

Media Release

4 November 2019

The right to inclusive education must not be contested by the Disability Royal Commission at the first hearing commencing in Townsville today

Today marks a historic day with the commencement of the first public hearing of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability on education and learning.

For too long the rights of people with disability to inclusive education have been contested in this country, and misguided ideas have prevailed, with devastating impact.

Decades of [evidence](#) overwhelmingly shows that children and young people with disability achieve best in inclusive schools - and that their non-disabled peers benefit as well - yet they continue to be placed in special schools, separate classrooms, in part-time schooling, and doing a separate – or worse, no – curriculum.

The Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE) is a new national coalition to ensure that Australia adopts a human rights and evidence-based approach to education for children and young people with disability.

We will be attending the first hearing and call on the Disability Royal Commission to uphold in accordance with its Terms of Reference, the full and equal enjoyment by all children and young people of their human rights, and to recognise the role of inclusive education in the realisation of a more inclusive society.

The Disability Royal Commission must not stray from this course; it must not put inclusive education “on trial” or allow itself to be swayed by those who want to maintain the status quo, or worse, that seek that Australia go backwards by increasing segregated education.

Inclusive education is a human right for all recognised by the UN in international law that binds Australia – the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and General Comment No. 4 – and it is everyone's right, regardless of their disability and the complexity of meeting their needs.

The role of the Disability Royal Commission is not to contest, diminish or interrogate inclusive education; rather it is the systems that continue to fail children and young people with disability, and those who would deny them an inclusive education that must be interrogated.

For as long as society chooses not to include children with disability in education and to set them up for a life apart and at its margins, the experiences of violence, abuse neglect and exploitation that are the subject matter of this Disability Royal Commission will remain unresolved and insurmountable.

Quotes attributable to Mary Sayers, CEO, Children and Young People with Disability Australia:

“Last week we released a [landmark report](#) that shows the systemic abuse and neglect of students with disability and they are routinely abused, excluded, suspended, bullied and their educational experience is categorised by low expectations.”

“The Disability Royal Commission presents an opportunity for Australia to right its wrongs and start providing children with disability the inclusive education they are entitled to – it is their human right.”

Quotes attributable to Michelle O’Flynn, Director, Queensland Advocacy Incorporated

“Queensland now has a Human Rights Act with the right to education whereas previously it was at the discretion of the Minister.”

“It is imperative that the Royal Commissioners ensure that their deliberations and findings reflect the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and that all students with disability are

included in general education just as people with disability are supported and included in community."

"If we don't support and include children in the supportive environments of school then what kind of life on the outer are we condemning them to as excluded adults?"

Quotes attributable to Sue Tape, Queensland Collective for Inclusive Education

"As students and families go about the process of readying themselves for the Royal Commission, we remind ourselves about who we are: "... a group of families who promote inclusive lives for our children with disability and work together to make inclusive schools a reality for all."

"We want the Commissioners to consider the impact of segregation as an act of exploitation and educational neglect. We want the impact of micro-exclusions and emotional aggression to be examined as a cultural failing of the education system to recognise the need for inclusion. We want the lack of national leadership and whole of government approach to be examined."

This and the next generation of students need ALL of us to be the 'adults in the room' and lead real change for ALL students, now."

Ends

Mary Sayers, CEO of Children and Young People with Disability and co-convenor of the Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education will be attending the first hearing in Townsville between the 4 and 7 November and is available for media comment. All media enquiries to marysayers@cyda.org.au or 0407 126 351



Chair & Co-convenor



Co-convenor



Members



Purple Orange



Tasmanian Disability Education Reform Lobby



Queensland Advocacy Inc.



FAQs – Some Myths and Truths about Inclusive Education

Myths and misguided ideas include:

- A school or early childhood service cannot include a student because it does not have enough resources
- Inclusive education is only for some students
- Students with intellectual disability or complex disabilities cannot be included in general education settings
- Inclusive education is when a student attends a 'mainstream' school but they are withdrawn from the class for 'special' education classes or units
- Inclusive education can occur in segregated settings
- Inclusive education leads to poorer educational outcomes for students without disability because they take up all the teachers time
- Students with disability have better educational outcomes in "specialist" segregated settings
- Segregated settings keep children with disability safe
- Parents can make free and informed choices, in an education system free of 'gatekeeping' and discrimination
- Students who exhibit behaviour that is perceived as "challenging" cannot be included in general education

Truths:

- Six decades of research show the benefits of inclusive education for ALL students
- Students with disability who are properly supported in general education settings have better academic and post-school outcomes than their peers with disability in segregated settings. But the benefits don't stop there – they also experience a range of social and behavioural benefits
- There are a wide range of benefits for students without disability, teachers, educators and the community
- Students whose needs are met in a supportive and inclusive learning environment with positive peer role models are less likely to exhibit behaviour that is perceived as "challenging"
- Children and young people with disability and their families experience widespread discrimination and 'gatekeeping' and face significant barriers in asserting their right to inclusive education

For more information on the evidence for inclusive education available at <https://www.cyda.org.au/inclusion-in-education> and includes:

Evidence review

Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation

Fact sheets

- What is inclusive education?
- The benefits of inclusive education
- Addressing ableism in education
- Transformation to inclusive education: the next steps