

## Media Release

12 December 2019

### New national education policy ignores students with disability - again

**We needed to have a Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability to investigate the failure of education systems to provide inclusive education and address segregation, discrimination, violence and abuse for students with disability. Yet the new [Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration](#) endorsed by all [Australian Education Ministers](#) today only mentions the word 'disability' once.**

For as long as society chooses not to include children and young people with disability in education it sets them up for a life apart and at its margins, and the experiences of violence, abuse neglect and exploitation will remain unresolved and insurmountable.

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) the national representative organisation for people and young children with disability and the Chair and co-convenor of the Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE) recently released the results of its National Education Survey of almost 500 parents and carers of primary and secondary students with disability and found that over the past year around:

- 1 in 10 students had been refused enrolment
- Almost half had been excluded from school events or activities
- 1 in 4 were subject to abuse by either being restrained or secluded
- Half had experienced bullying by other students and by educators
- 1 in 5 didn't attend school full time
- 14% had been suspended.

The Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE) is a national coalition to ensure that Australia adopts a human rights and evidence-based approach to education for children and young people with disability. Our organisations together are extremely disappointed that children and young people with disability were not prioritised in this new national plan.

Australian states and territories are not meeting their international obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to provide inclusive education, and continue to segregate students with disability, in special schools and classes, along with failing to provide inclusive environments in regular education and continuing to use restraint and seclusion.

Australia was slammed by the UN for failing students with disability in September of this year during the review of its human rights record, with both the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Committee on the Rights of the Child calling on the Australian government to urgently address these issues. UN disabilities expert Dr Markus Schefer expressly noted then that "the Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians (the predecessor of the plan released today) does not explicitly identify students with disabilities as a priority, and it does not commit explicitly to inclusive education".

Once again, despite the fact that 18.8 percent of Australian children require educational adjustments because of disability<sup>1</sup>, and they face poorer life chances because they are more likely than people without disability to leave school early and to have a lower education levels, their educational rights have not been prioritised.

Together the ACIE calls for:

- A National Plan for Inclusive Education and a comprehensive review of policy and practice at all levels of the education system to ensure the rights of students who experience disability are upheld, consistent with Australia's obligations under the UN

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<sup>1</sup> National Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD), Report of Government Services 2019

Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities, and in keeping with the definition of inclusive education outlined in General Comment 4)

- Whole of government leadership and action to provide a universally accessible and fully inclusive education system with clear targets and timetables
- Investment in and accountability for improvement in outcomes for students with disability
- Phasing out segregated education in special schools and special classes, with no more investment in a dual track system that does not support full inclusion
- Education and capacity building for all schools and teachers to provide inclusive education

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

*“It really beggars belief that a national education policy fails to prioritise overcoming the educational disadvantage and discrimination children and young people with disability face in their education”*

*“The Disability Royal Commission must hold education jurisdictions to account by making strong recommendations for them to right the wrongs that are happening every day in Australian schools, and for the transition from parallel ‘special’ and ‘mainstream’ education systems to one education system for all.”*

**Quote attributable Michelle O’Flynn, Queensland Advocacy Incorporated**

*“Many people with disability experience a lifetime of devaluation from birth, through their school years and beyond. The imprint left upon people by the multiple layers of discrimination, exclusion and rejection is often a terrible burden of loneliness, pain or anger. If we don’t want adults with disability to face indefinite detention, endure social exclusion then we must start with inclusive education”.*

**Quote attributable to Sue Tape, Convenor, Queensland Collective for Inclusive Education**

*“Once again Australian students with disability are left without clear national leadership”*

**Quote attributable to Gina Wilson-Burns, Deputy Chairperson, All Means All – The Australia Alliance for Inclusive Education**

*“The Australian government has missed an opportunity to send a message that students with disability matter. This is disappointing given that we all know that students with disability are being failed across Australia and that the rate and extent of segregation is growing”.*

**Ends**

The spokespeople above are available for media comment.

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Purple Orange



Queensland Advocacy Inc.



Tasmanian Disability Education Reform Lobby



QUEENSLAND  
COLLECTIVE  
FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

## **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