



Inclusive education: What is it?

Education is a human right. Everybody deserves to have equal access to quality education but for people with disabilities there can be many barriers that make accessing education difficult. Australia and other countries around the world are gradually moving towards more inclusive education settings, as the benefits seen in schools and students continues to grow.

The Victorian curriculum provides flexibility for different educational needs, and an increasing number of schools are embracing inclusive learning practices. This is good for everyone as research shows that inclusive education has significant, ongoing benefits for all students, regardless of whether they have a disability.

Making schools truly inclusive involves support from the whole school community. There are many small steps people can take that have a big impact. Having a basic understanding of what disability and inclusion truly mean is a good first step to creating an inclusive environment.

“Including students with disabilities in schools is important because that’s where so much of a child’s learning happens. That’s where they pick up attitudes... and where they learn about the world. And so, it is important that a school is a place where they learn about as much as possible - which includes disability and disability inclusion.”

— Ciri, student



“There needs to be so much more awareness on invisible disabilities but also accessibility for all disabilities... I wish people would understand sensory overload, why I need headphones, fidget toys, or why I need to sit down on public transport without people judging me.”

— Ella, student

What is disability?

If you don't know much about disability, then you're not alone.

Research shows that most Australians have positive attitudes towards people with disability, but many feel unsure of how to act around people with disability.²

Disabilities result when there are barriers in physical and social environments that combine with individual differences to stop people from being able to participate equally in society.

For example, take a student whose disability makes it difficult for them to quickly process instructions given verbally by a teacher. The problem is that the instructions are only offered verbally, not that the student can't process the instructions in this way. Something like this can be easily overcome with the addition of the instructions also being available in a written format.

Disability is diverse

There are many, varied types of disabilities. These can be:

- physical
- developmental
- sensory
- and more

It is important to recognise that there can be significant variation in the individual needs of people with disability. Different people with the same disability can also have different needs to one another. Some people have multiple disabilities.

There is also variation at an individual level. Many people's support needs vary from day to day. Some people have more difficulty focusing on some days than others while some people need mobility aids on days when they are not feeling their best but can go without aids on days when they feel better.

Some disabilities are invisible

Sometimes you will know when somebody has a disability; mobility aids are an obvious visual cue that somebody might have a physical disability. But many disabilities are not so obvious. Those disabilities which can't be seen, often referred to as invisible disabilities, can have impacts on all elements of an individual's life.

Just because you can't see somebody's disability doesn't mean that it's not there.

By being open to learning more about disability, people's experiences living with disability and what support they might need, we can all contribute towards building a more inclusive future for everyone.

Inclusive education means education for all

Inclusive education ensures that every student is given equal opportunity to learn, that every student is given what they need to thrive, and that no student is discriminated against. Making education inclusive means:

- minimising barriers to equal participation and belonging,¹
- valuing individual differences and unique contributions,³
- helping everyone learn together.³

Catering to the diverse and varying needs of individual students means that inclusive education must be flexible, and this flexibility has benefits for all students.¹

For further information about how inclusive education works and the benefits for all students, please see the other information sheets in this series including 'Inclusive education: What does it mean for you and your school?' and 'Inclusive education: What are the benefits?'



Education and Training

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References

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