

Inclusive Education in Victoria

Discussion paper & proposed policy framework

**Inclusive Education Network
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Background to the Inclusive Education Network.

The Inclusive Education Network is an informal network made up of individuals, including parents, educators and advocates, as well as people from a number of organisations from both the disability and education fields, who share a commitment to working together to bring about improvement at both the local and systemic levels in both policy and practice in regard to inclusive education for all young people, including students with a disability or impairment.

The network had its beginnings when STAR Victoria (a state-wide community based advocacy organisation for people with an intellectual disability and their families) held a forum in mid 2005, in response to an increasing number of calls from families of students with a disability in relation to educational concerns. The aim of this forum was to identify the issues and develop a strategic, constructive and collective approach to addressing them.

Throughout the remainder of 2005 and early 2006 STAR co-ordinated and facilitated regular meetings of the network. A major outcome of these meetings has been the development of this discussion paper and proposed policy framework. Initially this process was much assisted by support from the Disability Advisory Council of Victoria in the form of funding of a consultant, Marigo Raftopoulos from Strategic Essentials Management Consultants who worked with network members over several months on a scoping paper which formed the basis for this final document which has been further refined by members of the Network.

The Inclusive Education network sees this paper as a constructive and participatory way of promoting further discussion and consideration of all the issues involved, with government, Education Department staff at all levels, families of students with a disability and others committed to moving forward on inclusive education for all.

1. What does inclusive education mean?

Schools play a fundamental role in defining and supporting children's life chances. Apart from the provision of education, schools play a vital role in transmitting society's values and offer a place for interaction and engagement for children and their communities (DRC, UK 2005). Inclusive education is about building a learning community in which all students can learn successfully.

The term "inclusive education" has often been used to describe the education of children with disabilities in the general education classrooms in their neighbourhood schools (Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello & Spagna 2004). However, the concept of inclusion involves a paradigm shift from a focus on the management of student deficits (i.e., the identification, classification and remediation of individuals with special needs) to the creation of more inclusive classroom environments that respond constructively to class, poverty, gender, disability and education for a multi-cultural and ant-racist society (Dalmau, 2002; Hamilton & Moore, 2004; Skrtic, 1995). "As soon as we allow ANY assessment of the child as a means to determine resources or school policy, we are allowing the system to subtly blame the child for the problem. If however we look at the inclusion from the perspective of *what is needed* to have it succeed, we keep the focus on the system deficiencies. What is needed will fall into the areas of will, skill or capacity." (Bob Jackson - 2006)

Thus in a more holistic sense, inclusive education means that schools need to be cognisant of the different learning needs and optimal learning environments for of all students, not just those with disabilities (Gartner and Lipsky 1987; Reynolds et al. 1987; Stainback and Stainback 1990). Inclusive education, thus described is a key responsibility of democratic schooling that will lead to more flexible and innovative pedagogies that build on the learning potential of every child and benefit all members of the school community

We should also consider the broader social policy context established by the State Government and within this context the following are of particular relevance for this paper.

- The Victorian Government Social Policy Action Plan – 'A Fairer Victoria - Creating Opportunity and Addressing Disadvantage'- May 2005
- The Victorian State Disability Plan 2002-2012 which outlines the right of people with disabilities to live and participate in the community on an equal basis with Victorian citizens and emphasises that in order to maximise the opportunities for people with disabilities the government must support communities so that they can become more inclusive. It also requires all government depts to develop and implement Disability Action Plans
- The Victorian Government Justice Statement (May 2004) which asserts that human rights provide fundamental protections for all members of our society.
- The Schools for Innovation and Excellence Initiative encourages Victorian schools to implement innovative and challenging programs that lead to improved learning outcomes for all middle years students. The Bracks Government has set a target of 90% of all young people in Victoria completing year 12 or its equivalent by 2010.
- The Education Blueprint for continuing improvement and progress in the quality of the government school system which outlines measures to be taken to ensure that all schools actively pursue excellence in teaching and learning outcomes for all students continue to improve.

We need also to take account of the Commonwealth Government's DDA Education Standards(2005) and the implications for all stakeholders within the education system.

Inclusive education forms an important part of the strategy mix that aims to deliver improved educational and social outcomes for all Victorians.

2. Why do we need to support the participation of students with disabilities in inclusive education?

Children and young people with disabilities continue to experience inequality in the education system. This has resulted in lower levels of educational qualifications and workforce participation among people with disabilities (relative to those without disabilities) which results in social isolation and economic hardship. Access to inclusive education assists in promoting equal opportunities for children and young people with disabilities which will allow them to live independently and to actively contribute to and benefit mainstream society. Currently, the lack of educational opportunities has contributed the following socio-economic profile of people with disabilities:

Measure	people with disabilities	people without disabilities
Completed year 12	30%	49%
Completed a degree	13%	20%
Labour force Participation	53%	81%
Unemployment rate	8.6%	5%
Gross median weekly income	\$255	\$501

Research to date reveals that the vast majority of students with disabilities do better in integrated classrooms rather than segregated special education programs (Sobsey & Dreimanis 1993 in Jackson and Wills 2005). This is also supported by research undertaken in the US which has shown that inclusive education practices result in positive benefits not only for children with disabilities but also for the general student population, teachers and the school community (Burstein et al 2004). Research also suggests that inclusive education programs overall are no more costly than segregated models (Lipsky & Gartner 1996 in Jackson & Wills 2005) while delivering better results for all children.

Continuing with segregated education cannot be justified on educational or social rationales. It is not supported by half a century of research. The onus of proof must be on the segregators to continue to justify exclusion (Jackson & Wills 2005).

3. What is the current status of inclusive education in Victoria?

Members of the Inclusive Schooling Network discussed a range of local and systemic issues and reached general agreement on the following key areas of concern

- the culture of schools is often not welcoming to children with a disability unless they come with a support package.
- teaching for inclusion and diversity (in terms of building a learning community in which all students can learn successfully) is not always part of professional development and pre-service teacher education.
- there is a lack of teachers with disabilities at all levels of the educational system and a lack of a diverse teaching workforce in general.
- teacher aides are commonly seen to be the only effective way of supporting inclusion - there is confusion about their role-many instances were reported of teacher aides being expected to take full responsibility for the education of particular students. Common impacts of this practice are the stigmatisation of students with disabilities and their separation/isolation from their peers and the over-reliance on teacher aides in the classrooms .Further the cost of this practice may limit effective resource allocation
- children with disabilities are excluded from formal testing so not to affect schools' performance measures

- if disagreements arise in the shared decision making process, the situation is further exacerbated by the lack of agreed local and regional dispute resolution procedures. This leaves individual parents to battle on their own, many believing they have no choice but to accept segregated schooling regardless of the lost opportunities for their child.

The Inclusive Education Network believes that addressing these issues will require systemic change to our current education paradigm and this will require a co-ordinated change management approach between government, central and regional department staff ,students, parents, principals, teachers and the local school communities as a whole.

4. What needs to be done?

International research suggests that there is no one perfect model for inclusion; it is a delivery system that evolves at the local level to reflect the complexity and unique needs of the school and community environment. However to facilitate change, transformation is required in the culture of the current schooling system, in the organisational structures of schools and in the roles, responsibilities and practice of teachers. The difficulty in this is that the education system currently operates with an entrenched structure, culture, assumptions, values and customs.

A commitment to change is required among students, parents, teachers, school principals, the school community, education department, further education and training institutions, and government to create an inclusive education system in Victoria. This entails building a common understanding for the need to change the current system and developing a shared vision and partnerships to facilitate change.

Research findings in the US and UK suggest that the major determinants of successful inclusion include:

- a paradigm shift from individual classification and remediation to creating more inclusive classroom environments that respond constructively to class, poverty, gender, disability and education for a multi-cultural and anti-racist society
- a positive and supportive teaching staff.
- a positive school principal.
- a whole school policy of inclusion of all children.
- good teacher professional development and support.
- assistance with curriculum development.
- appropriate resource allocation models

Consideration needs to also be made of the wider aspects of access to inclusive education. Children with disabilities and their families rely on other services to enable them to reap the benefits of an inclusive education such as accessible transport services, allied health and community services that all contribute to children with disabilities attending the school of their choice and leading independent lives.

The opportunity exists for a whole of government approach in co-ordinating and strengthening relevant pieces of legislation that support people with disabilities into a coherent framework not only in education but for all services offered to people with disabilities (DRC 2005).

In terms of making immediate progress on inclusive education we recommend a proposed model of inclusive education and an outline of a strategy map that will assist in the development of a more inclusive education system for all children, not only for those with disabilities.

4.1 Proposed Model of Inclusive Education – A “Whole School Approach”

Inclusive education is not just about providing additional support or aid, it is about an integrated curriculum driven by student learning and an accountable financial model underpinned by the following principles:

- expect that all students can learn and be taught in neighbourhood schools
- ensure equal opportunity for all students to maximise learning potential and successful school outcomes
- strengthen assistance to disadvantaged groups
- develop funding models that lead to schools’ implementation of inclusive education for all students and provide targeted support to highest risk areas.

Key features of the proposed model include:

- the ‘Blueprint’s “Effective Schools” framework which is currently developing comprehensive planning & performance measures to be developed in a process of strategic planning in schools, inclusive of all students, including students with disabilities.
- a focus on schools and clusters developing local models that best reflect the unique needs of the students in their communities.
- the strategic use of incentive funding to support the development and dissemination of local modes of effective practice.
- a school cluster based approach to the provision of professional development, and statewide dissemination of best-practice information.
- Equity Funding to improve the learning outcomes of students with disabilities, thus building on and strengthening the Government agenda for a more equitable resource model that is inclusive of all students. The Blueprint for Government Schools highlighted the disparity in student outcomes across the government school system- the evidence based advice for the use of Equity funding and on the influential strategies to support sustained improvement in student achievement apply equally to students with disabilities.

Components of an accountable school financial model are illustrated in Table 2 and a rationale for key components of the accountable school financial model follows.

Base School Funding

Inclusive education is a key principle of democratic education that recognises the responsibility for schools to provide for the effective education of all students within a diverse learning community. School budgets include a per capita allocation for each student and all schools are currently required to prepare Strategic Plans which show the application of their budget to the effective education of all students by *ensuring ... equal opportunity for all and reducing barriers to opportunity* (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2005, p. 5). Thus the education of all students (including students with disabilities) must be considered in this plan i.e., the Inclusive Education Plan is an essential component of the Strategic Plan and will include:

- overall plans for inclusive approaches to curriculum and school organisation.
- recognition of groups within the school population that are at risk of exclusion or limited participation.
- development of explicit plans for the inclusion of at risk groups within curriculum and life of the school
- accountability and evaluation strategies.

<p>Table 2: An accountable school financial model</p> <p>• Ensuring equal opportunity for all – Blueprint - Flagship Strategy 2 – Developing a New Resource Allocation model</p>	
	<p>Base School Funding The implementation and evaluation of inclusive education is a required element of school's annual strategic plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall plans for inclusive approaches to curriculum and school organisation. • Explicit plans for the inclusion of at risk groups within curriculum and life of the school (<i>The inclusive education plan for students with disabilities fits here</i>). • Accountability and evaluation strategies.
	<p>Additional per capita funding: for students who need additional support to access and participate in the curriculum.</p>
<p>Providing targeted support in high risk areas: Equity funding</p>	
	<p>Cluster based model of coordination and professional development Models need to be developed which capitalise on structures and relationships developed by current successful models e.g., the middle school cluster development strategy.</p>
	<p>Small innovative practice grants: to support development and evaluation of effective whole School Inclusive Education Plans (within Strategic Plan)</p>
	<p>Performance bonus: Incentive funding for meeting KPIs of inclusive educational plan to support the transition to inclusive models</p>
	<p>Involving school communities in decisions: Making parent and student participation in decision making easier, including support for parent advocacy</p>

Inclusive education is about building a learning community in which all students can learn successfully. While this goal is not limited to the education of students with disability, it is important that the management of, and accountability for educational funding is in line with strategic directions of the Victorian Government

...it is critical that people with disability are entitled to live, learn, work and engage with their families, neighbourhoods and communities with the same rights and opportunities as all citizens (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2005, p. 42)

Additional per capita funding when required if students need additional support to access and participate in the curriculum.

In the light of the budget escalation since the adoption of the current funding model, it is recommended that alternative curriculum based funding models be developed that focus primarily on participation in the curriculum and minimise the need to overemphasise negatives in order to obtain funding. (McDermott, 1987; McDermott, 1996; Mehan, Hertweck, & Meihls, 1986)

A cluster based model of coordination and professional development

Schools have consistently identified the need for support for teachers including professional development. Models need to be developed that:

- extend capacity by ensuring that appropriate expertise is available at all levels of the system
- provide for ongoing opportunities for learning and the improvement of practice for teachers, currently in service and those returning to service
- support teachers at the time when they are planning and implementing curriculum
- support the coordination and best use of the available resources and extend the capacity of all schools to manage inclusive education and support disadvantaged groups.
- capitalise on structures and relationships developed by current successful models e.g., the middle school cluster development strategy
- are in line with the *Principles of Learning and Teaching P-12 (PoLT)* and *Middle Years strategies* (Blueprint for Government Schools) and the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS)*.
- find ways of including parents and community so that new approaches are understood and supported by all stakeholders.

A cluster based model which facilitates the above outcomes will be effective because it:

- builds on existing partnerships between schools and between schools and universities
- has the potential to support the professional learning of teachers in schools, pre-service teachers and those returning to teaching and to embed this professional learning in practice.
- incorporates well researched models of teaching and learning
- builds in action research and accountability and the opportunity for examples of effective practice developed by clusters to inform and educate across the state system.
- can be resourced through a viable and economic funding model.

Initial models should be trialed in a small number of clusters in partnership with a designated university and region.

Small initiative grants to support development and evaluation of whole School Inclusive Education Plan (Time limited)

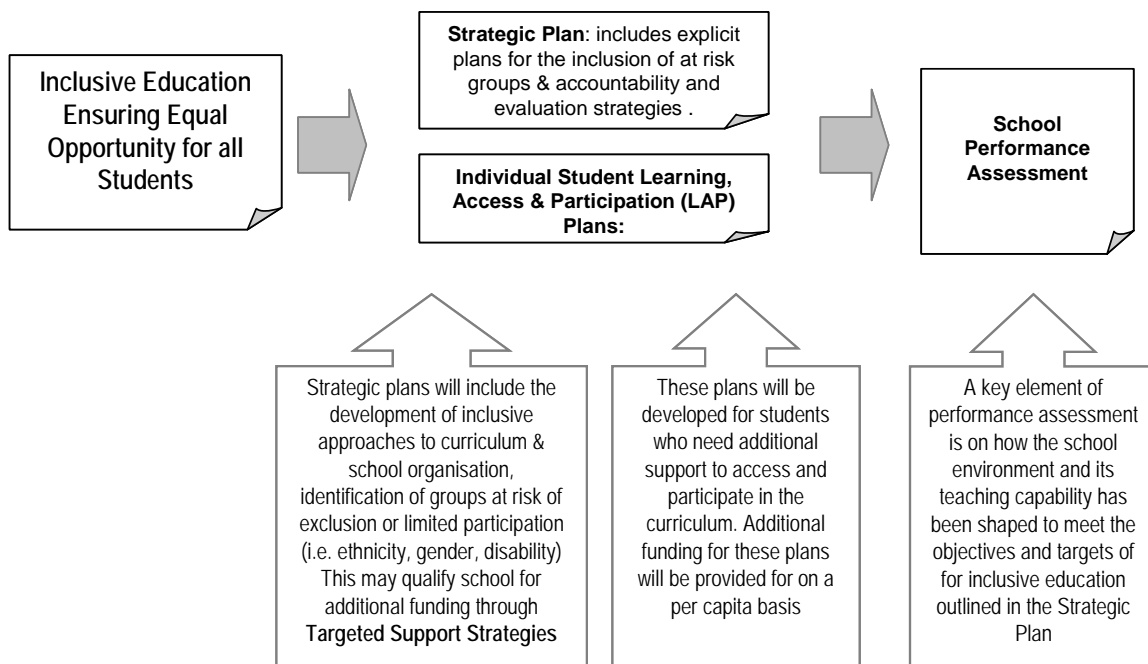
This is transition funding to encourage the development and evaluation of plans for inclusive education within the school's strategic plans. Innovative schools will be thus encouraged to develop model plans that can be used in professional development and system change.

Performance bonus for meeting KPIs of inclusive educational plan

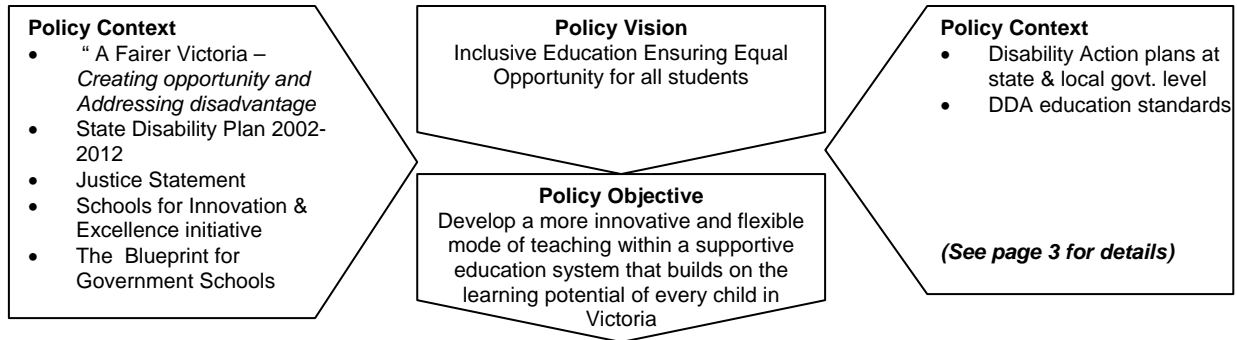
Incentive funding is intended to assist the transition to inclusive models that foster and promote student achievement and encourage and support positive, collaborative and inclusive curriculum based approaches.

4.2 Key Features of the Model

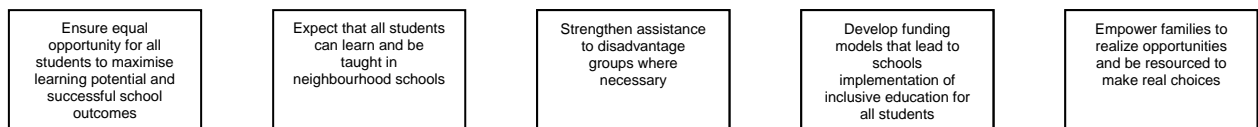
The proposed model includes the development of comprehensive planning and performance monitoring tools that will be developed at the local school level. While resource kits on best practice models will be provided to schools at the state level, the focus will be on schools developing local models that best reflect the unique needs of the students in their communities. The additional resources required by schools in developing inclusive education plans will be provided through bonus or “top-up funding” as long as the plans meet key criteria for best practice models and accountability for performance. The key features of this model are outlined in the chart below



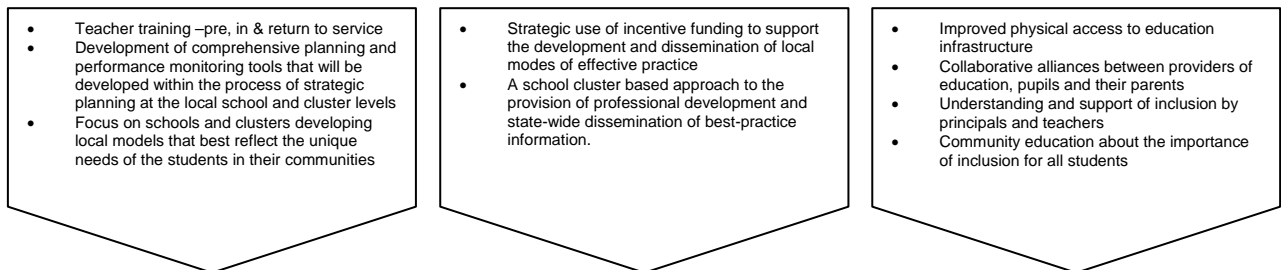
Strategy Map: Inclusive Education for Victorian Schools



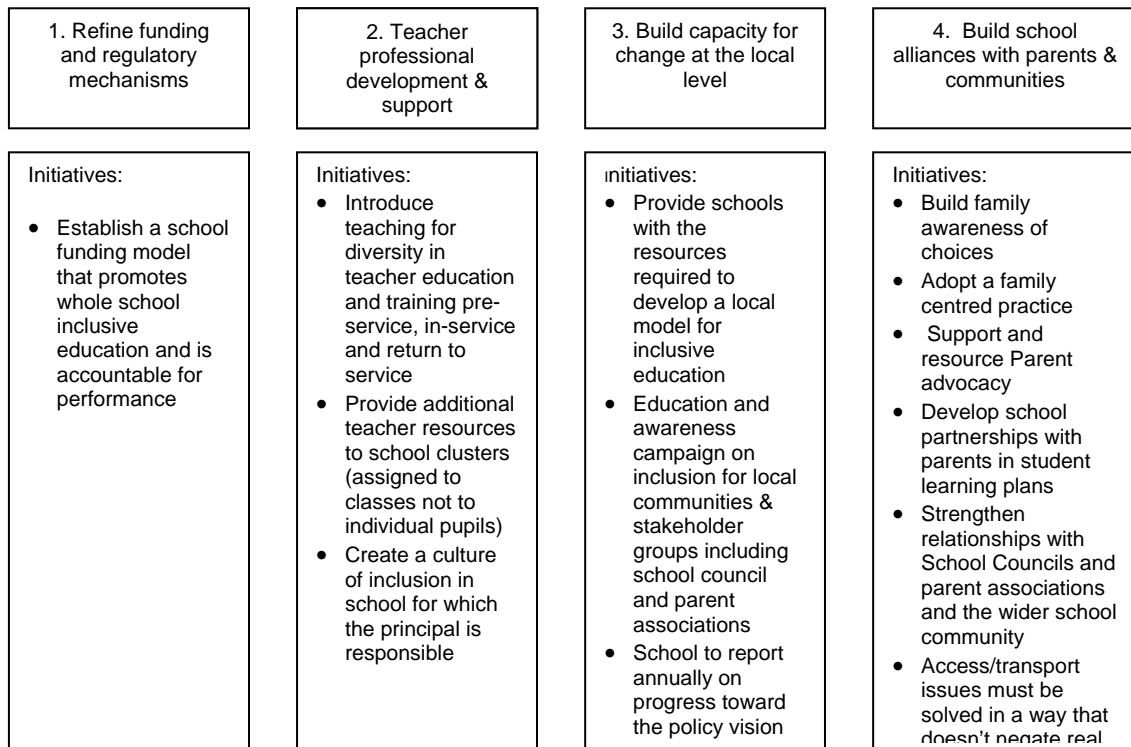
Principles of Inclusion Inclusion requires cultural, ethical and pedagogical transformation



Critical Success factors:



Strategic Objectives (Value Chain)



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