The Ministerial Taskforce on

Inclusive Education

(students with disabilities)

June 2004

Queensland
Government

Letter of Transmission

16 June 2004

Anna Bligh MP
Minister for Education and
Minister for the Arts
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Minister

I have pleasure in presenting to you the Report of the Ministerial Taskforce on Inclusive Education (students with disabilities).

This Report places the education of students at educational risk, in particular students with disabilities and learning difficulties, within the broader social and educational reforms bringing rapid changes to our schools and communities.

It also builds on and includes relevant recommendations from the three interim reports previously submitted to you. These include a review of the legislative and policy framework to reflect inclusive language, practices and policies, in particular, Education Queensland's policy, *SM-18: The Provision of Special Education Programs and Services to Students with Disabilities*. Other issues already addressed in those reports, such as transport and responses to learning difficulties and student behaviour, are not canvassed here.

This Report represents the outcomes of the deliberations of the Taskforce over the two-year period of its activity. It must be acknowledged that many differing views were expressed during meetings and this Report reflects the majority view of the broad membership of the Taskforce.

In presenting this Report to you I wish to acknowledge the outstanding commitment and effort that members of the Taskforce and its relevant sub-committees have given to this work. I believe implementation of these recommendations will contribute significantly to educational outcomes for students in the future.

Yours sincerely

Professor John Elkins
Taskforce Chair

Contents

Pip04045

Executive Summary

Work of the Taskforce

The Taskforce on Inclusive Education (Students with Disabilities) was established by Anna Bligh MP, Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts, in March 2002 to provide advice on how to make the schooling system more inclusive for students at educational risk, in particular students with disabilities and learning difficulties. In meeting its terms of reference, it consulted widely across education systems, visited schools and drew upon advice from other government departments concerned with health, families and disability services. It became clear in Taskforce deliberations that a systemic, strategic approach was required to address core issues. Among these issues was the need to accelerate the transition, from a long tradition of compensatory educational approaches premised on a deficit view of the learner, to contemporary approaches that celebrate diversity and difference, as a basis for building responsive, collaborative, communities of learning.

The issue of inclusive education is located at the core of ongoing debate about social reform and educational renewal. The education of students with disabilities is central to the concept of human dignity and the achievement of full citizenship. While there is much to commend Queensland schools in their willingness to respond to the needs of each student, some organisational structures, and core beliefs and practices remain that hinder the provision of quality curriculum and pedagogy for students with diverse learning needs.

The task of implementing educational approaches that genuinely address students' diverse learning needs belongs to the community – at local, state and national levels and must ultimately become a fundamental part of our culture. Educational renewal calls for a shared vision of changes needed to achieve equitable outcomes, informed by research that addresses quality teaching for diverse learners.

Challenges on the journey to inclusive education

Seven broad challenges arising from the journey to inclusive education imply a need for systemic transformation:
- the fundamental right of students to achieve full citizenship through quality education
- an array of wider social changes impacting on schools
- increased challenges for classroom teachers in providing quality education for learners with diverse needs
- evidence of dissonance between current policy and practice
- the need for realignment of resources to support inclusion
- national and international developments impacting on schools
- the need to provide support for changes to deliver inclusive education.

Vision for inclusive education

The Taskforce has developed a vision for inclusive education that states:
Quality education is made available to, and accessed by, all Queenslanders, underpinned by respectful relationships between learners, teachers and parents/caregivers. It is supported by collaborative relationships with communities and governments. It excludes no one, welcomes all. Growth in wisdom and humanity is celebrated.

The Summit on Inclusive Education (29-31 May 2002) defined inclusive education as *'a process of responding to the uniqueness of individuals, increasing: their presence, access, participation, and achievement in a learning society'*.

Five principles underpinning inclusive education were identified. These address:

• Responsiveness to the uniqueness of individuals through their access to and presence, participation and achievement in, a broader learning society.
• The importance of partnerships, which embrace and reflect diverse views and respect for each other's knowledge.
• Equitable opportunities for students to maximise their learning potential and educational outcomes through quality educational processes and pathways.
• A learning community that questions disadvantage, challenges social injustice and empowers all members to participate as active citizens in society.
• The accountability of individuals and organisations in contributing to inclusive education.

To ensure its success, the vision needs strong leadership and commitment at three broad levels – whole of government, community and schools.

While the majority of Taskforce members support this vision of inclusion it must be acknowledged that there are range of views within our community regarding the path to inclusion.

Achieving the vision – summary of recommendations

The Taskforce identified seven key areas and 12 recommendations that require attention in pursuit of the vision.

Leadership

Recommendation 1

That the Queensland Government publicly support the vision and benefits of an inclusive society.

Recommendation 2

That the Minister adopt and promote a vision of inclusive education for diverse learners and lead the implementation of comprehensive system changes to achieve that vision.

Recommendation 3

That the Minister prepare and promulgate a Green Paper on Inclusive Education.

Community and family expertise

Recommendation 4

That the Minister take steps to ensure that the importance of communities, and particularly families, in contributing to the creation of inclusive educational environments for diverse learners, is translated into effective policy and practice.

Recommendation 5

That schools implement policies to embed collaborative relationships with parents/caregivers to enhance their participation, and where possible that of their child, in making decisions about the child's education.

Improved accountability to families

Recommendation 6

That schools provide accessible information about their dispute resolution processes and that an independent complaints mechanism be developed and implemented so that in unresolved cases parents/caregivers have access to a system of due process.

An inclusive and responsive curriculum

Recommendation 7

That the Queensland Studies Authority develop by December 2006 syllabuses and other documents that support the development of an inclusive curriculum that emphasises achievement of educational outcomes within key learning areas for all students.

Empirical support for the vision

Recommendation 8

That the Minister establish a rigorous research program in all schooling sectors of Queensland along the lines of the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study, which examines the link between pedagogic practices in classrooms for students with disabilities and the outcomes achieved by these students.

Equitable use of resources

Recommendation 9

That Ascertainment, as a process for the allocation of resources, be phased out by 2005 and that a new resource allocation methodology be developed.

Recommendation 10
That professional development programs focusing on strategic implementation of the vision be developed and implemented within a planned timeframe to meet the identified needs of the workforce.

Recommendation 11
That by January 2006, all Queensland pre-service teacher education programs be required to ensure that inclusive education is a pervasive theme in their courses of study, and to demonstrate the effectiveness of the courses.

Recommendation 12
That the Teacher Application process include, among its criteria, reference to inclusive education theory and practice.

Conclusion

The new vision of inclusive education underpins the Smart State.

Inclusive education contributes to building community capacity to include and value all of its members. Teachers, parents/caregivers and other community members work together to create socially just visions of what they wish to achieve, and develop the strategies and resources to implement such visions.

Universities have an opportunity to prepare teachers for inclusive schools and engage collaboratively in regional and local issues in ways that transform both the current preparation and continuing development of teachers. The single greatest challenge as we move forward is the education and re-education of teachers, parents/caregivers and community about the theory and practice of inclusive education.

A Scottish Parliamentarian recently emphasised that the core of the debate about inclusive education was values:

> The debate … is not about figures, politics … or dogma; it is about belief, faith, caring and the creation of community…. It is about human rights and human beings. (Russell, Scottish Parliament, 2001 – cited by Allan, 2003, p. 178)

Inclusivity promotes cooperation and unity for the common good. Building the common good ensures a prosperous future for all.

The Taskforce

The Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts, Anna Bligh MP, established the Taskforce (Membership, Appendix 1) in March 2002 to provide advice on how to make the schooling system more inclusive for students at educational risk, in particular students with disabilities and learning difficulties. While the Terms of Reference (Appendix 2) focused on particular categories of students, it became clear in Taskforce deliberations that a systemic, strategic approach was required to address core issues. Among these issues was the need to accelerate the transition, from a long tradition of compensatory educational approaches premised on a deficit view of the learner, to contemporary approaches that celebrate diversity and difference, as a basis for building responsive, collaborative, communities of learning.

This Report draws upon the *Department of Education Strategic Plan 2003-2007*, which gives priority to 'community identity and capacity', and 'recognising and valuing the diversity of communities and in partnership with them, contributing to a socially just society' (p. 4). It also acknowledges the visions and plans of the Queensland schooling sectors, which foster inclusive education and the building of valued, respectful relationships.

In addition, the Taskforce tapped the accumulated wisdom of teachers, parents/caregivers, students, administrators, unions, universities, disability groups and their advocates, and other government departments such as Queensland Health, Disability Services Queensland and the Department of Families.

Another major contribution arose from Education Queensland's Summit on Inclusive Education in June 2002, which brought together the views of thousands of teachers from across the State, following a large number of forums designed to promote new thinking about ongoing challenges. While the Summit outcomes were confirmed and enhanced by several international educators who met with the Taskforce on various occasions and by research papers and quality articles made available to the Taskforce, no systematic review of the literature was undertaken. The findings of the Summit have provided important input that is helping to frame the Education Queensland Action Plan for Inclusive Education (Students with Disabilities).

The Taskforce reviewed Education Queensland policies and practices relating to an inclusive approach for students with disabilities and learning difficulties. Members made visits to schools in all sectors to contextualise the issues addressed at its regular meetings. Finally, it conducted a Futures Day with international futurist, Dr Sohail Inayatullah, to shape a vision of Inclusive Education.

This Report places the education of students with a disability and learning difficulties in the broader social and educational movements that impel exciting changes in schools and communities. These include the dominant social contexts in which political and educational endeavours are transacted and the educational contexts in which schooling policies and practices play out. It also builds on and includes relevant recommendations from the three interim reports. Other issues already addressed in those reports, such as transport and responses to learning difficulties and student behaviour, are not canvassed here.

Challenges in Inclusive Education

The journey towards inclusive education is underpinned by important challenges that imply a need for systemic transformation. These include: the fundamental right of students to achieve full citizenship through quality education; an array of wider social changes; increased challenges for classroom teachers; dissonance between current policy and practice; realignment of resources to support inclusion; national and international developments and the need to provide support for changes that lead to inclusive education.

Right to achieve full citizenship through quality education

The core social context that illuminates the plight of marginalised groups is the issue of human rights, which has as its centre the concept of human dignity, social justice and the achievement of full citizenship. These issues go to the heart of the debate on inclusive education. Consideration of human dignity compels us to question our values, identity and belongingness; who is included or excluded, why and by what means. The search for answers forces us to consider the structures we have invented to serve our needs, and to examine why so many of those structures create silos of separation, the antithesis of a community that seeks to welcome and include all its members.

While there is much to commend Queensland schools for their willingness to respond to the needs of each student, we believe that some core viewpoints and practices remain that hinder the provision of quality curriculum and pedagogy for students with diverse learning needs. Some of these represent the incomplete professional development of the workforce, while others are related to the belief that there is insufficient support to enable effective education for students in regular classes.

Challenges of social change

The Government's vision for schools in the current decade, *Queensland State Education – 2010*, [QSE – 2010] acknowledges a range of societal changes – to families, to the cultural mix in our communities, to information technology, to the economy and future work scenarios – which require students to learn 'to live with complexity, uncertainty, and diversity' (p. 4). In answering the challenge to become a learning society, the report emphasises human and social capital as key resources rather than just physical and material resources. The report notes:

> Because human and social capital develop within families and through wider networks, Queensland state schools should be re-conceptualised as part of that learning society and become embedded in communities – local and global – in new ways.

> This will transform the means and ends of teaching and learning in schools – those involved, the way it occurs, and the principles on which the curriculum is constructed. It changes what teachers do from teacher-centred learning and gatekeepers of information to managers of the learning experiences of children. (p. 8)

The report also places emphasis on students 'achieving personal best rather than passing or failing' (p. 9). It cautions:

> The existing disparities in opportunity for students arising from the distribution of wealth, different cultures and location will get worse unless there is dedication to an equity principle that gives everyone a chance at the same outcome. This is an obligation of government. (p. 8)

The 2010 – QSE report also affirms that 'schools must be provided with flexibility to address the individual learning needs of students with a disability in different ways' (p. 17).

Schools need to adapt to these challenges to inspire and educate a wide range of very diverse students and to contribute to building a sense of community that may be translated from the microcosm of classroom and schools to the wider community.

Challenges in the classroom

The support and management of the behaviour of some students is an escalating concern for school staff, parents/caregivers and the wider community. Many teachers do not have the expertise to deal with such behaviour and some schools and districts have limited support structures in place for challenging behaviours. From anecdotal evidence it would appear that suspension and eventual exclusion of these students is becoming common practice.

The percentage of school students who have been diagnosed with disabilities and other special educational needs is increasing each year above the increase in the student population. While the reason for this is unknown it is consistent with the experience of other states in Australia.

There is steady increase in the number of students with disabilities who are enrolling in local school programs. Parent choice is the major factor in this trend.

The Taskforce notes the importance of early identification of students with disabilities. The provision of appropriate interventions and supports for the students and their families remains areas of critical concern for many parents/caregivers, especially with the introduction of the preparatory year in 2007.

The Queensland Government has responded to some of these issues through the Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF) Agenda with initiatives such as the Prep Year Trial and the reforms in Middle and Senior Schooling potentially providing opportunities for the promotion of inclusive practices in schools. Many senior students with diverse learning needs already experience the opportunities of multiple pathways and access to a variety of service deliverers. The challenge is to ensure that all these initiatives are inclusive of students with disabilities.

Dissonance between policy and practice

Terms such as 'integration', 'inclusion' and 'individualised instruction' do not enjoy common meaning among parents/caregivers, teachers, educational leaders and other community members, leading to inconsistencies in interpretation and expectation.

The Taskforce found that current policy statements, developed and added to over time, now carry incongruencies that need to be addressed by a comprehensive review to align them with projected new directions on inclusive education. The current review of the *Education (General Provisions) Act* provides an opportunity for this to occur. Education Queensland's policy, *SM-18: The Provision of Special Education Programs and Services to Students with Disabilities* (commonly referred to as Placement Policy), is an example of this dissonance.

Realignment of resources to support the goals of inclusive policy

While all schooling sectors have contributed significant resources towards the education of students with disabilities, additional resources are needed: to refocus and realign curriculum and teaching, to assist school administrators to transform their school communities, and to re-skill the teaching workforce to provide quality teaching to diverse learners. As with attempts to create inclusive communities by the closure of institutions, the reframing of services should not be viewed as revenue saving exercises. Indeed there is a need for resources to be provided to support teachers to bring about the changes required to create inclusive school communities.

The Taskforce takes the view that the resource allocation for student support through the Ascertainment process is seriously flawed and requires a more flexible approach to ensure that students and their class teachers can access resources as needed.

National and international developments

The achievement of social justice through the provision of genuinely inclusive education resonates at national and international levels as well.

In the later part of 2004, the Australian Government will introduce the Disability Standards for Education into Parliament for implementation from 2005. The Standards are designed to provide clarity for education providers as to their obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and for students with a disability as to their entitlements.

In reporting findings of the 32-nation Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), Caldwell (2002) noted 'that disparities among students were wider in Australia than in most other nations, favouring girls over boys, urban over rural, high socio-economic over low socio-economic, and non-indigenous over indigenous'. Among the responses needed, he recommended: (a) 'giving unrelenting policy priority to achievement for all students in all settings'; (b) 'decentralisation of decision making to schools'; and (c) the enhancement of teaching to 'achieve better outcomes for all students' (p. 1).

According to UNESCO's *Salamanca Statement* (1994), 'Regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective way to combat discriminatory attitudes, create welcoming and inclusive communities and achieve education for all'. Such schools provide effective education to the majority of children, improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

The Salamanca Statement asks governments to:
• give the highest priority to making education systems inclusive
• adopt the principle of inclusive education as a matter of law or policy
• encourage exchanges with countries which have experience in inclusion
• set up ways to plan, monitor, and evaluate educational provision for children and adults
• encourage and make easy the participation of parents and organisations of disabled people
• invest in early identification and intervention strategies
• invest in the vocational aspects of inclusive education
• make sure there are adequate teacher education programs.

Support for change

The Taskforce located the issue of inclusive education at the core of ongoing debate about social reform and educational renewal. It acknowledges that schools cannot effect the necessary changes on their own without the leadership and vision of government and support of the wider community. The task of implementing educational approaches that genuinely address students' diverse learning needs belongs to the community – at local, state and national levels and must ultimately become a fundamental part of our culture.

Educational renewal calls for a shared vision of changes needed to achieve equitable outcomes, informed by research that addresses quality teaching for diverse learners.

Vision for inclusive education

The Taskforce has developed a vision for inclusive education that states: *Quality education is made available to, and accessed by, all Queenslanders, underpinned by respectful relationships between learners, teachers and parents/caregivers. It is supported by collaborative relationships*

with communities and governments. It excludes no one, welcomes all. Growth in wisdom and humanity is celebrated.

Definition

Inclusive education is a process of responding to the uniqueness of individuals, increasing: their presence, access, participation, and achievement in a learning society. (Summit on Inclusive Education, 29-31 May 2002)

Underlying principles

- Responsiveness to the uniqueness of individuals is celebrated through their increased access to, and presence, participation and achievement in, a broader learning society.
- Partnerships are essential, characterised by a shared commitment to inclusive education, which embraces and reflects diverse views and respect for each other's knowledge.
- All students receive equitable opportunities to maximise their learning potential and educational outcomes through quality educational processes and pathways.
- A learning community promotes the knowledge, skills, attitudes and practices that question disadvantage, challenge social injustice and empower all members to participate as active citizens in society.
- Individuals and organisations are accountable for their contribution to inclusive education.

Implementation

This vision needs strong leadership and commitment at three broad levels – whole of government, community and schools – to ensure its success.

The Government's broader vision – to create a 'society that values people with a disability; upholds their rights; and supports their equitable participation in everyday life' (*Queensland Government Strategic Framework for Disability 2002–2005*, p. 8) – underpins a strong commitment to inclusive education.

Inclusive communities need to be concerned about, and accept responsibility for, the education of all young people.

Inclusive education needs the commitment of schools, which require the emotional, professional and financial capacity, and confidence to ensure the successful participation and maximised achievement of every student and to celebrate the diversity of their school communities.

Achieving the Vision

Achievement of the vision requires: full community support led by Government committed to its implementation; harnessing of community and family expertise; improved accountability to families; development of an inclusive and responsive curriculum; empirical support for the vision; equitable use of resources; and building a confident and capable workforce. Each is considered in turn and linked to key recommendations.

Leadership

The Government's established vision for a society that values people with a disability and supports their equitable participation in everyday life impacts not only on society as a whole but, significantly, on the education sector. The notion of inclusion needs to be embedded in the promotion of Queensland as the Smart State and in all educational sectors.

Consequently, relevant legislation and policies will need to be reframed to ensure that students with disabilities are valued and supported among the diverse range of students in our schools.

Support for the vision requires continuing public leadership from the Minister in making clear the Government's commitment to a comprehensive reshaping of education that ensures quality teaching for diverse students.

Recommendation 1
That the Queensland Government publicly support the vision and benefits of an inclusive society.

Recommendation 2
That the Minister adopt and promote a vision of inclusive education for diverse learners and lead the implementation of comprehensive system changes to achieve that vision.

After two years exploring the complexities of delivering inclusive education to students, the Taskforce has come to appreciate that it is difficult and perhaps impossible to implement inclusive education in Queensland schools from 'the sidelines'. Given the long history of special education as the core service framework for students with disabilities, we are concerned that deficit views of students with disabilities and assumptions that they are the responsibility of 'someone else' will continue to dominate the thinking of teachers and parents/caregivers. In order to create a situation where schools are designed and resourced to educate the diverse array of students who may seek enrolment, the education sector and the wider community must be given the reasons why past approaches must be replaced with one that honours the diversity of all students. Such a change requires a fundamental shift in the behaviours, belief systems and attitudes of many teachers, from a deficit view of some students to one that acknowledges that all students are capable of learning when matched with appropriate pedagogical strategies in settings with their aged peers.

This substantial rethinking and revisioning of education will be a major undertaking, comparable to that of the Education and Training Reforms for the Future Agenda. It is a complex and comprehensive change that requires widespread consideration and debate. We urge the Minister to develop and circulate a Green Paper on Inclusive Education that provides opportunity for discussion on best practice approaches to quality teaching for diverse learners and related service supports. The Green Paper would address such issues as: celebrating and harnessing the strengths of diversity in community and school contexts; the power of inclusive language; review of curriculum from an inclusive perspective; empirical evidence on quality teaching for diverse students; assessment and reporting; transforming schools to embrace productive links with community; strategies to raise achievement levels of all students.

Recommendation 3
That the Minister prepare and promulgate a Green Paper on Inclusive Education.

Community and family expertise

An important contemporary challenge in education is to produce citizens with a positive view of diversity. In a rapidly changing world, it is widely recognised that, to equip young people for effective citizenship, schooling needs to be reviewed and renewed. While competition has its place, the school environment should promote a climate of caring, compassion, and genuine regard for all citizens to ensure that Australian society is inclusive. The processes of community consultation leading up to the Summit on Inclusive Education Conference in June 2002 revealed the value of seeking community input at the local school and district levels.

Available expertise, whether derived from classroom or specialist teachers or other support personnel, needs also to harness the experience and wisdom of parents/caregivers and, as appropriate, the students themselves.

Recommendation 4
That the Minister take steps to ensure that the importance of communities, and particularly families, in contributing to the creation of inclusive educational environments for diverse learners, is translated into effective policy and practice.

The parents/caregivers of a student with disabilities also have dreams, aspirations and expectations that their child will achieve to the best of his/her ability. An inclusive educational environment that is welcoming of students with disabilities and values the gifts they bring to our diverse society can facilitate the pursuit of such goals.

It is important to include parents/caregivers and, where possible, students themselves in decision making on a more equitable basis so that their contributions are valued and respected. Allan (2003) made an important observation in the Scottish context:
> Children have valuable insights into how they might participate and learn successfully, but their involvement in decision making within school has tended to be closely circumscribed. Parents are key authorities on their children's needs and have many unique insights into successful inclusion strategies …. [but they] have been kept at arm's length and … patronised and ignored by education professionals who think they know best. Children and parents are clearly too valuable a resource to be wasted in this way. (p. 177)

Recommendation 5
That schools implement policies to embed collaborative relationships with parents/caregivers to enhance their participation, and where possible that of their child, in making decisions about the child's education.

Improved accountability to families

Given the increasing pressure from parents/caregivers and the wider community for accountability in schools, it is important that schools report publicly and on a regular basis their progress in achieving inclusive educational outcomes and provide appropriate measures of student learning and achievement. The framework for such reporting may be established statewide against an agreed set of progress indicators carefully developed to represent genuine aspects of inclusive education. Ball (cited by Allan 2003) sounded a cautionary note about the effectiveness of accountability 'with … [its] emphasis on proving rather than improving … [which] creates an imperative for those under scrutiny to engage in fabrication' (p. 177). Allan reported simplistic indicators in the U.K. such as increased numbers of students with disabilities in regular classes and fewer numbers in special settings, but neither represented the real issues about inclusive curriculum and effective pedagogy.

Effective avenues of parent/caregiver participation need to be implemented to ensure that children with disabilities are scaffolded into educational environments by those who know them intimately, and that access to such expertise is maximised. This needs to be supported by formal advocacy support to ensure that family concerns or complaints are fully and properly addressed and that systems continue to improve. The task of advocacy for students with disabilities will typically be located at the local school level more than in the past. Parents/caregivers of children who have a significant disability often find themselves immersed in a 'disability world' as they pursue a raft of services and supports. They can be marginalised by these experiences, particularly when their child starts school. Creating more inclusive educational provisions for their children ensures such efforts benefit all children. Close and productive relationships between schools and their constituent communities contribute positively to the education of students with diverse learning needs.

Taskforce members reflected on the manner in which some parent complaints about the education of their children with disabilities are being managed. Members believe that the development of collaborative relationships with parents/caregivers and effective intervention are essential to minimise the occurrence of such disputes. The complaints management process should be accessible to all. Complaints data can be collected to highlight recurring issues and problems, which can be addressed to improve outcomes for participants. When disputes are not resolved within context of their occurrence (e.g. at school or district levels), some members expressed the need for an independent, external review process. This was not supported by the Queensland Teachers' Union.

Recommendation 6
That schools provide accessible information about their dispute resolution processes and that an independent complaints mechanism be developed and implemented so that in unresolved cases parents/caregivers have access to a system of due process.

An inclusive and responsive curriculum

Curriculum planning should include reference to inclusive practices that enable students with diverse learning needs to participate successfully and achieve maximum benefit and outcomes. It is essential that, as part of the inclusive curriculum agenda, schools measure, record and report on the educational achievements and outcomes of all students including those with developmental delay and/or cognitive factors that impact on their rate of learning.

For inclusion in education to be successful, leadership is required at all levels, from Government and the Minister to students in schools and their families. The major responsibility for leadership in curriculum frameworks falls to the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA). The QSA should review existing frameworks to ensure that genuinely inclusive curriculum is available for implementation in the 2007 school year. The reviewed curriculum would be expected to address curriculum content, quality pedagogy inclusive of diverse learners, assessment and reporting.

Recommendation 7
That the Queensland Studies Authority develop by December 2006 syllabuses and other documents that support the development of an inclusive curriculum that emphasises achievement of educational outcomes within key learning areas for all students.

Empirical support for the vision

In considering change strategies required to implement the vision, research is needed to identify quality teaching approaches for diverse learners. In addition, existing good practice examples of inclusion for diverse learners already occurring in schools should continue to be identified and highlighted as useful models. It has been amply demonstrated, through the Summit on Inclusive Education, other educational conferences and the Annual Showcase Awards among

others, that school personnel in all sectors are already providing significant impetus to inclusive practices through their leadership.

The Taskforce notes systemic improvements such as the creation of the Queensland Studies Authority, the initiation of major research efforts such as the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study and the ETRF, each of which can bring benefits to students with disabilities. We note also that advances are being made in pedagogy, assessment, pre-service education in universities and teacher support (through the Staff College Inclusive Education), but a more comprehensive approach that draws upon empirical evidence is needed to achieve the vision.

Recommendation 8
That the Minister establish a rigorous research program in all schooling sectors of Queensland along the lines of the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study, which examines the link between pedagogic practices in classrooms for students with disabilities and the outcomes achieved by these students.

Equitable use of resources

The Ascertainment processes for distributing resources to support students with disabilities has not delivered an equitable or satisfactory solution; indeed it appears to be subject to manipulation by those desperate for resources but unable to match need to designated classifications that yield the resources. In relating the findings of an inquiry by the Scottish Parliament into inclusive education, Allan (2003) noted 'that the formal system of assessing and recording children with special educational needs — what Warnock (1997) referred to as her "greatest mistake" — should be abandoned' (p. 178) as indeed it was, replaced by a new system of assessment.

The Taskforce understands that all three education sectors in Queensland are currently reviewing Ascertainment policy. The Taskforce stresses the need to reconceptualise the resource allocation methodology and resource utilisation, and believes that any new resourcing process must:
• be transparent and easily understood
• be linked to the identified needs in the school community and to needs of students with disabilities
• encourage inclusive practices – schools to explore strategies for developing sustainable inclusive programs
• be linked to accountability through student outcomes and
• assist school communities to make appropriate decisions at the local level.

Recommendation 9
That Ascertainment, as a process for the allocation of resources, be phased out by 2005 and that a new resource allocation methodology be developed.

A confident and capable workforce

For the teaching workforce to be effective, pedagogical practices need to take account of strategies that address a diverse student population. This is important in view of recent international best evidence research findings. Teaching is identified as a key influence on high quality outcomes for diverse students. The evidence reveals that up to 59 per cent of variance in student performance is attributable to differences between teachers and classes, while up to almost 21 per cent, but generally less, is attributable to school level variables (Alton-Lee 2003, p. v). Clearly, because what happens in classrooms has a major influence on student achievement, continuing development of teacher expertise is of vital importance.

The teaching workforce, augmented by specialist expertise in such areas as guidance, therapies, and special education, is the major resource available to implement the vision of inclusive

schools. How can inclusive schools be created from the present arrangement of regular, special units/classes and special schools? Many current and past initiatives to support students with disabilities have served to separate them (and their teachers) from their (respective) peers. Teachers who have taught students with disabilities in special schools and units have usually undertaken training programs different from those of other teachers. In contrast, implementation of the vision requires the provision of such specialist expertise to support diverse learners, their teachers and parents/caregivers, in inclusive educational environments.

This involves teachers with specialised knowledge of students with disabilities, learning difficulties, behavioural difficulties and other diverse educational needs working closely with their classroom colleagues to design, implement and evaluate effective educational programs. Such programs should rely less on withdrawal models that are not integrated into the regular curriculum and more on inclusive models, as appropriate. Consideration of disability and other diverse learning needs from functional and ecological perspectives places emphasis on curriculum and pedagogy rather than on what has typically been viewed as the child's 'weaknesses'. While it is noted that training of specialist teachers has not kept pace with levels of need for such expertise in schools, new models of training may be required to prepare teachers for such collaborative responsibilities. While an ageing workforce may contribute to shortages of teachers with specific expertise and experience, it is also important to continue to skill all teachers in teaching to the diversity of the students in their classrooms.

Allan (2003) acknowledged the tension that exists in the divergent nature of our obligations towards social justice, equity and inclusion by posing several questions:
- How can teachers be supported in maximising student achievement and in ensuring inclusivity?
- How can teachers be helped to understand the features of particular impairments and avoid disabling individual students with that knowledge?
- What assistance can be given to teachers to enable them to deal with the exclusionary pressures they encounter and avoid becoming embittered or closed to possibility for inclusivity in the future? (p. 177)

Clearly, there is a pressing need to address the professional development of staff at all levels in education sectors – central office, districts and schools – to engage them in implementing the vision. It is important to identify staff needs in a wide range of areas such as curriculum design; quality pedagogy for diverse learners; learner-centred strategies and development of communities of learners; collaboration with students and parents/caregivers; assessment; reporting; teamwork with fellow teachers, related specialists and teacher aides; building productive links with the community.

Flexible delivery of such programs should enhance availability and access, augmented by a series of regional forums. The Taskforce noted the particular issues relevant to rural and remote schools where staff struggle to access training, support and mentoring because of their isolation. Innovative solutions are needed to enable these schools to access support similar to their urban counterparts. Professional development programs conducted by the Staff College on Inclusive Education draw upon examples of good practice throughout the State as they address issues such as models of effective service delivery, and inclusive culture and practice.

Recommendation 10
That professional development programs focusing on strategic implementation of the vision be developed and implemented within a planned timeframe to meet the identified needs of the workforce.

While many pre-service teacher preparation courses now address the education of diverse learners within their course structures, it is important that student teachers not only perceive inclusive education as a pervasive focus in coursework, but also engage in its practice during

their practicum sessions in schools. Such study should include the nature of teamwork with colleagues, and productive engagement with parents/caregivers and the local community.

Recommendation 11
That by January 2006, all Queensland pre-service teacher education programs be required to ensure that inclusive education is a pervasive theme in their courses of study, and to demonstrate the effectiveness of the courses.

As part of the process in applying for employment in schools, teachers should demonstrate, among other requirements, their knowledge of inclusive teaching for students with diverse learning needs.

Recommendation 12
That the Teacher Application process include, among its criteria, reference to inclusive education theory and practice.

Conclusion

The new vision for inclusive education and consequent changes to the current paradigm will produce important advantages for the Government, our communities, and our education sectors, through accountability for performance at all levels of stakeholder participation.

The vision of inclusive education underpins the Smart State.

Inclusive education contributes to building community capacity. Schools alone cannot build an inclusive society, but they can model an inclusive spirit and set of practices that can animate a whole community. A community that seeks to include and value all its members will work with its schools and other educative agencies to ensure that all students receive the best education possible inside and outside of the school setting.

An important dimension of inclusivity will be the ways parents/caregivers, and especially those of children with disabilities, are valued and made to feel welcome in the processes of education. Such involvement enhances the sense of democracy in which everyone's views are sought and respected in the decision-making processes.

Education that espouses an inclusive philosophy will be advantaged by the ways in which teachers, parents/caregivers and other community members work together to create socially just visions of what they wish to achieve, and to develop the strategies and resources to implement such visions. Working together, along with support from the Government agencies, will bring greater transparency and credibility to the accountability processes – educational and financial.

Universities have an opportunity not only to prepare teachers for inclusive schools but also to engage collaboratively in regional and local issues in ways that transform the current preparation of teachers and the continuing development of teachers. This is perhaps the single greatest need as we move forward – the education and re-education of teachers, parents/caregivers and community about the theory and practice of inclusive education. In this task, universities, schools, parents/caregivers, business and industry and community are all co-teachers and learners, a genuine community of learners.

Allan (2002, p. 178) cited a Scottish Parliamentarian's reflection that values were at the core of the debate about inclusive education:

> The debate … is not about figures, politics … or dogma; it is about belief, faith, caring and the creation of community…. It is about human rights and human beings.

Finally, inclusive education provides what might be termed an 'integrated advantage'. Inclusivity is a bond that unites all interested parties so that they continually reinforce one another in ways that strengthen community standards and accountability. Rather than promoting an excessively competitive and divisive society, inclusivity promotes cooperation and unity for the common good. Building the common good ensures a prosperous future for all.

References

Allan, J. (2003). Productive pedagogies and the challenge of inclusion. *British Journal of Special Education*, 30(4), 175-178.

Alton-Lee, A. (2003). *Quality teaching for diverse students in schooling: Best evidence synthesis*. Wellington: Ministry for Education. Retrieved 15 May 2004, Available online: www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=document&documentid=8646&data=l

Caldwell, B.J. (2002). *Priorities for the transformation of schools*. Retrieved 22 May 2004, Available online: www.unimelb.edu.au/alumni/mum/mum2002/schools.html

Education Queensland. (2003). *Department of Education Strategic Plan 2003-2007*. Brisbane.

Disability Services Queensland. (n.d.). *Queensland Government Strategic Framework for Disability 2002–2005*. Brisbane. Retrieved 7 June 2004. Available online: http://www.disability.qld.gov.au/publications/StrategicFramework0205.pdf

Education Queensland. (n.d.). *Queensland State Education – 2010*. Brisbane. Retrieved 7 June 2004. Available online: http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/qse2010

UNESCO. (1994). *The Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education*. Paris.

Appendix 1

Membership and representation of the Ministerial Taskforce on Inclusive Education (students with disabilities) 2002-2004

Chair	Prof. John Elkins
The Association of Independent Schools, Queensland	Trish Brady
The Association of Independent Schools, Queensland	Dr. John Roulston
Association of Special Education Administrators in Queensland	Terri Lipscomb
Association of Special Education Administrators in Queensland	Michael Brett
Australian Association of Special Education	Wendy Burton
Australian Association of Special Education	Michael Brett
Community Representative	Ann Bromley
Council for Educational Renewal	Prof. Alan Luke
Department of Communities	Andrew Davis
Disability Council of Queensland	Brian Parker
Disability Services Queensland	Paul Grevell
Early Childhood Intervention Australia	Carmel Davis
Education Queensland	Prof. Roger Slee
Education Queensland	Michael Walsh
Education Queensland	Anna Brazier
Isolated Children's Parents' Association	Sally Cooper
New Basics Special Education Consortium	Bryan Hughes
Parent	Anna Magnus
Parent to Parent Association Queensland Inc.	Kerrye Parry
Practising Teacher	Trudy Smith
Queensland Advocacy Inc.	Nigel Webb
Queensland Association of State School Principals Inc.	Tom Hardy
Queensland Association of State School Principals Inc.	Despina (Esta) Thiris
Queensland Catholic Education Commission	Garry Everett
Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations Inc.	Chris Allison
Queensland Health	Katrina Horsley
Queensland Parents for People with a Disability Inc.	Fiona Connolly
Queensland Secondary Principals Association	Ian Ferguson
Queensland Teachers' Union	Dr John McCollow

Appendix 2

Terms of reference

1. The Taskforce will operate for a period of two years commencing in February 2002 and complete its work in February 2004.

2. To provide advice to the Minister for Education, and to work closely with the Director-General, on the development and implementation of key strategies promoting an inclusive education framework.

3. To provide advice and assist Education Queensland to develop an Action Plan for Inclusive Education (Students with Disabilities).

4. To provide advice on the status of educational services for students with disabilities, learning difficulties, behaviour problems and children at educational risk.

5. To provide advice on Education Queensland policies for an inclusive approach for students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

6. To provide advice on identifying students with disabilities and learning difficulties within the Queensland education system.

7. To provide advice on appropriate support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties in the precompulsory education age group.

8. To provide advice on the formal links with other Government Departments to ensure a high level of coordination and consultation between Departments in the delivery of services to students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

9. To promote community awareness of Inclusive Education and inform the Minister on international developments in Inclusive Education.

10. To provide a six monthly report in writing to the Minister for Education on:
    • The activities and future initiatives of the Taskforce
    • The extent to which Education Queensland has implemented an Inclusive Education Framework.