategic implementation of the vision be developed and implemented within a planned timeframe to meet the identified needs of the workforce. PD to commence 2005 (Responsibility DETA)
  - 11) That by January 2006 all Queensland pre-service teacher education programs be required to ensure that inclusive education is a pervasive theme in their courses of study and to demonstrate the effectiveness of the courses. (Responsibility DETA)
  - 12) That the Teacher Application process include, among its criteria, reference to inclusive education theory and practice. Begin 2005 (responsibility DETA)

#### **The Ministerial Advisory Committee - Students with Disabilities (MAC)**

The terms of Reference of The Ministerial Advisory Committee - Students with a Disability 2005-2008 were:

- 1) To provide advice to the Minister for Education and the Minister for the Arts on the development and implementation of key policies and strategies **promoting** inclusive education for students with disabilities within the context of the goals of *QSE-2010* and the Government commitments under the *Education and training reforms for the future*.
- 2) To provide advice on the formal links with other Government departments to ensure a high level of coordination and consultation between departments in the

- delivery of services to students with disabilities.
- 3) To provide advice on other matters referred to it by the Minister
  - 4) To provide advice on research projects and major initiatives as required by the Minister or as approved by the Minister
  - 5) To provide a six monthly report in writing to the Minister for Education and the Minister for the Arts on the activities and future initiatives of the Ministerial Advisory Committee.

QPPD believes that this Committee in its 3 year duration has fallen short in the task of **promoting** Inclusive Education, choosing rather to stay with the status quo of provision of 'an array of services' and even actively promoting special education in segregated settings, building new special schools, rather than resourcing and promoting inclusion. This has occurred despite assurances in *QSA 2010* that 'inclusion is guaranteed and that there will be a shift of resources to reflect where students are'.

A faulty interpretation of what inclusion actually means, allows Education Queensland to use the word 'inclusion' in reference to students 'clustered' and to suggest that special schools are inclusive, even though these schools only have students with disabilities and are often out of the local communities of those students.

The MAC did however finally act to implement a new enrolment policy, which in theory, makes it more likely that a student with a disability can enrol in their school of choice, and it did assist in implementation of the DDA requirement by government to be embedded in the education system. While QPPD welcomes an inclusive enrolment policy we remain concerned

that so many families continue to face less than inclusive practices. Furthermore as a result of a request by some members of the MAC, the Education Department has developed a comprehensive Parent Information Website, to inform parents of what is available to them and their rights. They welcome feedback to improve the site.

The MAC has **not** been successful in improving the language used with regard to students with disabilities, which often leads to confusion for parents and schools alike. For example speaking of 'programmes' in the coding of the speciality of certain schools, which makes it appear that the other schools do not offer Inclusive education. What used to be called SEUs (Special Education Units) are now called Special Education Programmes; it would be easy to assume the students belong in the Unit, rather than in their mainstream classes, supported by the various resources of the Unit.

As of March 22nd 2009 the recommendations of the MAC have not been made available to us. This is very worrying as these recommendations would be helpful in further impetus and improvement to the Education System.

The Education Policy and Practice Sub Committee of QPPD has worked tirelessly to respond to requests by Education Queensland to provide our suggestions for improvements at every opportunity. For example, input was provided to the Student Action Plan and our experiences and research on the Misalignment of Policy and Practice was presented at a meeting of the MAC in August 2007.

The focus on Inclusive Education over the past few years has led to the

development of the following statement from DETA (Department of Education, Training and the Arts).

“Inclusive education ensures that schools are supportive and engaging places for all students, teachers and caregivers. It is about building communities that value, celebrate and respond to diversity. It is underpinned by respectful relationships between learners, teachers and caregivers. It is supported by collaborative relationships with communities and governments. It is about shaping the society in which we live and the type of society to which we aspire. Because of the diversity of school communities in the public schooling sector, our students have rich opportunities to acquire the skills and values necessary for a productive life in an open, just and multicultural democracy” (Ref 12)

Furthermore the Statement recognises the challenges in delivering on their promises and tries to address these in the rest of their statement.

QPPD welcomed this statement and its promises; however our own research of many parents’ experiences shows us that there are **still** widespread systemic issues which impinge on students with disabilities and their families. The statement is not fully effective as it does not go far enough and define inclusion. QPPD believes that if the content of this statement was applied in mainstream schools, inclusion would be a long way toward becoming a reality for our students.

However the need for improvement to access to the curriculum **has** been recognised for students with disabilities. Education Queensland Curriculum Branch has shown leadership recently in the development of Guidelines for students with disabilities to enable those students to

fully access “curriculum based education” the same as all other students.

### **QPPD Position on Inclusion**

Queensland Parents for People with a Disability Inc (QPPD) vigorously defends justice and rights for people with a disability by exposing exclusionary practices, speaking out about injustices and promoting people with a disability as valued participating members of society

In 2009 not much has changed in the way of school practices. QPPD has undertaken vigorous advocacy for the past 25 years to stop the injustice of children with a disability being denied access to the education programs occurring in mainstream classrooms in local schools. Sadly, the need for such advocacy still remains today. In 2009 not much has changed by way of school practices, despite improved policies. Children with a disability still face discriminatory practices, are rejected, and are segregated and congregated. QPPD will continue to advocate for their full inclusion as research consistently confirms **inclusion in education is best for all children.**

QPPD wants an education system where all young people can receive their education in a mainstream school, where there is a commitment to removing all barriers to the full participation of each child as a valued and unique individual. QPPD wants an education system where the new paradigm is ***All Children Belong Together.***

QPPD knows all children have educational needs, some children with and with out a disability will have

additional education needs. All children deserve to be supported to achieve their potential at school. Failure by Education systems to provide an education, on the same basis as their peers, for children with a disability is a breach of human rights. Exclusion of children is a human rights issue not a resource issue and must be addressed as an issue of human rights first and foremost.

QPPD fully agrees with The Alliance for Inclusive Education, UK: “The changes we wish to bring about are based on our conviction that all young people need to be educated in a single mainstream system which can support all young people to learn, play and live with each other.” (Ref 13)

We know that this has benefits not only for the student involved but also yields many benefits to all the students and the school community. Many parents have commented on these benefits and many teachers have commented on the benefits and learning they have received from being involved in Inclusive Education. When fears and barriers are broken down, tremendously advantageous experiences are the result!

### **What still needs to be done?**

It is evident that there still needs to be an ‘overarching’ strategy and commitment to inclusion. Once that commitment to inclusion is actually made as a statement by the Premier and the Ministers of Education and Disability, there then needs to be an action plan to get **all** Principals on board. The up skilling of principals and teachers needs to be a dedicated process, led only by highly skilled people with strong inclusive values. It is also vitally important that alongside a commitment to develop and practice

truly collaborative partnerships with parents, there needs to be an independent complaints procedure for backup when necessary.

### **To Summarise**

We should be getting clearer about the history of trying to obtain inclusive education for children in Queensland, clarifying definitions, understanding what inclusion actually is, what has been done and what still needs to be done. We consider that progress in Queensland has been hampered by several things:

- 1) The lack of a commonly agreed definition of Inclusive Education
- 2) The absence of a clear overarching strategy towards Inclusion for all students with disabilities.
- 3) The absence of a true commitment to inclusion despite theoretical commitments and improved policies.
- 4) The absence of an independent complaints procedure

The major influences for the improvements have been:

- a) The Education Standards of the DDA.
- b) Requirements for the DDA to be embedded in all government departments.
- c) Constant vigilance and lobbying by systems advocates and their allies using every opportunity to inform policy makers about inclusive education and the need for it.

QPPD seeks inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream education settings.

We know that the way forward is to uphold the fundamental human rights



for all children, including students with a disability to participate in education in regular school settings. This will finally see educational and social inclusion become a reality and will bring benefits to students themselves, their families and their communities.

all members of our society in Australia can enjoy social inclusion.

### **Conclusion**

During the past two decades there have been considerable efforts to improve the inclusion of students with disabilities in the mainstream education system. These efforts have been supported by international human rights and our own DDA legislation as well as Queensland's own policies.

However the impetus of all of these rights and policies to move forward and deliver inclusive education to our students on the same basis as their peers has been hampered by the lack of a clear definition of what inclusion actually is. This has enabled tinkering around the edges of the existing dual system, rather than commitment to a truly inclusive education system for all our children.

QPPD is concerned that inclusive education is a long way from being a reality for all students with a disability in this State. Rights and policy are not aligned, and the practice leaves many students without the education they need to participate in society. Educational apartheid erodes the human rights of children with a disability and will result in future generations of children experiencing disability facing social exclusion as adults. This cannot be condoned or justified.

We look forward to the time when social justice is served, human rights are upheld, and all students being educated together is the norm so that

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