

Inclusive Education Statement - 2005

Inclusive Education is for everybody and is everybody's business. (R. Slee)

THE AIM OF THIS STATEMENT

Inclusive education reflects the values, ethos and culture of a public education system committed to excellence by enhancing educational opportunities for all students.¹ This statement clarifies the nature of inclusive education and its role in achieving the objectives that underpin public education in Queensland.

Education Queensland, through major reviews and initiatives such as *Queensland State Education – 2010*², the *Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS)*³ and the *Education and Training Reforms for the Future*⁴ embraces a school reform agenda with a focus on quality teaching and learning to enable young people to achieve high-level outcomes and to continue learning throughout their lives.

The potential of this reform agenda can only be realized through a commitment to inclusive education. The QSRLS found that a respect for diversity and commitment to social justice is embedded in, and integral to productive pedagogies, productive assessment and productive leadership.

While Education Queensland has an excellent record in developing social justice strategies, the inclusive education statement urges staff at all levels of the system to sharpen their focus on the equity and citizenship goals of public education.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education in Education Queensland:

- fosters a learning community that questions disadvantage and challenges social injustice
- maximises the educational and social outcomes of all students through the identification and reduction of barriers to learning, especially for those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion
- ensures all students understand and value diversity so that they have the knowledge and skills for positive participation in a just, equitable and democratic global society.

Inclusive education ensures that schools are supportive and engaging places for all students, teachers and caregivers. It is about building communities that value, celebrate and respond to diversity. It is underpinned by respectful relationships between learners, teachers and caregivers. It is supported by collaborative relationships with communities and governments. It is about shaping the society in which we live and the type of society to which we aspire.

¹ *Draft Strategic Plan 2004-2008* Department of Education and the Arts, The State of Queensland (Department of Education and the Arts), 2004, pg 11

² *Queensland State Education – 2010*, The State of Queensland (Department of Education), 2000.

³ *Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study*, The State of Queensland (Department of Education) 2001

⁴ The State of Queensland (Department of Education, Department of Employment and Training), 2002.

Because of the diversity of school communities in the public schooling sector, our students have rich opportunities to acquire the skills and values necessary for a productive life in an open, just and multicultural democracy.

It is from an inclusive education that students learn to respect and value difference and to develop productive processes for developing equity in their personal relationships and in their communities. Inclusive education is for everybody and is everybody's business.

EDUCATION QUEENSLAND'S COMMITMENT

Effectively responding to Education Queensland's commitment to inclusive education requires a refocus on understandings, relationships, policies and practices at all levels of the system.

Education Queensland:

- 1. Responds optimistically and constructively to the needs of educationally disadvantaged/marginalised students**
- 2. Uses diversity as a rich resource for building a connected and intellectually challenging curriculum in the classroom.**
- 3. Ensures that students, teachers and community members from diverse groups feel safe and free from discrimination, bias and harassment**
- 4. Respects student voice and ensures that all students learn *through* democratic processes**
- 5. Promotes locally negotiated responses to student, family and community needs through effective community engagement processes and cross-agency collaboration**
- 6. Ensures that all Education Queensland policies and initiatives recognise the centrality of inclusive education practices to quality education.**

INDICATORS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Valuing and responding to diversity are critical indicators in judgment about quality at all levels of the system. The following indicators can be used initially as guidelines to review current practices, promote dialogue, plan for change and implement reform. Later, they can also be used to help evaluate outcomes.

Indicators of Inclusive Education - System, Districts and Schools

- Principles of equity and social justice are embedded in policy, practices and decision-making at all levels.
- Professional learning opportunities are provided to enhance understanding of the recognition of difference and the factors that contribute to educational disadvantage, especially an appreciation of factors such as: poverty; gender; disability; cultural and linguistic diversity; and sexuality.
- Community capacity is built through effective partnerships within the school community and with all of the agencies responsible for supporting children, young people and their families.
- Stories of effective delivery of inclusive education are documented and disseminated.

- Plans reflect an ethos, organisation, culture and values underpinned by principles of social justice and by democratic processes.
- Data on access, participation, outcomes and retention of diverse groups are used to evaluate progress, to identify priorities for further action, to plan for improvement and to inform professional learning communities.

Indicators of Inclusive Education – Teaching and Learning

- There is a 'no blame' culture that is underpinned by high expectations for all groups of students.
- Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are aligned and meet the needs of diverse student groups.
- Curriculum is intellectually challenging for all students and connected with student and community imperatives and experiences.
- Curriculum programs are informed by student outcome data and by current research relevant to diverse student needs.
- Teachers build bridges from the knowledge and skills that students bring from their homes and communities to the knowledge and skills they need for success in schooling.
- All students are provided with the explicit and scaffolded teaching they need for success in schooling and beyond.
- Students are recognised as partners in the teaching/learning process and opportunities are provided for student voice, for example through negotiating curriculum and assessment.
- Evaluation of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment provides evidence that the interests, skills, knowledge and experiences of diverse groups are central features in the design of learning.

CHALLENGES IN DELIVERING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

1. Valuing and Responding to Diversity

Challenge

According to the QSRLS, recognition of difference is an important dimension of productive pedagogies. It assists us to understand how to systematically improve the achievement of educationally disadvantaged students.⁵ Furthermore, the research indicates that inclusive classrooms that value and respond to diversity produce improved outcomes for ALL students. Valuing and responding to diversity is important for intellectual quality and academic excellence in all Queensland state schools.

Response

Teachers must have a good understanding of the social and economic factors that impact on their students' ability to engage in education. They must be given the opportunity to update and refine their knowledge of issues of poverty, gender, disability, location, culture and sexuality in order to respond to diversity and to effectively deliver productive pedagogies.

⁵ Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study, The State of Queensland (Department of Education), 2001, Vol 2, page 18.

Teachers also need to be supported to provide localised responses that consider the interrelated social, cultural, geographic and economic factors that impact on their student communities. Students are not defined by membership of one community, but inhabit multiple worlds that represent the intersection of diverse cultural and social experiences. Approaches that focus on 'the boys' or Aboriginal students' can suggest that these students are all the same; that they have the same needs. Such approaches can cause mismatches between students and interventions and might not produce desired outcomes.

At the same time, the system needs to target resources to groups and communities that over time have experienced a consistent pattern of poor educational outcomes.

2. Building Social Cohesion

Challenge

Globalisation has brought with it increasingly diverse and potentially fragmented communities and a growing gap between the rich and the poor. The single strongest indicator of educational marginalisation is poverty. In economically depressed communities, optimism for the future is low, capacity to organise for collective goals may be diminished, and young people can be alienated from schooling and from communities.

Response

Systems must respond differentially to their communities through greater coherence between policy and service delivery. Schools can make a difference by capacity building within communities. Productive partnerships among schools, families, communities, business, industry and other government agencies can generate the most effective use of resources that facilitate personal development, health and wellbeing for all students, but particularly those students who are disadvantaged.

3. Diversity Not Deficit

Challenge

Diversity, not deficit, needs to be seen as the core of the public education system. Rather than seeing students, families or communities as the problem, educators need to respond positively to the needs of diverse student communities

Response

A 'no blame' culture and a belief in students' ability including recognition of students' diverse strengths are critical elements in improving students' social and educational outcomes. Teachers who believe that they are the most important factor in improving student outcomes are more likely to deliver a connected curriculum, with high intellectual quality and high levels of student engagement.⁶

⁶ Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study, The State of Queensland (Department of Education), 2001.

4. Citizenship and 'student voice'

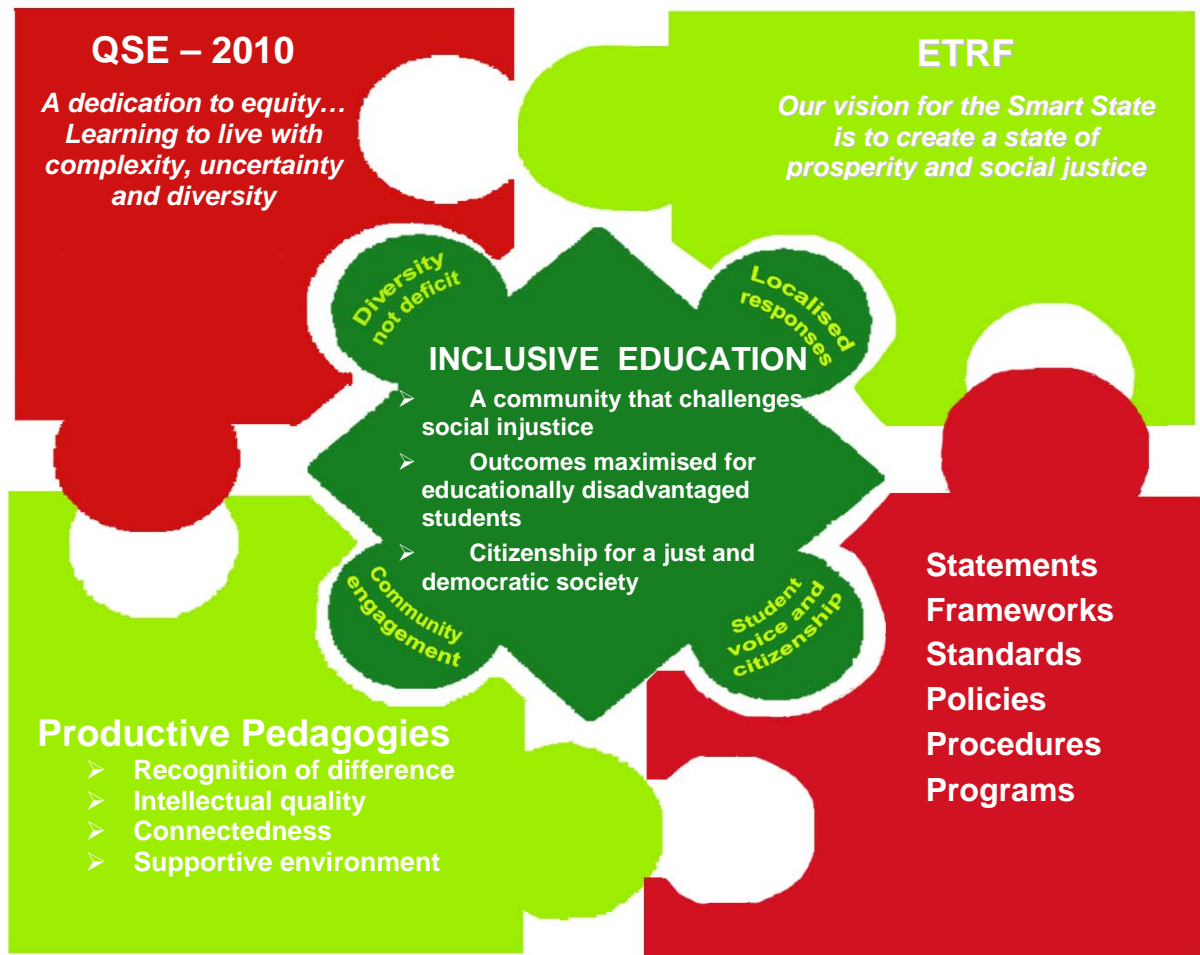
Challenge

To become active and productive citizens in a just and democratic society, students need to experience democracy in classrooms and in school organisation. Education *through* democratic processes is as important as education *about* democracy.⁷

Response

Throughout all phases of learning, students need the opportunity to be part of the decision-making of their school communities. Students need opportunities to negotiate curriculum and assessment and to practise reflective (and responsible) citizenship in their classroom and in their communities.

Inclusive Education



⁷ Brennan, M., 'A new generation of high schools for the ACT — A Discussion Paper', developed for the ACT Department of Education and Community Services as part of their project, High Schools for the New Millennium, 2000, page 5.