Inclusive School Practices Toolkit

Writing a School Inclusion Policy

This tool has been developed as part of the *Inclusive School Communities Project*, funded by the National Disability Insurance Agency. The project is led by JFA Purple Orange.

## Introduction

“Inclusive communities start with inclusive neighborhood schools that value diversity and respect the right of ALL students to be welcomed and to belong.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

For a school to deepen its practice as an inclusive community of learning, it needs to describe what it wants to achieve and why that is important. For the purpose of this tool, this is termed a ‘school inclusion policy’. It might include a definition of what inclusive education is and a commitment to certain values and inclusionary practices. Generating new policy content can be a difficult task for school leaders.

This tool is designed to assist school leaders with the process of writing a new inclusion policy or reviewing and improving an existing one. Keep in mind though, that access and inclusion should feature across all school policies ensuring the school meets their legal (and moral and social justice) obligations to students living with disability and their families.

## Ideas

Inclusive education is:

* A human right
* Best for everyone
* Based on evidence
* Supported by law[[2]](#footnote-2)

The right to access a quality inclusive education is encompassed in Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), to which Australia is signatory[[3]](#footnote-3). Article 24 includes a clear and explicit expectation that education is inclusive. In addition to the UNCRPD, there are various national and state-based policies that establish a framework around people living with disability accessing and participating in education. See tool titled ‘Policy Framework around Students Living with Disability’ for an overview of the disability rights and inclusion policies relevant to education. Internal school policies must adhere to the laws and policies that apply to students living with disabilities and their families.

School policies are rules that are intended to help all school community members understand their rights and responsibilities at the school. They also inform and communicate the culture and practices of a school.

It makes good sense for every Australian school to adopt a school inclusion policy. After all, the policy is a statement of intent and it sets the scene for the systems and culture that then deliver it. Inclusion can feel like a weighty topic and it may seem daunting to try and craft such a policy. This tool sets out some considerations that may assist the school to resolve its school inclusion policy. To assist the drafting process, the school may find it helpful to source several different school inclusion policies already operating elsewhere. School leaders and other staff can then identify parts of these policies that they feel are particularly strong and take those as the basis for building their own school inclusion policy taking into consideration their specific school community demographics, needs, and preferences.

## Actions

In August 2019, ten South Australian schools gathered as a Community-of-Practice (CoP) to discuss a range of elements relating to inclusive school communities. This included a small group activity in which school delegates reviewed and discussed school inclusion policies from around Australia (found online); these include examples from different education settings and locations. This activity may be replicated in a staff meeting as a starting point for schools wanting to develop their own school inclusion policy.

When we ran this activity, school delegates in our CoP discussed what a school inclusion policy might look like and identified the following seven ingredients for a successful policy:

Accurate – Accurate in how it describes what inclusive education is and does not confuse it with education arrangements that are better described as *integration* or *segregation.*

Action-focused – Worded in ways that make it easy for the school to identify the actions it needs to take to create and sustain an inclusive school community. It sets out the types of behaviour and character the school expects of all its stakeholders.

Clear – Clear and not easily capable of misinterpretation. The rules described in the policy are obvious to all readers and do not need prior knowledge to be understood.

Concise – Concise and succinct, so that the meaning is not lost in long prose. Only relevant, useful information is included.

Consistent – Consistent, in that every part of the statement upholds the key values the policy is meant to reflect. Key points are repeated, and terminology is used consistently.

Values-driven – Includes an explicit set of values that are expected to underpin everything the school does. It describes these values in ways that make it easy for the reader to emotionally connect with their importance.

Well-worded – Uses language that does not describe the imperative in terms of students’ disabling circumstances (refer to the ‘medical model of disability’) but instead describes the imperative in terms of how the school responds to such students (refer to the ‘social model of disability’). It uses language that is affirming and comprehensive, and without hidden messages.

Schools may use the above ingredients as a checklist on their school inclusion policy to ensure it has every chance of championing their inclusive school vision.

## More Information

School Inclusion – From Theory to Practice, an online platform created by Loren Swancutt to share and unpack school-level design, implementation and leadership processes that support the realisation of inclusive education in Australian schools and school systems. https://school-inclusion.com/

Queensland Department of Education’s ‘Inclusive Education Policy Statement’, which is based on their shared vision and the right for students of all social, cultural, community and family backgrounds, and of all identities, and all abilities to receive high quality education. <https://education.qld.gov.au/student/inclusive-education/Documents/policy-statement-booklet.pdf>

Victoria Department of Education and Training’s ‘Education for all’ policy to support the inclusion of students with disabilities and additional needs in government schools. https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/participation/Pages/studentswithdisability.aspx

**Acknowledgement**

This tool was written by Robbi Williams, CEO of Julia Farr group and edited by JFA Purple Orange.



1. All Means All (n.d.). For parents – Why include? Retrieved from http://allmeansall.org.au/for-parents/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Community Resource Unit (2018). What is inclusive education? Education fact sheet 1. Retrieved from http://cru.org.au/ wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Fact-Sheet-1-WHAT-IS-INCLUSIVE-EDUCATION.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. UN General Assembly (2016). General Comment 4: Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education. Retrieved from https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/CRPD\_General\_Comment\_4\_Inclusive\_Education\_2016\_En.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)