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# **BUILDING INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS: PATHWAYS TO THE FUTURE WORKING PARTY FIVE REPORT**

## **REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**

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### **PRINCIPLE 5 The system supports the development of pedagogy to meet individual student needs**

The following indicators assist in describing the principle in practice:

- evidence-based, effective models of teaching and learning for all students with disabilities are identified, promoted and implemented;
- benchmarks for effective teaching and learning practices are identified, promoted and implemented throughout the system;
- implementation and ongoing evaluation of effective teaching and learning practices are supported by the system;
- partnerships with training providers are formed to ensure best quality pre-service and in-service training.

#### **Scope**

The working party formulated recommendations focused upon:

- the identification of teacher needs in terms of support requirements in providing appropriate learning educational programs for students who require teaching and learning adjustments;
- the provision of specific recommendations that would establish a framework to:
  - ensure that teachers and other staff have access to research-based effective pedagogical practices that provide optimal learning programs for students who require teaching and learning adjustments;
  - ensure that strong links with pre-service training providers exist to support schools in providing appropriately qualified staff;
  - ensure a focus on teaching and learning needs and curriculum arrangements;

- provide a basis for detailed planning and programming;
- explain how knowledge of new innovations will be disseminated to staff.

## **Action**

The working party met on four occasions over a five-week period.

The working party undertook lengthy discussions relating to the capacity of schools to provide appropriate learning environments for students with learning disabilities within regular classrooms.

Early and strong consensus was reached on the need to establish clear links to the Building Inclusive Schools strategy in terms of providing the social climate in which to provide effective inclusive practices.

## **Issues**

The working party identified and debated a number of issues that impact on an understanding of the intent and meaning behind the principle and therefore, the deliverables expected. Implementing a new framework for professional development that will provide ongoing support to all staff in genuinely inclusive schools is critical. The focus remains on teacher competencies for good pedagogy for all children across all settings.

## *Attitudes*

The positive correlation between the attitudes of teachers to inclusive education and the use of effective strategies in the regular classroom supports the working party's discussions that *will* must precede *skill*. Changing educational culture becomes a precursor to the successful inclusion of all students.

## *Teacher needs*

The working party discussed and listed teacher needs and the structures or processes that would need to be established to ensure successful implementation of any such professional learning program. Discussion included the comparison between teacher needs and the needs of the student with special educational needs.

### *Professional learning*

The working party acknowledged that strengthening local school community capacity should be the major focus of all systemic and professional training efforts. Teachers learn from other teachers. To change and improve teaching styles, schools must create opportunities for teachers to learn from one another, by observing each others' practices, discussing and reflecting on change (Jenkins, 2002).

The working party identified that specific support in terms of providing collaborative learning strategies and the notion that teachers must take responsibility for remaining professional learners will require a framework that will provide the time necessary to undertake these actions successfully.

The working party agreed that the content of a professional learning program should:

- focus on what students are to learn and how to address the different problems students may have in learning the material, and
- should involve teachers in identifying what they need to know and in developing learning experiences in which they will be involved.

The identification of a plethora of current initiatives that will support matching pedagogy to individual student needs raised the question of why they have not always successfully facilitated enhanced student outcomes and how any new framework of pedagogical support could better link with them.

The need to make links with existing initiatives rather than adding new ones was focused upon wherever possible. To this end, the Building Inclusive Schools strategy and the Curriculum Framework became an obvious starting point and focus for much of the conceptualisation.

### **Critical components of a professional learning environment**

The working party agreed that no one package or method of training will adequately meet the needs of all teachers. The critical components of a professional learning framework to support the enhancement of learning outcomes for all students formed the basis of much of the work. Any professional learning must offer stages of development that recognises individual needs.

The second stage of a professional learning program designed to support teachers engaging students with disabilities and those with special educational needs was discussed in terms of providing ongoing opportunities for self-reflection and action learning rather than one-off specific disability-related workshops. Focus on the commonalities of teaching diverse students rather than a focus on differences was mooted.

Ingvarson's and Wills & Jackson's models were used to conceptualise the components within any professional learning framework that would be necessary to ensure all levels of the system were supportive of building the capacity of schools.

### *Information*

The awareness of teachers of the options available to them in terms of adapting practice to meet the changing needs of students was discussed in terms of access to relevant information. The suggestion that schools be supported in structuring their whole school information systems to facilitate planning to meet educational needs and to enhance communication between teachers lead to discussions regarding web-based data.

### *Leadership*

District-level support must focus on the provision of support to school leaders in terms of knowledge and awareness of best inclusive school practices. In this way teachers can be supported at the school level with leaders creating opportunities for teachers to reflect on ways to improve outcomes for their students based upon the principles of effective teaching and learning as outlined in the Curriculum Framework;

The creation of genuinely inclusive schools will require significant resourcing at least in the early stages of change. Time will need to be allocated for all teaching staff to undertake training in and then utilisation of collaborative problem solving, networking, planning, professional learning through reading, and reporting to parents.

The fear of additional responsibilities adding to an already intensive workload was vigorously discussed in the light of the need for teachers to accept change within a context of support and collaboration.



Adapted from: *Building a Learning Profession*, Lawrence Ingvarson

Commissioned Research Series, Australian College of Educators and Wills, D. & Jackson, B. (1996) Inclusion: Much More Than Being There. *Interaction*, 10 (2), 19-24.

The working party acknowledges several key issues that underpin the recommendations put forward regarding a professional learning environment:

- strengthening the local school community capacity should be the major focus of all systemic and professional training efforts;
- vision and leadership at all levels of the system will need to bring the correct match of tools to the person/s in need and provide an enabling culture of support;
- teacher attitudes will determine outcomes;
- good pedagogy applies to all students in all settings and will support them in achieving the outcomes as specified in the Curriculum Framework.

## **Recommendations from working party 5**

### *School Communities*

The school will remain on an ongoing cycle of professional learning that is embedded within all school development planning and constantly challenges itself in light of current best practice.

The working party recommends:

- all schools establish rigorous self-reflection processes within their school that identify the needs of the school in terms of inclusive educational practice to inform school review processes;
- support personnel (SAER coordinators / GIR specialist teachers, school psychologists) are appropriately trained to provide effective professional assistance in planning and teaching strategies to the classroom teacher;
- support personnel (SAER coordinators / GIR specialist teachers, school psychologists) take an integral role in the collaborative decision making process among teachers, teachers and specialists, teachers and parents and among the students themselves;
- there be flexible use of teacher-release time to enable teachers to undertake self-assessment so that they can hypothesise, design, measure and adjust locally and share their findings with others.

### *Systemic supports and structures: central office level*

The working party recommends:

- a project team be established to develop a multi-stage, multi-level professional learning program that is premised on the notion that educators have ownership and responsibility for the progress of all their students; and reflects the principles of effective professional adult learning;
- a generic first stage of professional learning that will:
  - comprise a mixture of input and action learning and provide professional learning appropriate to all educators;
  - focus on encouraging teachers to take responsibility for assessing and constantly upgrading their own professional learning;
  - enhance the skill of teachers to adapt curriculum and pedagogy to meet the needs of a diverse range of learners;

- provide information and resource locations;
- a second stage will provide more specific information in terms of specific student needs and the needs of the teacher in providing appropriate learning environments in the context of the regular curriculum:
  - the program will link with the teacher competency framework and the school accountability framework;
  - the program will provide an evaluation component that will enable schools and teachers to identify their point-of-need;
  - the program will provide modules that reflect both schools' and staff diversity of need in terms of professional learning;
- an Executive Directors level liaison team be established to meet and work with the Deans of Education from all universities to review current teacher programs with a view to:
  - pre-service training programmes that provide primary and secondary teachers with a positive orientation toward disability and special educational needs, thereby developing an understanding of what can be achieved in schools with locally available support services;
  - pre-service education that has a significant emphasis on effective pedagogy, assessment, adaptation of curriculum content, individualising teaching procedures etc, for students with special needs and is consistent with the principles of teaching and learning in the Curriculum Framework;
  - pre-service education that focuses on expanding teacher capacity to draw on and adopt a range of pedagogical approaches to meet the diverse needs of students;
  - pre-service education that focuses on the expectation that teachers will learn throughout their careers, in line with the changing needs of their students;
- the Department of Education and Training support teachers to undertake further training or post- graduate studies for inclusive educational practices through the provision of subsidies for HECS;
- a Memorandum of Agreement that allows scholarship partnerships between universities to ensure that teacher education studies and teacher registration reflect the attainment of the pedagogical skills required to respond to special educational needs;

- that an accreditation process be developed to ensure appropriate competencies for education assistants;
- a tool be established to support effective self-reflection in terms of pedagogy.

This tool will:

- link to identify indicators of inclusive practice;
- supplement the content of *School Accountability Framework* and the *Teacher Competency Framework*;
- foster rigorous standards of classroom practice within schools;
- be based on the key known pedagogies;
- recognise the 'value-adding' by schools and staff in terms of inclusive educational practice;
- provide classroom, school, district and systemic information from which each entity can continue to develop and share its capacity with others;
- the project team develop a professional development program for all school and district leaders to further develop their capacity to provide leadership in making schools more responsive and inclusive to children with wide ranges of individual differences, special educational needs;
- a multi-disciplinary team develops a web page supported by local resource centres and the Centre for Inclusive Schooling to enable easy access to sources of best practice, research and relevant information for all educators;
- the Centre for Inclusive Schooling is identified and further resourced as a quality-assured source of support for all schools in terms of resources and expertise;
- the Centre for Inclusive Schooling will be responsible for:
  - providing accessible on-line and up-to-date information, including local, interstate and international initiatives and practice for students who require teaching and learning adjustments;
  - providing immediate support in terms of this information to enable teachers to adapt these resources and match pedagogy to the myriad of issues facing teachers;
  - upskilling of visiting teachers and education assistants in current best practice and collaborative problem-solving;
  - provision of examples of current best practice models in schools;

- initiating research and resource development in response to identified issues and trends for students who require teaching and learning adjustments;
- there be further review of current monitoring of student progress and the attainment of outcomes to inform educational planning for students who require teaching and learning adjustments.

*Systemic supports and structures: district level*

The working party recommends:

- district based support personnel be appointed who will be responsible for:
  - the professional learning across district staff, the coordination of the various agencies, departments and institutions in the provision of services and support for students who require teaching and learning adjustments;
  - the development of rigorous documented educational programs for students who require teaching and learning adjustments that provide appropriate classroom educational best practice; flexible curriculum; reasonable accommodations; and provide a sound evaluation component;
- clusters of schools be formed within districts to assist networking opportunities and the sharing of best practice in terms of meeting the special educational needs of students in the area.

Chair: Liz Healy  
Executive Officer: John Brigg  
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