

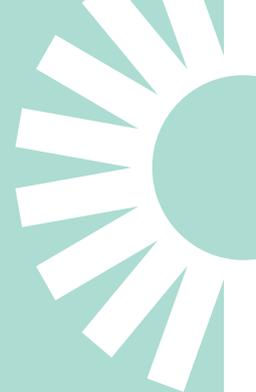
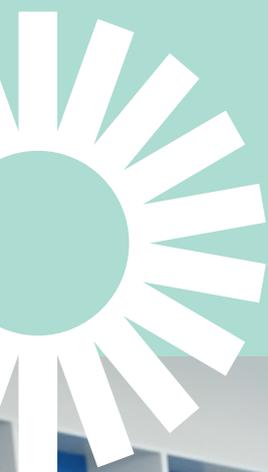
Inclusive education: What does it mean for you and your school?

Inclusive education is more than just giving students with disabilities the opportunity to attend school with other students who don't have a disability. It is about valuing unique contributions, dignity, belonging, and giving all students an equal opportunity to actively participate in all areas of learning.¹ This means accommodating school settings, systems, and experiences to the needs of all students.

“An inclusive environment means understanding that everyone’s brain and bodies are different, and we have different needs. Society needs to be inclusive to all.”

— Elise, student

Many countries, including Australia, have historically approached disability by separating those with from those without, but this type of exclusion is something that our society is moving away from. Both in education and in broader community life, there is growing recognition that we can honour our shared humanity by embracing and honouring diversity. Inclusive education has been acknowledged by many as the most effective way to combat discriminatory attitudes, build welcoming and inclusive societies and achieve education for all.²



What does inclusive education look like?

Inclusion can look different in every school, but the differences don't have to be dramatic. What might seem like small changes can make a huge difference to the lives of students with a disability.

The accommodations put in place will always be guided by the needs of students. Some things you might see at an inclusive school include:

- Quiet study spaces to help students self-regulate. These are spaces with lower levels of noise, lower lighting and sensory toys which can be especially helpful for Autistic people.
- Providing information in larger text for students with visual impairments.³
- Providing alternative assessments where the format isn't accessible to the student.³
- Presenting information visually can make it easier for some students to understand and follow along.³

Depending on the support needs of all students, adjustments may be made at an individual level, in the classroom, or at a whole school level. Parents and caregivers, teachers, education supports, and others within the school administration work together to ensure that accommodations are effective and student needs are met.³ While adjustments made may be the result of an individual student's needs, the additional supports can be of benefit to all children in the classroom, irrespective of if they have a disability or not.

How can you contribute to inclusion in schools?

There are small steps each of us can take to make schools more welcoming and inclusive. What might be a small change for you can make the world of difference to your school community, especially for families and students with a disability. Members of the school community can help by:

- Getting to know the families and children who have disabilities – some families and individuals may wish to keep details about their disability private, and that is to be respected. But that shouldn't stop you – get to know the person, not the disability.

- Not making assumptions about a student's needs or skills based on their disability – experiences and abilities differ greatly amongst people with disabilities, so be curious and open-minded.
- Talking to your teacher and school – some schools run information sessions about their approach to inclusive education and can be a great source of advice for how you can contribute to improving inclusiveness within your school community.
- Talking to your children openly about disabilities, answering their questions and filling in the gaps in your own knowledge – remembering everyone has something to learn.
- Learning from disability advocates, people in your community, or disability organisations (the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations is a good place to start!).

“People in the community can make their school more inclusive by keeping an open mind, engage in conversations and being fully involved in their school. Everyone wants to be included. We're able to put small things into place to make sure that can happen. That might just be saying hello, it might be asking if someone needs help. It might be asking another parent if their child would like to join for a play date. Small things like that can make a big difference for everyone.”

– Melissa, Leading Teacher of Inclusive Practices (Primary school)

The benefits of building and supporting an inclusive school environment are felt by all students – those with a disability and those without. For more information about these positive and life-changing impacts, see the other information sheets in this series including 'Inclusive education: What is it?' and 'Inclusive education: What are the benefits?'



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Acknowledgements

This information sheet was developed in consultation with parents/carers of children and young people with and without disabilities alongside children and young people with and without disabilities. This document is a collaborative creation between a number of disability and youth organisations including Amaze and is proudly funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Training.

References

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3. Inclusive education - Teaching students with disability. Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. 2020.