

Enrolment in the Regular Class: the Best Option and the Default Option

Enrolling students with disabilities in the regular class at school leads to better outcomes. Social, academic and vocational outcomes are better for children with disabilities in regular settings, and outcomes are the same or better for students without disabilities*.

Despite this, we know that students with disability and their parents are turned away from the regular school and class at a rate of roughly one in four**.

Currently, enrolment in the regular class is fraught with obstacles. Families have the right to seek enrolment for their child with disability, but this right is not guaranteed. People with disabilities and their parents need an improved system, one that affirms their belonging in their local school.



The history



People often think that special schools were created in the interests of people with disability. In fact, some parents did advocate for the creation of 'special' schools for their children because children with disabilities were thought by the state to be 'uneducable'.

In NSW the Wyndham report that led to the Public Education Act 1961 recommended the establishment of special schools because "special children should not be left in the ordinary class to impede the progress of more able children and to embarrass the class teacher".***

This history tells us how entrenched the idea of segregating students with disability is and why it is so important that NSW combats this by repeatedly welcoming students with disabilities in to the regular classroom.

In summary



For a default enrolment policy to become a reality, a number of areas need to be tweaked.

These include:

1. Making sure the **website** reflects the regular class as the first, default and preferred option.
2. **Mandatory training for principals** and other key staff so they reflect that that all local families have a right to enrol in the regular class and are welcome to do so.
3. The NSW **Education Minister and Secretary direct schools to enrol all local children** in the regular class as a default, expected option.
4. **Information** about the rights of students with disability should be provided to all parents as part of the enrolment form, at initial meetings, at transition stages, and when a disability or functional impairment is identified.

5. A simpler and shorter **enrolment form** premised on the acceptance that all students are expected to attend their local school, with a later discussion regarding the support needs of the student.

6. A system for **gathering data about school setting of students with disability** from each school district, with tracking that monitors the numbers who attend separate and regular settings.

The barriers

1. Website

For students with disabilities and their parents, barriers to regular class often start with the Department of Education website. The website wording sends a number of subtle messages that the regular class might not be the best place for a child with disability.

The NSW Department of Education webpages directed to students with disability and their parents includes a page under Support services called 'Disability Support' and a number of pages under the 'Disability Learning and Support' section of the website.

Educational options

On this page

- > [Regular classes](#)
- > [Specialist support classes](#)
- > [Support at school](#)

The department provides a range of options to support students with disability and additional learning and support needs across the primary years.

Regular classes

Our primary schools are well prepared to support students with disability and additional learning and support needs in regular classes.

Every regular school has a **learning and support** resources package that gives the school a specialist learning and support teacher who works directly in the school to support students and their teachers. Learning and support flexible funding in regular schools provides immediate support when required.

This means many students can be supported in regular classes without a confirmation of disability or the need for a formal application process or other paperwork outside the school.

Targeted or additional specialist support, however, does require a separate application process.

Classroom teachers provide adjustments for students' individual education needs and are supported by:

- The 'Educational Options' page under 'Disability Learning and Support' is positive because the regular class is mentioned first and points out that schools are 'well prepared to support students with disability'

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- It also states that 'students are supported through a wide range of programs and services that operate in regular and special schools' – parents are not encouraged to consider the regular class, nor given tools to distinguish between types of schooling, despite the overwhelming majority of evidence in favour of inclusion in regular class.

NDIS

National Disability Insurance Scheme

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is an Australia-wide scheme to support people with disability and will replace the current NSW disability support system. NSW Government departments and agencies will continue to make their services accessible and inclusive of people with disability.

The National Disability Insurance Agency

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) is the independent agency that delivers the NDIS. The NDIA is responsible for assessing the eligibility of participants and working with them to develop support plans that meet their needs. The NDIA will also support the delivery of broader disability supports in the community.

Transitioning to NDIS

The NDIS will roll out across NSW between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2018. A trial of the NDIS commenced in the Hunter region in July 2013. An accelerated transition commenced in the Nepean-Blue Mountains region on 1 July 2015 for children and young people aged between 0 and 17.

Meeting the educational needs of students with disability

Education providers in NSW will continue to meet the personalised learning and support needs of students with disability under the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*.

Under the Standards, education providers make reasonable adjustments for students with disability to access education on the same basis as other students. Education providers work closely with parents and carers in providing adjustments and supporting students with disability.

- However the 'Disability Support' page under the of support services section of the DoE website emphasises that students with disability have a right to education but does not specify a setting. Parents might have some sense that their disabled child has a right to an education but not that the child has a right to be in the regular class. Therefore, parents need to be informed of the right to education in the regular class at the local school.

- The disability standards are currently mentioned under the NDIS tab of the website, but could have their own prominent tab and page and be more obviously used to alert parents that their children with disabilities have a right to attend the local school

2. The principal and other school staff

Often parents make an appointment to meet the principal of a school prior to filling out enrolment forms. In this situation, it is imperative that the principal:

- knows that all local families have a right to enrol in the regular class
- communicates this to the family
- gives the family information on their rights in written form
- and does not attempt to persuade the family regarding segregate placement.

Compulsory training must be provided to principals and other staff who are key to the enrolment process about this matter.

3. Leadership

The NSW Education Minister and Secretary can direct schools to enrol all local children in the regular class as a default option and all principals and staff that enrolment in regular class is best practice for students with disability.

4. Information

Information about the rights of students with disability should be provided to all parents as part of the enrolment form, at initial meetings, at transition stages, and when a disability or functional impairment is identified.

All parents should be included in this process for two reasons. Firstly, a disability can be acquired or identified at any time, particularly in the development of a younger student. Secondly, for cultural change to occur, it is important that schools communicate their expectations of inclusion to all families associated with the school.

5. Enrolment

The enrolment form currently includes a page entirely dedicated to information about a student's disability, often filled out and seen before a student ever gets near the school. This means that if the school is not inclined to enrol students with disability, they have information that can be used to their discretion.

We recommend a much simpler and shorter enrolment form premised on the acceptance that all students are expected to attend their local school, with a later discussion between the parents and the school that addresses the support needs of the student.

6. Data on school settings

A system is needed for monitoring enrolment of student with disability from each school district, with tracking that monitors the numbers of students with disability who attend separate and regular settings. This would provide the Department, and the public, with information about how inclusive school areas are and steps could be taken to reward and use as exemplars, or support greater inclusion, as necessary.

Family Advocacy
(02) 9869 0866
www.family-advocacy.com

* Cologon, Kathy 2013 Inclusion in Education: Toward a Better Outcome for Students with Disability, Children with Disability Australia, available from <http://www.cda.org.au/inclusion-in-education>.

Jackson, Robert 2008, Inclusion or Segregation for Children with an Intellectual Impairment: What does the Research Say? Available at:

<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/StudyEducation/NGOs/AustraliaNationalCouncilIntellectualDisability2.pdf>

** Audit Office of NSW, 2016, Supporting students with disability in NSW public schools, available from: <http://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/publications/latest-reports/supporting-students-with-disability>

*** Wyndham cited in McRae Report, 1996