

Children with Disability Australia (CDA) is the national peak body that represents children and young people with disability, aged 0-25 years. CDA has a national membership of 5000 with the majority being families. CDA's vision is that children and young people with disability living in Australia are afforded every opportunity to thrive, achieve their potential and that their rights and interests as individuals, members of a family and their community are met. Further information about the organisation is available at www.cda.org.au

CDA welcomes the opportunity to make a brief submission to the review panel of the Australian Curriculum. Further information can be provided through direct discussion with the review panel if necessary.

9% of children aged 5-14 have a disability.¹ Just over 90% of students with disability attend mainstream schools.² It is typical to have 1-2 students with disability in classrooms across Australia. It is therefore highly important for the education system to reflect best practice with regard to education provision for students with disability. An essential component of this is teaching children about the value and contribution which **all** children make to our community, including schools, namely inclusion. CDA believes that 'inclusion' should be part of the national curriculum.

Students and families frequently report that in their education experiences their children are subject to limited opportunities; low expectations; exclusion; bullying; discrimination; and violation of human rights.

CDA has provided detailed submissions previously to a range of education consultations which have detailed that the current education system is not adequately meeting the needs of students with disability. Relevant submissions include Review of Disability Standards for Education 2005 (May 2011), Review of Funding for Schooling (March 2011 & September 2011), Senate inquiry into teaching and learning – maximizing our investments in Australian Schools (Oct 2012). School Workforce Productivity Commission Report (Feb 2012) and the Australian Education Bill 2012 (Feb 2013). These submissions are available at <http://www.cda.org.au/cdasubmissions>

Statistics show that there is a significant difference in education outcomes for students with disability compared with their peers without disability. Currently 26% of student with disability do not go past Year 10,³ with only 36% completing Year 12 compared to a completion rate of 60% for people without disability.⁴ This is further evidenced by the

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2009, 'Rates of Disability in Australia,' *Profiles of Disability*, Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra, viewed 17 March 2014,

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4429.0Main+Features100232009>.

² ABS 2009, 'Children at School with Disability,' *Profiles of Disability*, Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra, viewed 17 March 2014, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4429.0main+features100302009>.

³ ABS 2009, 'Persons Aged 15-64 years, selected characteristics – by level of highest educational attainment,' *Survey of Education Training and Experience 2009: State and Territory Australian tables*, Commonwealth of Australia.

⁴ ABS 2012, 'Disability – Education and Employment,' *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia, Summary of Findings 2012*, Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra, viewed 17 March 2014, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/E82EBA276AB693E5CA257C21000E5013?opendocument>.

workforce participation rate of people with disability with only 53% in full time employment compared to 83% of the rest of the population.⁵

CDA recently commissioned Macquarie University to complete an issues paper, *Inclusion in education – Towards equality for students with disability*.⁶ This research identifies the major barriers to inclusion that currently exist and provides recommendations to overcome these issues. The paper discusses the considerable body of evidence that demonstrates the benefits of inclusive education for all students. In particular, the research literature overwhelmingly supports inclusive education as a facilitator of positive outcomes for social, academic, cognitive and physical development in children who do and do not experience disability.⁷

The paper's author, Dr Kathy Cologon suggests that the term 'inclusion' in education is highly contested and often misunderstood.

A common misconception is that inclusive education requires a child (who is being 'included') to change or adjust to fit within a setting – as a notion of assimilation rather than inclusion.⁸

The paper argues that currently within the educational system there is a systemic culture of negative attitudes and low expectations towards students with disability. This culture forms a vicious cycle that limits opportunities for students with disability and also influences other students in forming their own cultural preferences and prejudices at a young age about people with disability. Primary school provides a unique opportunity to create generational change in attitudes and understanding of disability.

Fundamental to tackling these issues and overcoming negative attitudes is the need for inclusion to be explicitly taught within the curriculum. An example of how inclusion can be incorporated into the curriculum is the ACT Government's 'Everyone Everyday' teaching program. It is a comprehensive teaching resource for mainstream primary schools. The program aims to create a cultural shift in community attitudes towards disability. The underlying assumption is that we all benefit when the environments in which we work, live and play are inclusive; and that we all have a role to play to create inclusive communities. It is based on the assumption that 'inclusion' needs to be explicitly taught, if we are to move from a situation in which children with disability are simply present in mainstream schools; to one in which they are welcomed, valued and enjoy full membership of the school community.

⁵ ABS 2012, 'Disability – Education and Employment,' *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia, Summary of Findings 2012*, Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra, viewed 17 March 2014, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/E82EBA276AB693E5CA257C21000E5013?opendocument>.

⁶ Kathy Cologon 2013, *Inclusion in Education: Towards Equality for Students with Disability*, Children with Disability Australia: Melbourne, available at <http://www.cda.org.au/cda-issue-papers>.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Section 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

SUMMARY

It is the view of CDA that the present education system does not adequately meet the needs of students with disability. This is reflected in lower high school completion rates and workforce participation rates. A key reason for this is the deeply entrenched systemic culture of low expectations regarding students with disability. Research has shown that this attitudes and barrier needs to be challenged directly to enable a creation of an education system that meets and provides quality education for **all** students, including students with disability.

Creating inclusive educational settings that respect the contributions of all students have significant benefits and lead to positive outcomes for children who do and do not experience disability. Actively teaching inclusive practices as part of the national curriculum therefore represents a crucial step to improving the educational and employment outcomes for students with disability.

The current review of the national curriculum provides an opportunity to implement the vast body of research literature that supports this view.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the review.

Contact: Stephanie Gotlib
Executive Officer
Children with Disability Australia
3/173 Queens Parade, CLIFTON HILL VIC 3068
Ph: 03 9482 1130 or 0425 724 230
Email: stephanieg@cda.org.au
www.cda.org.au