**Every student with disability succeeding vignette transcript –**

**Oakey State School**

- My name's Scott Pacey, I'm Principal of Oakey State School, We're situated along the Darling Downs, about half an hour outside of Toowoomba. We've got just under 360 students in our school from very diverse backgrounds. We have about 10% of our school population are verified with a disability. And on top of that, we have about another 6% who are identified in NCCD data. We also have about 23% of our school population is Indigenous, and about 6% of our children who are in out-of-home care. So I arrived at Oakey State School in 2013 and at that stage, we had four Special Education classes across the school.

They were called transition classes, the reality was there wasn't a lot of transitioning between the classes. The children basically remained in those classes for the majority of the day. In my first term at the school, we underwent a behaviour audit and a teaching and learning audit and one of the things to come out of it was the need for us to be more inclusive in our practises and that was when the journey started for us and it's a journey that has lasted the best part of five years at this stage. We started to engage with our staff and community about whether we were providing our students with disabilities what they're entitled to, which is an opportunity to engage on an equal footing with students in their education.

And we gradually cut our transition classes back until the end of last year, where we eliminated the last class that we have and we now have all of our students with disability included in mainstream classrooms. That process took a lot of time to build up the trust with our community and also a lot of capacity building with our staff and as a result, what we found is happy students and happy parents with the move and teachers who are doing a great job of catering for students some very varied needs across the school.

- I'm Kerri Harycki, I'm the Head of Special Education for Oakey State School's Special Education cluster, which comprises Oakey State School and a number of smaller schools. When I first started in this role as the HOSES here at Oakey, we had dedicated SEP classes. So now all the students who were in that SEP building and in that special education class are now across the school in their appropriate age classroom with their same age peers, learning and having successful learning experiences. Here at Oakey, I'm part of the student wellbeing team. We discuss the kids who have those different needs and work out how we're going to meet the needs for those students.

We support these students as a team. It's no one person's responsibility to work out what we can do for these kids or the best way that we can help them. All of our students with disabilities are fully involved in school life. They participate in our school sports days, they can participate in our school excursions. We need to put it to place different adjustments to make those camps accessible for different students.

- One of the advantages we've noticed with the change has been the difference it's made to our students and I'm not talking just about our students who are verified but the other students in the classes. What they've learned is how to be a lot more tolerant and they're also learning to be more caring in their approach. It's lovely when you see the way they interact with the students. They have an understanding of people having different needs and they're fantastic at helping us adjust what we're doing to make sure that children can access the same activities and programmes that they're accessing.

I think it's probably been almost our biggest advantage is to see the change we've had in our students and in our parents who are also a lot more tolerant to see the changes that we've put in place. One of the things that we've noticed working with our students has been the improvements we've seen in their outcomes. The first difference that we noticed was quite an increase in attendance of some of our students with disabilities, who were having regular attendance issues and that seems to be a lot better in improvement that we're seeing. It's also with their reading results and we think some of that has come because previously they weren't as exposed to age appropriate behaviours and they would quite often mimic the behaviours of younger children because they hadn't been in that age appropriate setting.

The other thing with the outcomes was they very rarely saw what an A or B standard looked like in their setting so being exposed to those higher standards of work has encouraged them to improve on what they're doing so it's very early days for us with some of that data around A to E, but certainly with the attendance and the behaviour, we're noticing some big changes, we're noticing children now who don't tantrum to the extent that they would've and I think some of that's around the age appropriateness of their actions, which they weren't aware of previously. Working with our parents was essential. The life of a parent when you have a student who’s got a verified disability is extremely challenging and they're often very nervous and worried about what school will look like for their child.

We took the approach of over-communicating with our parents and engaging very early. We knew a lot of our parents would be anxious about the change. We organised meetings with our parents where there was no agenda other than it was an opportunity for them to engage with myself as principal and Kerri, our Head of Special Education, in a very open forum where nothing was off the table. We stayed as long as they needed to stay and we allowed them to ask any questions that they wanted to ask. One of the things that we stress with our teachers was around the high expectations and the needs for not enabling behaviour or actions that we didn't want to see. Teachers are great at differentiating.

Sometimes teachers don't realise how good they are. They've done it for years but when they hear the term, it scares them. So it's the high expectations around what we're doing in the room. The fact that every teacher is an expert teacher for every child in their room and that notion of 12 months of growth for 12 months of learning for every student irrespective of what their starting point is has been a part of our high expectations journey for what we achieve for their students.

- So there's a number of people across the region who can support us as we move forward looking for new ways to support the students. We're also giving teachers plenty of opportunities to access any of the PDs that they're interested in around working with students with emotional issues, with ASD, with hearing impairments and vision impairments, so we are supporting our teachers to build capacity for them to support the kids as best they can in their classrooms. - And we made our primary focus the building and the capacity of our staff so a lot of money went into releasing our teachers to work collaboratively on planning issues along with our Head of Curriculum.

We also put a lot of money into professional development, particularly on the ability to cater for varying needs in our room and to make sure that we can actually provide the teaching at the point at which the student needed that teaching. We also upped the ante as far as our teachers being the primary case manager for all of our students. So if you had a student in your classroom, you were their case manager. They weren't case managed by our support teacher, or they weren't case managed by a Head of Special Education Services. You are their primary teacher and you are their case manager and it was you who would work with the school to determine how we got the best outcomes for that student.

- We are still in fairly early days of working with the fully inclusive model but what we are seeing at the moment are students who really didn't have a lot of friendships with their same age peers, who are now starting to develop those friendships and relationships and feeling more comfortable across the whole school in all of the settings. What we want to see is when they're transitioning to their high school setting that instead of going with a bunch of strangers, they are going with a group of friends, they're going with their supports.

- I talk often with our staff about the fact that it's our moral imperative as educators to give the students the best possible outcomes that we can give them. To do that, we need teachers who are skilled to be the best teachers that they can possibly be. We need them to know where to target their teaching so that when our students leave us, we know that we've given them the best possible future that we can.