

STAR VICTORIA



STAR VICTORIA is dedicated to change community attitudes towards people with intellectual disability and advocate and empower them to ensure they live fully inclusive lives of their own choosing.



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INTRODUCING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education has long been a priority for STAR Victoria, but it's far from a new concept, nor is it a local matter.

More than a hundred years ago, Australian children with disabilities were often hidden away or placed in residential institutions. Between the 1920s and the 1960s, children with disabilities found themselves segregated from their peers in what came to be known as special schools. Since the 1960s there has been more integration, but it is applied unevenly and special schools still exist, separating children early in life and setting them up for lifelong exclusion.



Since 1973, all Victorian children are entitled to an education, and in 1984, a major review recommended that all children should have the option to attend mainstream schools and parents should make that choice, not the Government.

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Inclusive education means...

Creative Curriculums

Indepth Training for Teachers

Closing of Special Schools

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The United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) recommended that all children with disabilities should be educated in integrated settings. This was consolidated in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Need Education, adopted by the World Congress on Special Needs Education in 1994. This statement, to which Australia is a signatory, was crystal clear on the benefits of regular schooling as the “most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all”.

Despite the Disability Standards for Education being written into the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) in 2005, a review in 2012 found that discriminatory practices continued to occur, with the main barriers to inclusion being organisational, awareness and training. The 2012 Held Back report by the Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission was also critical of the lack of systems within the Department of Education to record and evaluate outcomes for students with disability, the high percentage of educators who were unaware of the Disability Standards for education, the use of restrictive interventions to manage challenging behaviours and bullying of students with disability.

There is a wealth of evidence that inclusive education is not just good for children with disabilities, it's also good for other children. It's cost effective, good for teachers, the school and ultimately society as a whole. And it's not just the right thing to do – it's the law.

The Victorian Government has a commitment to inclusive education, and requires all Victorian schools to comply with the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic), the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) and the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth).



This commitment is welcome, and STAR appreciates the efforts made by the Department of Education and Training to implement its Inclusive Education agenda. That's why the decision to develop another special schools is puzzling, and STAR will be challenging the use of government funds to build a new special school at Endeavour Hills. It's a retrograde step that segregates children early in life, and sets them up for a lifetime of exclusion.

There is a better way, and Victoria can be a leader, not a laggard, by banishing the policies of the past and embracing a fully inclusive society that respects all Victorians, regardless of their abilities, as valuable members of our community.

Inclusive Education from the Australian Human Rights Commission

“Education in schools, training courses and universities is more than just maths, reading and writing. It includes lessons not taught formally and how those lessons are taught – these impact upon perceptions of diversity and inclusion”. This was the backbone of the recent speech by Dr Ben Gauntlett, Disability Discrimination Commissioner for the Australian Human Rights Commission.

In the speech at the Queen Victoria Women’s Centre in late 2019, Gauntlett hammered home the point that “disability inclusion is more than a plan or piece of legislation – it is a mindset”. He goes on to discuss the importance of education as a critical means of moulding that mindset. Children, particularly young children, are incapable of seeing prejudice; they see friends, they see opportunity, and, above all, they see the whole person. Unfortunately, through the use of student segregation, we instead cement a notion of difference in the next generation of humans.

Gauntlett says “in education and disability policy in Australia, we seem to not want to look closely as to why aspects of our education system are not inclusive”. We see ramps, teaching aids and minor changes to a curriculum and believe the job is done. Inclusive education achieved. But as Gauntlett states, this is not inclusive education. “Rather, (inclusive education) is the meaningful inclusion of people with disability in the design and operation of the education system in compliance with Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability.”

“It is not enough just to spot a problem. We need to volunteer solutions”



Photo Credit - Australian Human Rights Commission

“Disability inclusion is more than a plan or piece of legislation”

While it is easy to focus on these negatives, Dr Gauntlett says “when criticising education policy, we need to be constructive.” “It is not enough just to spot a problem. We need to volunteer solutions.” STAR believes these solutions begin with:

- Training teachers to deliver more creative and inclusive curriculum
- The closing of special schools and the integration of children with additional needs into the mainstream and;
- The creation and cementing of disability policy that reflects our human rights obligations

In conclusion, Gauntlett says that this form of progressive disability policy makes sense both economically and ethically. To continue with segregating “one subset of the population from another for 15-20 years and then to join them together later and expect no consequences, makes no sense.”

To read the full transcript of Commissioner’s speech click the link [here](#)

“It is a mindset”



Photo: Stephanie Sweeney and her cat
Photo Credit - Maria Sweeney

Inclusive Education in Action

Maria and Stephanie Sweeney

"We don't know what they were thinking, but it left us with the impression that we were not welcome." This was Maria Sweeney's takeaway message when she made the attempt to enrol her daughter Stephanie into mainstream primary education. After trying the traditional manner to get Stephanie, who has autism and an intellectual disability, enrolled in the same primary school as her older sister, they were met with roadblocks.

This less than warm welcome came after Maria and her partner had enrolled Stephanie in an autism specialist school. After consulting with her paediatrician and touring some of the schools they believed this to be the best approach. "The specialist school was very good, and Stephanie learned a lot of the personal disciplines that would have made mainstream enrolment difficult, like taking turns, and listening to instructions."

However, Maria saw the potential in her daughter to grow beyond the confines of the special school. With this transition, she wanted to emphasise her daughter's individual needs, having seen other parents move their children to mainstream schooling at stages that were either too late or too early. She initially moved from the specialist school to a satellite classroom designed for children with disabilities on the mainstream campus. "We made the decision early on that we would make the decisions about Stephanie's schooling based on what was in her best interest. That meant that we had to be willing to change if her needs changed."



"It has to be on her terms. She has to be ready to want to do those changes."

Unfortunately, when the aforementioned roadblocks of the mainstream primary school were removed and Stephanie was allowed to attend full-time, Maria still saw some issues with how the school and her teachers were coping. "In some years, the teacher was engaged and enthusiastic, and in other years it was obvious that we were considered to be a burden. I understand that even mainstream students can face these challenges, but for autistic and intellectually disabled students, the loss of time is particularly critical."

The turnaround came when it was time to enrol Stephanie in mainstream secondary school, which seemed to be much easier. The secondary school she was attending had a history of including disabled students, and according to Maria they seemed more upbeat about her potential and opportunities.

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"I think we both (as parents) had a lot of concerns at the start, because until you become part of the community affected by autism, you only have stereotypes to rely on."

“

“(School) was one of the safest environments for her to learn that sometimes the world sucks. People are going to be nasty and how are you going to stand on your own two feet when you’re out there, instead of cocooning them in bubble wrap until they are at the end of special ed.” - Maria Sweeney

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From the get-go, Maria has had nothing but positive things to say in regard to her high school experience with Stephanie. The school has taken steps to inform her classmates and year level about autism and how to best interact with her as they take all the same classes with slight modification for her level. Maria also complimented the work of her aid, stating they have been innovative and dedicated and willing to take on any suggestions or advice regarding Stephanie’s learning needs. “Stephanie is doing really well at high school. Her social skills have improved, and she is a person who loves to learn. She feels that she is part of the school community there.”



Looking forward, Maria sees so much potential in her child as she approaches the end of her schooling. The potential to leave school, get a job and start saving for retirement are all very viable options, with her daughter looking for a position in the field of animal care to support her love of animals. “She changed my view on a lot of things. Every time someone says she can’t do it, yes you can. What makes you say she can’t? I will always say they can do it and it’s just a matter of finding the right puzzle piece to the problem. You find that right puzzle piece, you can get them to do anything.”

STAR will soon be running a webinar series for parents and educators on the benefits of inclusive education. Participants will learn how to access the classroom supports a child with intellectual disability needs to attend the local mainstream school. Please keep an eye on our [Facebook page](#) for updates!

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN VICTORIA

What we think



We think that every child has the **right** to learn and be happy at school.



Rights are things everyone should be able to

- get
- have
- do.



The law says everyone has rights.

We want every student in a government school to



- feel welcome
- feel important



- be happy at school



- learn.

Credit: Department of Education and Training.

AT A GLANCE

What we will do



Every school should

- work with students and their families to decide
 - how each student learns best



- what help each student needs at school

- be kind to students



- teach students the best way they can.



Every school must also make **reasonable adjustments** for students with disabilities.

A reasonable adjustment might mean a school changes something to help a student learn.



For example, a school could

- give a student extra help to do work in class
- give a student different tasks to help them learn.



All schools need to make reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities.



It is the law.

Why Segregate When You Can Include?

Editorial

The Andrews Labor Government made an election commitment in 2018 to transform the old Endeavour Hills Secondary College site into a new specialist school, “designed to meet the additional needs of students with disabilities.”

This is old century thinking. Dividing students into disabled and non-disabled groups is not only ethically wrong, it deprives everyone of the benefits that flow from an appreciation of each other’s differences. That’s why the commitment for a segregated specialist school is a distressing backward step.

Everything that can be provided in segregated schools can be provided in the regular school with the appropriate supports and funding.

There is also a legal question that hangs over segregated schooling and Australia’s commitment and obligations under international agreements. These commitments make it clear that in education this means inclusive education, where children with additional physical supports or learning needs attend the same schools as their typically developing peers.

These commitments, and the adoption of a progressive, Inclusive Education policy in Victoria, gave us confidence that all students of all abilities are valued for who they are and that students who have a disability belong in the same schools as their non-disabled brothers and sisters.

Information provided to parents in making decisions about their child’s education, both formal and informal, should stress the inclusion principle, and there is ample research to show that students with disabilities do better educated in mainstream schools alongside their non-disabled peers. This is possible when teachers are skilled and resourced to meet the individual needs of the students in the class and to respond accordingly.

Change will happen all students currently attending a special school setting are individually contacted and offered the supports they need in the neighbourhood regular school, to be included, learning, and above all, happy.

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“Change will happen all students currently attending a special school setting are individually contacted and offered the supports they need in the neighbourhood regular school, to be included, learning, and above all, happy.”



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The Victorian Government must show the leadership it has displayed with its commitment to inclusive education by redirecting the \$438.6 million that would segregate students in a new specialist school towards the establishment of a best in class learning centre with the expertise and personnel to support teachers and schools across Victoria.

We recommend the establishment of a Centre of inclusive Education Leadership, a place where all Victorian schools in the region can access the necessary expertise to help them establish classroom environments in which students, regardless of difference, can learn and experience success.

STAR would welcome an opportunity to meet with members of the Andrews Government to discuss options for inclusive education in Victoria.



The Gap Widens for Employment of People with an Intellectual Disability



Globally, Australia ranks 21 out of 29 developed countries in the employment or participation of people with a disability, despite evidence showing that employees with a disability are more reliable, productive, safe and good for business. So, are we doing enough?

Recent data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) show that working age (15-64) people with a disability are twice as likely to be unemployed than those without a disability, and the rate is widening.

Delving even deeper, the news is even less positive for people with an intellectual disability. The latest Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data shows that only 39% of people with an intellectual disability are in the job market compared to people with other disabilities (55%) or no disability (83%). Most of their jobs were not full time and fall within the occupations of labouring (45%), trades (16%) or community service (12%) positions.

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According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, people with a disability aged 15-64 are twice as likely to be unemployed



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At STAR Victoria we are also concerned at the most recent Disability Employment Caseload Reports that showed that only 3.7% of people with disability assisted to find work were people with an intellectual disability, in comparison to 41% for each of those in the physical or psychiatric disabilities categories.

All this despite the efforts of advocacy groups, improved government policies, added funding and new support services aiming at improving vocational outcomes for people with disabilities.

This raised a number of questions:

- How can we achieve more equity of opportunity to employment?
- How can we ensure barrier free recruitment, that reasonable adjustments are appropriately applied and that we are removing biases (whether conscious or unconscious) impacting on inclusive employment?
- How can we ensure people with disabilities who are employed, do not lose their jobs in such turbulent economic times?

There is clearly a long way to go to make our society truly inclusive. We know that segregation begins at school, and yet we still build and fund special schools that separate children with additional learning needs from their peers. This cascades into segregation in adult life, and sets up barriers to employment that prevent people with disabilities accessing meaningful work and achieving their life goals.

At STAR Victoria, we are interested in hearing from you and your experience. We think it's time we put equitable employment for people with intellectual disabilities back on the table, and we want to hear from you about how to do that.



ABS data shows that only 39% of people with an intellectual disability are in the job market

Contact Us



We all need to look after ourselves and each other, so Ross House and the STAR office is closed and our staff and volunteers are working from home.

We are still working our usual hours, 9.30 am - 4.00 pm Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays and you can call us or email us if you need help or advice.



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