

Starting together, staying together

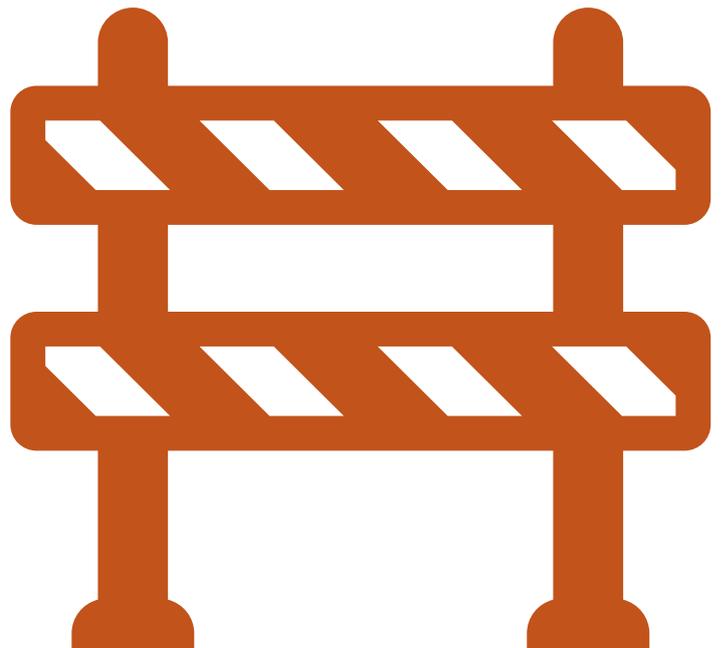
CYDA's position paper on ensuring inclusive education and phasing out segregated education

“Choice is not the right term when you are asking me to choose between two things that do NOT deliver - isolating my child from our local community or a system that doesn't support her to learn.

“That's not a choice.”

*(Parent of child with disability aged 12,
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Children and Young People
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Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) is the national representative organisation for children and young people with disability aged 0 to 25 years. CYDA has an extensive national membership of more than 5,000 young people with disability, families and caregivers of children with disability, and advocacy and community organisations.

Acknowledgements:

Children and Young People with Disability Australia would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which this report has been written, reviewed and produced, whose cultures and customs have nurtured and continue to nurture this land since the Dreamtime. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future. This is, was, and always will be Aboriginal land.

CYDA supports the following positions in conjunction with this paper:

- [Position Paper](#) on Segregation In 2020, CYDA and other disability rights and advocacy organisations endorsed a position paper¹ titled '*Segregation of people with disability is discrimination and must end*', calling for action toward the goal of ending the segregation of people with disability in schools, housing, and workplaces.
- The Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education's '[Driving change: A roadmap for achieving inclusive education in Australia](#)'

Content note:

Reference to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability.



¹ [Position paper](#): *Segregation of people with disability is discrimination and must end* (2020)



CYDA's position on education

Inclusive education is not about mainstreaming, it's about transformation! Inclusive education is a signpost for the type of society we want in the future. CYDA acknowledges the fears of families currently in or just out of the segregated system. People are fearful of what "mainstreaming" would mean. Just closing down special schools without transforming local primary and secondary schools to be more inclusive would also do students a massive disservice.

Starting together

All children need to start their learning journey as peers. Together, all children learn more than apart.

Inclusive places

Students need to be able to access and enjoy their school and learning places. Buildings and spaces designed for inclusion are critical for all.

Staying together

High school is a critical development stage for all students and needs to reflect the diversity of experience and opportunity in and out of school places.

Preparing for life

School is where students prepare for life after school. The full menu needs to be available to all. For example, further study, employment, moving out of home, travel etc.

Merging for a brighter future

CYDA calls for a timeline that ensures inclusive education and phases out segregated education. Navigating the transition from a two-lane road to an inclusive highway requires careful planning and a phased approach. We must ensure that all students can smoothly merge onto the highway of inclusive education while gradually phasing out the segregated side roads.

Lifelong learning for students

CYDA calls for a student first focus supported by workforce development and system change. Just as a well-maintained road is always open for travel, lifelong learning ensures students can keep discovering, long after the school bells have stopped ringing. Road improvements impact the entire journey and need an upgrade of each stage of a child's educational road, from the initial driveway to future destinations.

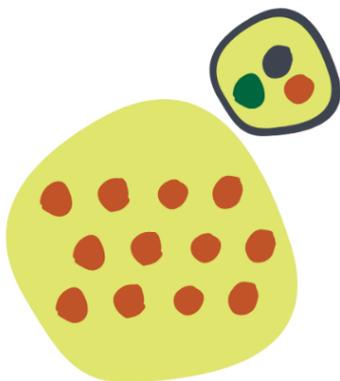


The current education system

What we have now is an educational divide, and we need a plan to bridge that divide, where all stakeholders work together to agree on the transformation to an inclusive schooling system for everyone.

At a glance we know from our recent education survey work²:

- ✘ Only 27% of students with disability reported feeling supported to learn at school
- ✘ 64% of young people and families felt that teachers and support staff did not have the training and knowledge to support them
- ✘ 54% reported feeling welcome and included but 65% of students reported experiencing bullying
- ✘ 70% of students reported being excluded from events or activities at school



Segregation

Segregation occurs when the education of students with disability is provided in separate environments in isolation from students without disability.

Segregation separates peers

- ✘ Young children start school in a different location from their neighbours and their friends in their local communities
- ✘ Children must rely on families and caregivers to create social connections with other children without disability in their local community
- ✘ Separating students from their non-disabled peers does not lead to good outcomes in the long term. Students are more likely to have poorer educational outcomes and face challenges to secure open employment.³

² [Report: Disappointment and discrimination](#) CYDA's surveys of the learning experiences of children and young people with disability in 2022 and 2023.

³ Inclusion Australia (2022) Equal Pay, Equal Respect, Federal Election 2022 Platform, p. 9.



Segregation is discrimination

The meaning of inclusive education is explained in (General Comment No.4, 2016) and states that ‘segregated models of education, which exclude students with disabilities from mainstream and inclusive education on the basis of disability’, contravenes the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (General Comment No.6, 2018).

Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021- 2031 is a nationally agreed commitment to undertake actions to realise CRPD, Priority 2- Education and Learning, to “Build capability in the delivery of inclusive education to improve educational outcomes for school students with disability:

“Students with disability have a right to access and participate in education on the same basis as students without disability, in an environment free from bullying, harassment or exclusion.”⁴

Segregation is not a choice

‘Special schools’ and segregated settings are often described as necessary to support ‘parent choice’. This idea of choice is a misnomer. If the local school is not prepared or equipped to provide and support a child to learn with their same age peers successfully and safely, then going to a special school is not a choice. It is a matter of compromise or, in some situations, coercion.

Self-segregation or choosing to be apart from peers, occasionally results from long existing attitudes and systemic biases rather than a conscious preference for separation. Whether it is the option to home-school or work in low-paying Australian Disability Enterprises, the choice is valid only when it’s born out of true preference and not forced due to systemic failures.

“Choice is not the right term when you are asking me to choose between two things that do NOT deliver – isolating my child from our local community or a system that doesn’t support her to learn.

That’s not a choice.”

(Parent of child with disability aged 12, October 2023)

⁴ [Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021- 2031](#)



A stepped approach to ensure inclusive education

CYDA calls for national and state and territory government action to ensure inclusive education and phase out segregated education via a reasonable timeframe including:

1. Developing a National Inclusive Education Plan aligned to Australia's Disability Strategy with legislation to support inclusive education from early childhood education through to tertiary level education
2. Ensuring the National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) and Commonwealth funding model supports and incentivises inclusive education, by holding states and territories accountable to deliver the full inclusion of all students in mainstream school settings
3. Implementing an independent oversight body to ensure that all levels of education providers are meeting their statutory and legal obligations and complaints can be independently investigated, monitored, and resolved

CYDA believes the future for children and young people with disability should include:

- ✓ From birth or when disability is first identified, families are encouraged and supported to strive for inclusion in their local community, and to make early childhood education and care the first step of an inclusive education alongside their nondisabled peers
- ✓ Students learning alongside children and young people with disability understand that disability is something to be welcomed as part of our society
- ✓ The presence of language and cultural adjustments, along with supportive mentors, enabling students to access language and literacy through Auslan, Braille, or augmentative and alternative communication
- ✓ Students with disability are not seen as a problem, and all schools have the right funding, support, training, and cultures for inclusion
- ✓ The voice of students with disability is sought after by teachers, schools, and stakeholders, encouraged by families, and routinely included in school and education system feedback processes and evaluations
- ✓ Families, teachers, schools, and stakeholders have high expectations and believe all students can flourish with the adjustments that support engagement, attendance, and participation, such as sensory supports and spaces
- ✓ Students leave their school education with options for education and employment knowing that society understands their value and there are pathways to an independent life

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