
BUILDING INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS: PATHWAYS TO THE FUTURE WORKING PARTY TWO REPORT

REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRINCIPLE 2 All levels of the system value diversity and operate within an inclusive framework

The following indicators assist in describing the principle in practice:

- school communities value diversity;
- educators have the awareness and confidence to support students who require teaching and learning adjustments;
- educational leaders take a proactive role in advocating and ensuring equity for all students;
- schools develop and adopt inclusive pedagogical and cultural practices.

Scope

The working party was required to formulate recommendations focused upon:

- the design of a framework that will establish the Building Inclusive Schools strategy in all professional development programs as an ongoing priority for all staff;
- the development of benchmarks that will provide an accountability mechanism to support the development of inclusive school practices;
- processes and structures that will maintain inclusive schools.

Action

The working party engaged in four workshop sessions over a five week period. Critical issues and factors in terms of building and sustaining school community cultures that would foster the respect and understanding of diversity were discussed and debated.

Draft frameworks for the rollout and sustainment of the Building Inclusive

Schools strategy was a key issue discussed at each meeting in acknowledgment of the need to influence attitudes as a precursor to successful change. Similarly, the group identified the likely and expected outcomes of the third stage of the Building Inclusive Schools strategy.

The working party:

- worked towards developing a scale or mechanism that would support schools in moving towards more inclusive educational practices within their school communities. The working party agreed that the *Index for Inclusion* developed by Mel Ainscow would be one such tool, however, there would be a range of such tools. Importantly, the group endorsed the need to shy away from the implications of any minimum standard within such a tool. Rather, the focus was on a continuum of ongoing reflection and change to enhance current practice.
- drafted possible measures of inclusivity. They acknowledged the need for a team or group to spend considerable time developing a tool that would provide effective supports and inform forward planning.
- engaged in discussions on the processes and structures that would be required to maintain inclusive schools. Responsibilities were identified that would be required at each level of the Department.

Issues

The working party identified and debated a number of issues that impact on an understanding of the intent and meaning that underpins Principle 2.

Terminology

Members of the working party discussed the impact of terminology on the successful building of inclusive school cultures. A suggestion was made that terms such as *special educational needs* and *minimum standards* will require reviewing to ensure inappropriate language does not undermine successful change nor perpetuate ineffectual practice.

Support

Inclusive school cultures require the support of all levels of the system.

Therefore strong and explicit links to existing programs and strategies will need to be established. Similarly strong ongoing support from all levels within the system will be essential if change is to be sustained. Defined responsibilities at each level of the Department will need to be acknowledged to ensure ongoing support.

Concern was often raised that time would remain a stumbling block in terms of supporting teachers in the time-dependent activities of collaboration. Flexible use of resources and funding were identified as essential components of funding allocations to ensure appropriate use of professional development.

Leadership

The need for strong leadership that models and encourages inclusivity at all times, again at all levels from within the department, requires comprehensive training of a particular kind. Teachers must feel supported in taking risks and in trying new practices.

Information

All information gathered must be used to inform further educational planning for staff or students to ensure that the most effective use of resources is made and that ongoing planning for support is clear.

Curriculum Framework

The Curriculum Framework offers clear guidelines and a strong philosophy of values, attitudes and beliefs. Schools must develop a whole-of-school approach to inclusivity and diversity by engaging in and fully implementing the philosophy that is the foundation of the Curriculum Framework.

Accountability

Any mechanism for measuring inclusivity must link to school accountability to ensure consistent and comprehensive terms of reference. Change is mandatory. Improvement is optional (Laing, 1992). Change is not inherently good, bad or neutral. It can be any or all of these things (Hargreaves, 1994). But in the post-industrial, post-modern age, change is unavoidable. Improvement is the only choice we have.

Recommendations from working party 2

To achieve school environments that reflect a culture in which diversity is acknowledged, respected and valued, many current educational practices will need to be challenged. Working party 2 offers the following recommendations to ensure such cultures are enabled:

- a framework of responsibilities is established to support the rollout of the school level Stage 3 of the Building Inclusive Schools strategy;
- central office will be responsible for:
 - the provision of a clear vision to all levels within the system;
 - policies, processes and guidelines that reflect the notion of inclusivity;
 - awareness and understanding of cultures of inclusivity within all senior levels of the Department;
 - flexible funding mechanisms that allow schools to engage in relevant professional learning to enhance current practice;
 - appropriate accountability mechanisms that provide relevant feedback in terms of successful practice;
- the school service area will be responsible for:
 - providing a conduit of best practice between central office and schools via the district offices;
 - providing districts and schools with appropriate officers and leaders to encourage and support the building of cultures of inclusivity;
 - appropriate, accessible flexible provision of resources or information;
 - an appropriate accountability mechanism to identify point-of-need in terms of enhancing school cultures;
- districts will be responsible for:
 - identifying point-of-need in terms of enhancing school cultures;
 - ongoing support for professional learning for all staff in terms of building inclusive school cultures;
 - building strong positive relationships with each of their schools;
- schools will be responsible for:
 - embedding inclusive educational practice in all school planning;
 - adopting policies that reflect the cultural shift encompassed within Building Inclusive Schools strategy and the Curriculum Framework;
 - ongoing awareness raising within the whole school community;

- collaborative decision making processes in the support of students with disabilities and those with special educational needs;
 - a formal process of evaluation within the school community to review the inclusive culture
- the Building Inclusive Schools strategy is an ongoing process of renewal and reaffirmation for all levels within the Department of Education and Training;
- Stage 3 of the Building Inclusive Schools strategy is undertaken by the majority of schools by 2005;
- the resource allocation for the rollout of Stage 3 of the strategy is flexible, reflects local contexts and will support teacher release time for a formal process of sharing best practice with other schools;
- a designated committee be established at central office level to focus on and to oversee the Building Inclusive Schools strategy;
- the designated committee overseeing the Building Inclusive Schools strategy will produce a tool or process that links with the *School Accountability Framework* to provide guidance to schools in creating and maintaining inclusive school cultures. The tool will:
 - reflect a continuum of inclusivity along which all schools can be placed according to a qualitative measure;
 - provide a determining factor for appropriate professional learning for all school communities;
 - provide a determining factor for a process of accreditation for schools that will acknowledge and promote inclusive school cultures;
 - define performance indicators and associated pointers;
- the outcomes for the Building Inclusive Schools strategy include:
 - an enhanced knowledge and understanding of students' diverse needs;
 - relevant legislative requirements;
 - appropriate terminology for students with disabilities and schools that support socially valued roles for all of their students.

Chair: Margaret Collins
 Executive Officer: Sue Gouldson
 September 2002