

The Ministerial Taskforce on
Inclusive Education
(students with disabilities)

June 2004
Government response



Queensland
Government

Minister's foreword

The Government recognises the importance of ensuring that all students are supported to achieve their potential.

I welcome the final report from the Taskforce on Inclusive Education (Students with Disabilities) and thank the members of the Taskforce for their time and dedication over the past two years.

Improving the educational outcomes for students with disabilities and operating within an inclusive education framework requires a continued commitment by government, educators and the community. The Government response to the Taskforce recommendations is a sign of our ongoing commitment to providing the best educational opportunities for all students, and particularly students with disabilities.

In response to the excellent work of the Taskforce, a Ministerial Advisory Committee on Inclusive Education will be established. It is important that we continue to build on our significant achievements.

This response to the Taskforce on Inclusive Education (Students with Disabilities) report confirms the Government's commitment to improving the educational outcomes for students with disabilities. The report contains twelve recommendations to assist the implementation of Inclusive Education within the department and the Government's response supports eleven of the recommendations and has identified actions for their implementation. One recommendation is not supported as we believe action is required now to progress Inclusive Education, rather than a further consultation paper.

I look forward to continuing to work with parents, teachers, professional and support staff and community members to ensure students with disabilities reach their potential.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anna Bligh'.

Anna Bligh MP

RECOMMENDATION 1

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

Position

Supported.

The Government is committed to achieving significant improvements in the quality of life of people in Queensland who have a disability. Through the implementation of the Queensland Government Strategic Framework for Disability 2002-2005, the Government will work with children and young people with a disability, and their parents/caregivers, to ensure that they are provided with the best possible education.

The Government is strongly committed to improving educational policies and practices to enhance the participation and achievement of students with disabilities.

Action

The Department of Education and the Arts will review their current commitments under the Queensland Government Strategic Framework for Disability 2002-2005 and set new goals that increase the presence, access, participation and achievement of children and students with a disability in Queensland government schools.

Timeframe

December 2004

Responsibility

Education Queensland

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.

Position

Supported.

The Government is committed to the principles of social justice and equity that provide all students with the educational opportunities to achieve their potential.

It is essential that Government is informed of the latest developments and is receiving accurate advice regarding the operation of its services. Supporting inclusive education and continually improving the system requires the commitment of all stakeholders to work cooperatively towards this goal.

Action

The Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts will establish a Ministerial Advisory Committee on Inclusive Education to provide advice on the development and implementation of inclusive education for students with disabilities.

Education Queensland will develop an Inclusive Education statement that clearly articulates the roles and responsibilities of educators and the system in developing inclusive school communities.

Timeframe

The Ministerial Advisory Committee on students with disabilities will be convened by September 2004.

The Education Queensland statement on Inclusive Education will be published by November 2004.

Responsibility

Department of Education and the Arts

RECOMMENDATION 3

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

Position

Not supported.

Action

A Green Paper is not required, and may slow the process of improvement, as the Government has a clear vision and direction for Inclusive Education. Action is required and the Government is working collaboratively with stakeholders to improve the educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

The Government is implementing the Queensland Government Strategic Framework for Disability 2002-2005, is establishing a Ministerial Advisory Committee on Inclusive Education, developing an Inclusive Education statement, and reviewing and updating all policies for students with disabilities (see recommendation 2 and 3).

Timeframe

See actions for all other recommendations from the Taskforce Report.

Responsibility

Department of Education and the Arts

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.

Position

Supported.

The Government recognises the important role of school communities, and particularly families, in supporting educators.

Inclusive education environments extend beyond the school gate and it is essential that there are collaborative partnerships with parents, schools, business, government agencies and other community organisations and members.

Action

All Education Queensland policies for students with disabilities will be reviewed to reflect the importance of communities and families in supporting students to achieve their potential through education.

Timeframe

Policies reviewed and updated, as necessary, by end 2005.

Responsibility

Education Queensland

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.

Position

Supported.

The Government recognises that teaching and learning is most effective when there is an active partnership between parents/caregivers and their schools.

Action

All Education Queensland policies for students with disabilities will be reviewed to ensure that processes and mechanisms for the inclusion of parents/caregivers in decision making and participation in their child's education are made explicit.

Education Queensland will develop an enrolment policy for all students to replace the current policy, Provision of Special Education Programs and Services to Students with Disabilities (commonly referred to as the placement policy).

Timeframe

Policies reviewed and updated, as necessary, by end 2005.

Responsibility

Education Queensland

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.

Position

Supported.

The Government is committed to providing open and transparent processes for parents to resolve issues and grievances.

For collaborative arrangements to be successful, it is important that there are clear and transparent pathways to address issues as they arise. These mechanisms need to be embedded in school and district practice and need to be assisted by independent community people.

Action

Written procedures for resolving complaints will be made available to all parents to ensure that complaints and inquiries are dealt with promptly and fairly in Education Queensland schools.

The complaints procedures will include processes for community representatives to assist with the resolution of issues and advice to the Director-General in settlement of unresolved disputes.

Consultation will occur with stakeholders and relevant unions in the development of any new mechanism.

Timeframe

June 2005

Responsibility

Education Queensland

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.

Position

Supported.

The Government is committed to providing opportunities for students irrespective of their personal circumstances, background and starting-point to participate fully in the educational and social experiences offered by schools and achieve outcomes according to their potential.

It is important that syllabus and support materials reflect an inclusive education approach.

Action

The Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts will refer the recommendation to the Queensland Studies Authority for advice on reviewing and updating the current syllabuses to ensure they are consistent with an inclusive education approach.

Timeframe

Documents reviewed and updated, as necessary, by end 2005.

Responsibility

Queensland Studies Authority

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 the range of pedagogic practices in classrooms for students with disabilities and the relationship of these practices to student outcomes.

Position

Supported.

The Government recognises the value of evidence-based decision making and the need for ongoing research into successful teaching strategies that support students with disabilities to achieve their educational potential.

The 2004-05 Department of Education and the Arts budget contains an allocation for undertaking research to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

Action

A cross-sectoral research program will be established to examine and report on ways to increase the capacity of schools to support the participation, learning and educational outcomes of an increasingly diverse range of learners.

Timeframe

Research program to commence in 2005.

Responsibility

Department of Education and the Arts

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.

Position

Supported.

Following consultation with parents, teachers, principals, therapists and other stakeholders and specialists, the Government recognises that Ascertainment is considered complex and time consuming and does not promote inclusive practices.

The allocation of resources to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities will be provided through a simpler, less time consuming process that supports program decision making at the local level.

The 2004-05 Department of Education and the Arts budget contains an allocation of additional funds to ensure the smooth transition to the new process.

Action

A simpler, less time consuming and more flexible resourcing methodology will be developed for the 2005 school year in Education Queensland schools.

Timeframe

Three-year transition commencing 2005.

Responsibility

Department of Education and the Arts

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.

Position

Supported.

The Government is committed to ensuring that educators have the skills and professional capabilities to respond to the future learning needs of the community.

Professional development opportunities need to assist staff increase their skills in providing support for students with disabilities and promoting an Inclusive Education approach.

The 2004-05 Department of Education and the Arts budget contains an allocation for undertaking professional development to improve the capacity of staff to provide the best educational services for students with disabilities in Education Queensland schools.

Action

A comprehensive professional development program targeting the skills needed for change will be developed and delivered to Education Queensland staff through the Staff College Inclusive Education.

The Professional Standards Framework for all teachers will reflect the skills required to develop and maintain inclusive schools.

Timeframe

Professional development program to commence in 2005.

Responsibility

Department of Education and the Arts

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.

Position

Supported.

The Government is committed to ensuring that educators have the skills and professional capabilities to respond to the current and future learning needs of the community.

The current review of the *Education (Teacher Registration) Act 1988* includes an analysis of the qualification requirements for teachers in Queensland. The Government supports the inclusion of Inclusive Education components in pre-service teacher training.

Action

The recommendation will be referred to the current review of the *Education (Teacher Registration) Act 1988* for action.

Timeframe

July 2004

Responsibility

Committee for the review of the *Education (Teacher Registration) Act 1988*

Recommendation 12

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

Position

Supported.

The Government is committed to employing a teaching workforce that is equipped to respond to the diverse needs of the community.

A sound knowledge and understanding of Inclusive Education by teachers is an important component for the success of the policy direction.

Action

Teacher application processes for Education Queensland schools will be reviewed and updated to include demonstration of understanding of Inclusive Education.

Timeframe

Beginning 2005.

Responsibility

Department of Education and the Arts