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What is
inclusion?



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Inclusion is when the strengths of every child and young person in a learning community are recognised, encouraged and fostered.

In the context of early childhood, the guiding principle that underpins equity, inclusion and diversity in the [National Quality Framework \(NQF\)](#) ‘recognises all children’s capacity and right to succeed regardless of diverse circumstances, cultural background and abilities’.

“Inclusive education means that all students are welcomed by their school in age-appropriate settings and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of school,” says the Department of Education in a [national resource](#) that supports the Disability Standards for Education (2005).

“Inclusion is a basic human right, an ethical obligation and a legislative requirement,” according to Early Childhood Australia, referring to the rights of children with developmental delay or disability as set out in the *Disability Discrimination Act (1992)*, the Disability Standards for Education 2005 and the Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011.

Another way to look at inclusion is to see it as an acknowledgement that every child and young person is unique. In an inclusive learning community, this diversity is respected and seen as an opportunity to learn, to grow and to implement changes that benefit the whole community.

“Inclusion is about how to ensure that each child or young person in our care develops a sense of belonging to the group and has equitable access to opportunities and resources, while diversity includes the differing cultural and social backgrounds of children and young people and their unique strengths, abilities, preferences and needs,” Early Childhood Australia clarifies.

“Inclusion is good for everyone,” says Professor Nicole Rinehart, founder of the AllPlay Learn program, which helps to create inclusive education environments for children and young people with developmental delay or disability.

“Research shows that having children and young people of all abilities together in the same learning community helps with acceptance and recognition, with the result that it helps develop a stronger sense of belonging for everyone. Ultimately, our society and quality of life improve if we’re fully inclusive,” Professor Rinehart says.

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Connecting children and young people together in groups of mixed abilities and interests is always worth the effort. Let them learn from each other and create opportunities for each to share their area of strength.”

– Educator insight

Jonas's story

This story is about how an educator has made small but important adaptations to meet Jonas's learning needs. Jonas has hemiplegia, a type of cerebral palsy.

Four-year-old Jonas loves to climb, has an impressive vocabulary and is a natural leader. Jonas has a type of cerebral palsy called hemiplegia, where mobility on one side of his body is affected. For Jonas this is his right side and, therefore, movement in his right arm and leg is more difficult. He has a slight limp and prefers to use his left hand.

Jonas's educators have made some adaptations to their practices to support his wellbeing and meaningful participation. This includes providing different-sized water jugs, including a lighter one for Jonas to pour water for himself and his peers. They also have flexible expectations of all children, including Jonas, during sleep-time preparation, acknowledging it takes Jonas longer to remove his shoes before rest. They have created space for movement and have reduced the number of table-top activities to prevent over-cluttering. Working with Jonas's occupational therapist, they're also incorporating stretching activities into their daily yoga sessions to support Jonas's physical needs, ensuring he is participating alongside his peers.



For reflection

- Describe Jonas's strengths and how you would enhance these. Can you think of any opportunities where Jonas's strengths could be used to support other children's learning?
- One of the principles of the [Early Years Learning Framework](#) (EYLF) is 'high expectations of children'. How have Jonas's educators demonstrated this?
- The educators are incorporating some of the exercises prescribed by Jonas's occupational therapist into a pre-existing yoga routine in which all children participate. What do you think about this approach? What would you think if Jonas's educators did the exercises separately (one-on-one) with him instead?



Learn more

Read Early Childhood Australia's [Statement on the inclusion of every child in early childhood education and care](#).

See this [Spotlight on inclusive education](#) by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)

Check out AllPlay Learn's Teacher Guides for [early learning services](#), [primary](#) and [secondary](#) schools for a more in-depth explanation of what inclusive education is.

Visit the [Raising Children Network](#) website for an overview of education rights for children with developmental delay or disability.

Read the [Disability Standards for Education 2020 Review](#) to find out whether the Standards are still effective in achieving their objectives.

References

Department of Education Skills and Employment (DESE) (2015), [Planning for Personalised Learning and Support: A National Resource](#) (online document).

NSW/ACT Inclusion Agency, [What is inclusion?](#) (online document).

Raising Children Network (Australia), [Education rights for children with disability](#) (online document).

Be You resources for educators

Delivered by Beyond Blue, in collaboration with Early Childhood Australia and headspace, Be You empowers educators and every learning community to be their most mentally healthy, positive and inclusive.

Now you've read the Be You Disability Inclusion Guide, browse the Be You website for educator resources related to supporting children and young people with developmental delay or disability.

Fact Sheets

Gain knowledge and to share information with your learning community.

- Overview of mental health services
- Help-seeking in early childhood
- Help-seeking for children and young people in schools
- Recommending additional support

Webinars

Learn from the Be You team and other educators across Australia through sessions, events and webinars.

- Supporting Children with Complex Needs
- Professional Boundaries and Difficult Conversations

Educator wellbeing

Wellbeing Tools for You is a collection of online apps and resources that Be You has compiled for educators. This resource offers guidance and practical strategies to look after your wellbeing, and to put yourself in a better position to support others in your care.

Join Be You today

Join Be You today and be part of building lasting positive mental health and wellbeing for children and young people in Australia.

The best way to sign up is as a [Be You Learning Community](#), giving you access to the full range of resources and support from a Be You Consultant.

Be You resources include free online interactive sessions and events, accredited Professional Learning, Fact Sheets, a Programs Directory, planning and implementation tools, and more.

[Get in touch](#) to find out how Be You can support your early learning service or school.

Find out more at:

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