

Family Advocacy
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CHILDREN THAT LEARN TOGETHER, LEARN TO LIVE TOGETHER: BUILDING MORE SUPPORT UNITS DO NOT MAKE NSW SCHOOLS "MORE INCLUSIVE"

The NSW government has announced an extra 243 support classes have been approved to open in 2024. It means more than 1500 students with a disability will have a place in a NSW public school support class this year. The majority of these classes will be established in mainstream public schools while 12 additional classes will open in Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs).

Whilst we acknowledge the NSW government's commitment to provide young people with disability the "support they need to achieve their full potential", increasing support units continues the segregation of students on the basis of disability.

The recent Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, heard overwhelming evidence that people with disability in segregated settings, including schools, are more likely to experience violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. Many witnesses reported schools from all sectors all over Australia engaging in harmful and inappropriate practices. All Commissioners agreed that system reforms are required to ensure that no one is forced to participate in settings designed exclusively for people with disability, and made the key point that "Education is the starting point for an inclusive society".

Clearly the current dual-track system of special and mainstream schools is simply not delivering the outcomes that it should be. People with disability have substantially lower rates of school completion, post-school study, employment, and community participation alongside higher rates of poverty (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022).

Twelve NSW and national disability representative and systemic advocacy organisations recently wrote to the Minister for Education and Early Learning, Prue Car with this **Position Statement on Inclusive Education**, calling for the creation of a single inclusive education system in which all students have their requirements met, including students with disability. Too often, this debate around inclusive education is seen as a culture war between special schools versus inclusive classes. We need to move past this rhetoric and work towards a solution that puts the needs of students with disability squarely at the centre.

Advocates for inclusive education are calling for an end to the dual-track system where special schools, support units and mainstream schools are transformed into one inclusive system where all children can learn together in their regular classroom. This will require a staged approach and will take all the relevant groups working together to see it through.

Let's expect more from the NSW government of the day. There are 206,000 students with disability in NSW public schools which is 1 in 5 students. We do not want another generation of children with disability left behind. If you feel the same, ask the NSW government to adopt the inclusive education recommendations from the Disability Royal Commission by **sending this email template to your NSW Member of Parliament**, as part of our "**Better Together, Inclusion for All**" campaign.

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About Family Advocacy

We work with people with disabilities and their families to help them defend and promote the interests and rights of people with developmental disability across NSW.

Contact

Please contact Leanne Varga, Systemic Advocacy and Campaigns Manager or Cecile Sullivan Elder, Executive Officer on 02 9869 0866 for more information.