

Briefings

Thought leadership for the independent schooling sector

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SCHOOLS AND THE 2020 STATE ELECTION

From the
Executive Director

The 2020 Queensland State Election will be held this Saturday 31 October. The outcomes will be historic with the next Government serving for the first time, a four-year term¹.

Education is a key service to be delivered by the State Government. It accounts for close to 25% of the State budget in terms of expenditure. Despite the long-term trend of Federal initiatives having an increasing role in shaping schooling provision, decisions at the State level are critical.

Decisions governments make about education today matter for the future. Education policies and reform take time to develop and implement and results may not be apparent for a generation. Against the public expectation for instant results and an appetite for higher spending, the challenge remains for establishing evidence-based reform and improvements to education which are simply not based on which political party can invest more dollars.

To date, in the 2020 State Election campaign, most attention in education appears to have been focused on the number of additional teachers each of the major parties proposes to employ. Little attention has been given to whether employing more teachers is the best strategy for the future and if so, how best to utilise these additional staff.

There would be few industries where such a significant increase in Government expenditure² would be promised without rigorous and deep policy analysis. In education, there seems to be an acceptance that the status quo (or doing more of the same with greater resources) is an accepted policy position.

There is no doubt that teachers (and other school staff) are at the heart of our schooling provision. During 2020, teachers have responded with great commitment and skill to the challenges of a global pandemic and its impact on local schools. The community's regard for the teaching profession has been one of the few positives from a challenging year for education.

Political promises to increase the number of teachers are therefore likely to be popular and well accepted.

In the Independent Schools Queensland commissioned *Our Schools – Our Future* issues paper *A Catalyst for Change*³ (July 2020), Professor Jim Watterston and Professor Yong Zhao identified six significant changes “that we believe must be collectively addressed in order to create the contemporary and fit-for-purpose schools that every child is entitled to attend”.

¹ From 2020, there will be fixed terms of Government for a period of four years with the next State election to be held 31 October 2024.

² The ALP is promising an additional 6,100 new teachers and 1,100 new teacher aides, whilst the LNP is committed to 3,350 additional teachers and 760 additional teacher aides. The most debate around these commitments is whether replacement teachers are being accounted in the “new” figures on both sides.

³ Available at https://rms.isq.qld.edu.au/files/Weblive_OSOF/Catalyst_for_change_2020.pdf

SCHOOLS AND THE 2020 STATE ELECTION

One of the six areas is *Rethinking Teaching and Teachers*, suggesting a movement from the traditional role of the teachers as the primary source of knowledge and instruction for students, to teachers as co-creators of learning events and processes with parents and students to support students to use technology and other means, such as peer tutoring to learn.

There appears to be widespread acceptance that in an age of technology and globalisation, the role of the teacher is changing and will be different in the future. What will teaching will be like and what roles should teachers play in the future?

The answers to these questions have profound implications for current election commitments and the most effective use of the resources that Government makes available for schools. They are not only worthy of extensive policy debate but vital to ensuring the decisions that we make now about education investment are focused towards the best interests of students, parents and the community.

Unfortunately, in an election context, there has once again been little discussion or debate about such fundamental concepts in terms of schooling.

This is disappointing given that Queensland can be a leader in education reform and improvements.

As a State, the “hard yards” have been done over the past two decades with the addition of the Prep Year, moving

Year 7 to high school, adoption of the Australian Curriculum and comprehensive senior schooling changes. These significant structural reforms have brought Queensland into line with education systems interstate and lifted our student outcomes, as evidenced by the annual NAPLAN results state-wide.

However, to continue our improvement journey, we need our political leaders to set out a comprehensive and bold vision for the future of schooling. Ideas and policies put forward at this election could be the foundation for putting schooling at the centre of a post COVID-19 society.

Queensland students and families deserve the attention and investment of their next State Government. It would be a disservice to future generations to halt the education reform momentum in schools that has been built over the past two decades. A world class education system, including a robust and diverse independent schools’ sector, is essential for a prosperous and economically strong Queensland.

Research confirms that the key planks required to continue the building of an improving schooling sector includes quality teaching, empowered autonomous school leadership and evidenced-based initiatives tailored to Queensland schools and their students.

As outlined in the recent ISQ publication *The Value of Independent Schools*⁴, the autonomy of

independent schools creates the ideal conditions for education innovation. It gives schools the freedom to try new evidence-based ideas and technology and incorporates what works best into student learning and wellbeing programs.

This is in addition to the value of choice and diversity provided by the independent schooling sector, the economic benefits of independent schools (including saving the taxpaying public in excess of \$1 billion annually as a result of parental investment in schooling), and the community building and connections.

Policy makers could spend time looking inward, at the independent schools’ sector, to build on the education practices that drive student achievement.

The sector has a long and successful history of being a willing and eager partner in Government initiatives designed for improving student outcomes and addressing the fundamental purposes of schooling. As Professors Watterston and Zhao rationally state in *A Catalyst for Change*:

“Education, in the modern era, should be about much more than helping individuals finding employment. While helping students develop basic practical skills is still needed, it should also be about development of humanity in citizens of the local, national and global societies. Education must be seen as pathway to attaining lifelong learning, satisfaction, happiness, opportunity and contribution to humanity (p9)”.

Perhaps the additional year in the term of future Queensland Governments will give the opportunity for longer-term and deeper thinking about schooling policies. Policies that might address contemporary education challenges and policy questions such as whether our existing legislative frameworks

4 See <https://www.isq.qld.edu.au/media-resources/celebrating-independent-schools>

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governing school education are flexible enough to enable innovation to occur and whether they are reflective of our understanding of the role of the school, teacher and students.

Queensland has strong foundations and a talented and committed education workforce on which to build exciting and innovative reforms for future generations. Reforms that would make us the leading State in Australian in terms of education.

Independent schools look forward to working in partnership with the next Queensland Government on the important task of continuing to transform our schooling provision for the benefit of students, parents and the community.



DAVID ROBERTSON
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LEADING INCLUSIVE LEARNING



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Inclusion comes from a mindset, in seeing people with disabilities as individuals like everyone else. This attitude must be embraced by school leaders as well as the school community... Inclusion is achievable with seeing past the disability to look at us as people, to see our strengths, rather than our differences and limitations.

TIM CHEN, 2020

Quality teaching and learning begins with a philosophy of inclusion. Inclusive education means schools are providing opportunities for every learner to succeed, including those students with a disability, either in a specialised or general schooling context.

The Commonwealth Disability Standards for Education, in place since 2005, require educators to understand and deliver inclusive and engaging teaching and learning for all students in our schools. The law requires independent schools to provide reasonable adjustments to enable all learners to achieve their potential.

The right to education is well established in international human rights law. The *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) reaffirms and clarifies the right to education for people with disability, with Article 24 requiring States to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels.

Significant resourcing is committed to encourage schools to deliver high quality teaching for all students. Funding for students with disability is the largest loading above the per student base provided to schools by the Australian Government. In addition to Federal funding, the Queensland government also provides a loading for students verified as having a disability. A further \$16 million dollars is provided annually by the State Government to the independent sector to support schools to provide significant adjustments to address the impact of disability on young people's learning.

In 2019, 187 Independent schools in Queensland supported 5,048 students with disability. In the five years from 2014 to 2019, State Census data indicates enrolments of students with disability in independent schools who are verified under the State Government's Education Adjustment Program increased at a rate of 9.3% per annum.

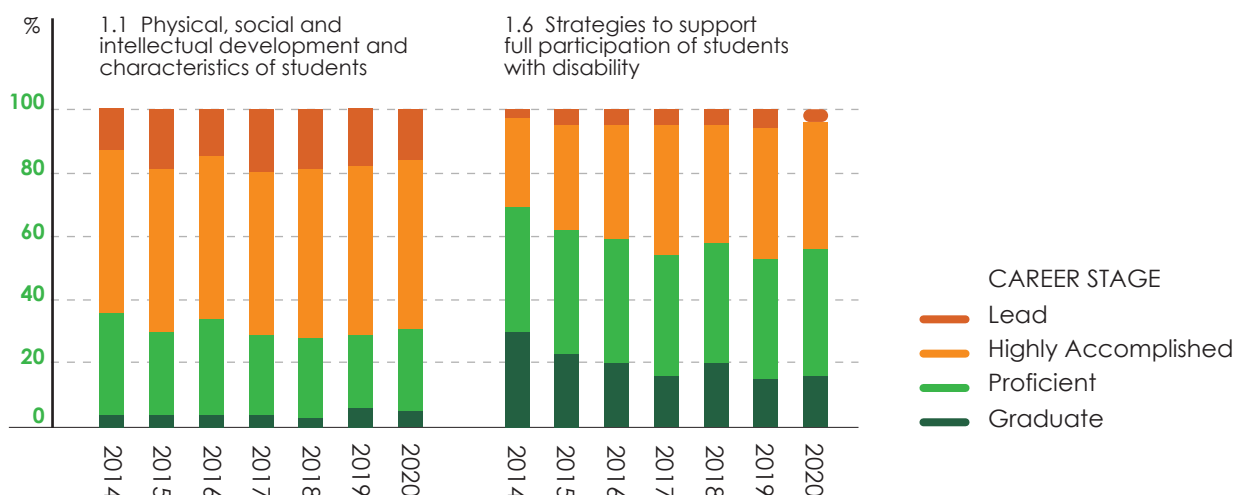
The contemporary expectations of inclusive education require educational leaders to ask themselves how they know that every teacher:

- is framing teaching and learning with high expectations for every learner?
- understands and can respond to the needs of all the learners in their classroom?
- is making teaching and learning accessible to every learner?
- is focusing on each student's abilities and strengths and planning learning that can enable progress?
- is monitoring and evaluating the learning to understand their impact on each learner?
- is engaging with parents, carers and other support in a continuous and meaningful way?

Thinking strategically across a student cohort, how does an educational leader confirm that:

- teachers are providing appropriate support and adjustments for students with disability or that significant, targeted resources are being invested in the activities that will achieve the greatest impact on learners?

Figure 1: Teacher confidence across four career stages



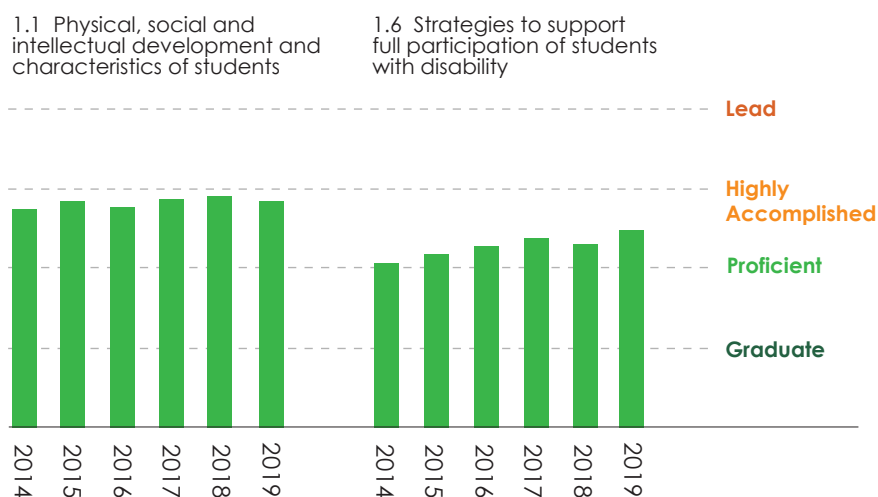
- learning support/enrichment staff are being guided effectively to enable pedagogical and curriculum adjustments?
- teachers are aware of the school's strategy and culture with regards to inclusion and understand and have the capacity to deliver their obligations within it?

This paper will encourage school leaders to reflect on their use of strategic, evidence-based approaches to enable inclusive learning. It will highlight the gaps in workforce capacity, and acknowledge the barriers created by poorly designed internal systems and processes associated with teacher planning and recording student data. It will also point to the opportunities for school leaders to establish a coherent and impactful strategy that enables teachers to maximise the learning opportunities for all students, including those young people with disability.

What is (Still) not Working (Yet)

Despite comprehensive resources from the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) and The Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (ACARA), including specific

Figure 2: Growth in teacher confidence in demonstrating Standards 1.1 and 1.6



advice about curriculum adjustments for those students identified as requiring significant adjustments to teaching and learning, schools still report that teachers struggle to plan, teach, assess and evaluate within a diverse classroom environment.

Graham et al. (2020) reports that while teachers are confident in identifying when students are experiencing learning difficulties (or behavioural difficulties) they are less confident in knowing how to remediate gaps in learning. ISQ's own data confirms this.

The Professional Growth Tool is a survey based on the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. It

has been undertaken by 4,486 teachers from 121 independent schools over the past six years. Over time, self-reported teacher data has shown some growth in teachers' confidence in their ability to teach students with a range of abilities and disabilities. However, many are still operating at Graduate-level standards of practice, despite many years of teaching. Standard 1.1 has the lowest number and percentage of teachers who identify as Highly Accomplished or Lead in this area.

In Figure 1, teachers report that they are able to rate their abilities against Standard 1.6 (strategies to support students with disability), with a large

LEADING INCLUSIVE LEARNING CONTINUED

Many people with disability experience a lifetime of devaluation from birth, through their school years and beyond. The imprint left upon people by the multiple layers of discrimination, exclusion and rejection is often a terrible burden of loneliness, pain or anger.

MICHELLE O'FLYNN, QUEENSLAND ADVOCACY INCORPORATED, 2019

proportion of teachers still seeing themselves as operating at the Graduate or Proficient Career Stage despite long years of service.

Figure 2 (refer page 5) highlights gradual improvement across Standard 1.6 over the years of the survey, but it also uncovers the clear disparity between teachers' perceptions of their ability to meet student need in general when compared with the needs of students with disabilities.

The impact of teachers feeling ill-equipped to deliver inclusive educational environments can have long term impacts on the trajectory of young people with disability.

The Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education "recently released the results of its National Education Survey of almost 500 parents and carers of primary and secondary students with disability and found that over the past year around:

- 1 in 10 students had been refused enrolment
- almost half had been excluded from school events or activities
- 1 in 4 were subject to abuse by either being restrained or secluded

- half had experienced bullying by other students and by educators
- 1 in 5 didn't attend school full time" (Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education, 2019, para. 3).

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability has made education and learning a key area of inquiry. This reflects that schooling contexts are still settings for violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation and is an important component of a society that seeks inclusion for people with disability.

The issues for education and learning identified by the Royal Commission include:

- lack of reasonable adjustments
- lack of individualised supports and planning
- inflexible curricula
- lack of culturally responsive teaching
- workforce capability issues; and specifically
- behaviour management (Australian Government, 2019).

Mary Sayers, CEO, Children and Young People with Disability Australia has said that the "Disability Royal Commission must hold education jurisdictions to account by making strong recommendations for them to right the wrongs that are happening every day in Australian schools" (Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education, 2019, para. 10).

For Queensland independent schools to lead the way in the design and delivery of inclusive education, school leaders must examine a strategic and contextualised approach to meeting the needs of all students in their schools.

What to Do?

Establish the culture

A school leader needs to consider how disability is framed within the whole school community. For example, is disability framed through a medical lens, and therefore is 'treatment or management' the focus and the responsibility of learning support or health teams and carers? Or is disability seen in the school through the lens of the 'social model'?

"The social model sees 'disability' is the result of the interaction between people living with impairments and an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers" (People With Disability Australia, 2020). It is the environment and interactions around a person which exacerbates or mitigates their ability to engage in learning. If a school is committed to a social model, every member of the school community needs to understand their role in mitigating the barriers to learning for every student.

"Impairment is a medical condition that leads to disability; while [d]isability is the result of the interaction between people living with impairments and

barriers in the physical, attitudinal, communication and social environment" (People with Disability Australia, n.d., para. 9).

The culture setting is also unlikely to be mature if the executive conversations are predominately focused on counting students to ascertain funding. Rather, they should focus on the ways that senior educational leaders are designing, implementing and evaluating approaches to understand and respond to the needs of the entire student cohort. Furthermore, in a mature culture, schools will be using student data to track learning progress and communicating with students and parents about that progress in a comprehensive and cohesive way.

If responsibility for leading a school's culture in relation to educational outcomes for students with disability is only with learning support staff, then teachers and leaders will not be able to mature the culture and take responsibility within it. Information about effective practice to support the annual Nationally Consistent Collection of Data with School Students with Disability (NCCD) Census states that "schools are encouraged to establish a school team which comprises a range of staff within the school, or that support the school, who have an interest or knowledge in the area of students with additional needs. This team supports whole-school understanding" (NCCD, n.d.).

A Summary of the Evidence on Inclusive Education (Hehir et al., 2016) suggests that it is through the development of a culture of collaborative problem

solving that the inclusion of students with disabilities can serve as a catalyst for school-wide improvement and yield benefits for non-disabled students.

Data collection and analysis has become common place in schools to guide teaching and learning and resourcing conversations. If the relevant data is not collected, analysed and used to make decisions about resourcing, teaching and learning and impact there is an obvious inequity. NCCD and the Education Adjustment Program (EAP) require schools to collect and keep evidence of classroom planning, teaching, assessment and review and evaluation of teaching for students with a disability. This process cannot be an add-on for classroom teachers, it needs to be embedded in existing processes and evidence collated and collected in ways that assist strategic planning around supporting the learning of all students, including those with additional needs some of whom have a disability. This will look different in early childhood, primary and secondary settings and typically will be designed with generalist teachers in mind so that it makes sense and supports differentiated practices in every classroom.

Elevate student voice

According to the Victorian Department of Education and Training "Student voice involves students actively participating in their schools, communities and the education system, contributing to decision making processes and collectively influencing outcomes by putting

forward their views, concerns and ideas" (Victorian State Government, n.d., para. 2).

Gordon (2010) states that "it is crucial to hear from students with disabilities who are participating in inclusive classrooms in order to better understand their social and academic needs... [and to] go beyond treating students as producers of interesting data in order to explore how they might become partners in a dialogue that informs the life and development of their school community" (p. 6).

Research recognises that it is the disability community who should be enabled and supported to be leaders and their voices considered at every level of decision making about their needs. For families, their support and involvement are critical to achieving consensus about the school's approaches to making reasonable adjustments for students with a disability.

A mature strategic culture of supporting all learners provides spaces for them, their families and community to be seen and heard. It will empower young people with disabilities to be leaders of their own learning and supported to take the lead and participate in all educational activities in a school. Educational leaders are encouraged to prompt teachers to consider how students with diverse learning needs are being supported and enabled to demonstrate leadership and be valued for their contribution to the school community.

Evidenced-based practice

Graham et al. (2020) discuss the benefits of early, evidence-based interventions and the importance of identifying the specific difficulty/ies the student is experiencing so that the correct support can be provided.

Sheehy et al. (2009) report on a systematic review that was undertaken (in England and Wales) of whole class

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LEADING INCLUSIVE LEARNING CONTINUED

I want to live in a world where we don't have such low expectations of disabled people that we are congratulated for getting out of bed and remembering our own names in the morning. I want to live in a world where we value genuine achievement for disabled people.

STELLA YOUNG, 2014

and subject based pedagogies for the academic and social inclusion of students with special educational needs and is still relevant to classrooms today.

Their research indicated that to be effective teachers need to:

- be part of a pedagogic community
- know how to teach the subject and understand why they would use an approach to ensure the subject is accessible for a student with diverse learning needs
- make social engagement intrinsic to the pedagogy
- provide flexible modes of representing the activities and authentic classroom activities
- use progressive scaffolding of classroom activities.

The Education Endowment Foundation has undertaken extensive research into the effectiveness of teacher aides (TAs) to support students' learning. The Foundation reports that under guidance from teachers and with specific interventions in place, they can contribute to a positive learning outcome for students. However, they caution that "schools have drifted into

a situation in which TAs are often used as an informal instructional resource for pupils in most need. This has the effect of separating pupils from the classroom, their teacher and their peers. Although this has happened with the best of intentions, this evidence suggests that the status quo is no longer an option. School leaders should systematically review the roles of both teachers and TAs and take a wider view of how TAs can support learning and improve attainment throughout the school" (Sharples & Webster, 2018).

Build workforce capacity

Findings from *A Summary of the Evidence on Inclusive Education* (2016) note that "teachers with positive attitudes towards inclusion are more likely to adapt the way they work for the benefit of all students and are more likely to influence their colleagues in positive ways to support inclusion..." and that "Teaching practice is central to ensuring that inclusive classrooms provide benefits to all students."

Teachers' confidence and capacity are critical to ensuring there is a continuous, seamless and integrated

approach to adjusting curriculum and pedagogy to meet the needs of diverse learners. The NSW Government (n.d.) is clear that "[e]ffective teachers and support staff are the most important resource in ensuring the best possible outcomes for every student, including students with disability and additional learning and support needs. A range of ongoing high-quality professional learning opportunities can help teachers and support staff meet the educational needs of the diverse range of learners in their classes" (para. 2).

ISQ is enhancing support for schools to build workforce capacity in effectively supporting students with additional learning needs. ISQ offers online modules about the Disability Standards for Education so that all staff understand their obligations and Differentiation for Students with a Disability to support school and curriculum leaders to understand options for differentiating curriculum for students with disability.

ISQ is also providing professional learning and dedicated programs in 2021 associated with:

- strategic use of teacher aides
- teachers working with students with a disability
- NCCD moderation and evidence requirements
- school reviews in relation to student/learning support structure and intent
- specialised workshops for classroom teachers about the Education Adjustment Program and disability specific adjustments.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic provides an opportunity to reflect deeply on each independent school's willingness to go 'above and beyond' in order to meet their obligation to every student and their families.

Schools need leadership teams that look at inclusion strategically and manage available resources according to the needs of a dynamic cohort. School leaders are responsible for supporting the continuous development of the workforce. Senior leaders must support and guide the design of suitable educational data collection and management processes to enable engagement of all teachers in the use of data to inform effective teaching and learning programs for all students.

Schools need teachers who understand their responsibilities and how to leverage their expertise to achieve more for all students; teachers who can guide support-staff and confidently engage with parents and genuinely understand their professional responsibility to apply their pedagogical expertise to enable positive learning outcomes for every student.

Schools are encouraged to reflect on the ways students (and staff) with disabilities are leading conversations about their needs and being enabled to participate fully in every aspect of school. This should be with the view that it is not an impairment that limits the opportunities for a student, but rather the educational community around that student's willingness to deeply understand their needs and provide adjustments that minimise and remove barriers that obstruct their full participation.

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Differentiation for Students with a Disability

This ISQ online module supports school and curriculum leaders, and those responsible for the professional development of teachers, who engage with students with disability in Prep to Year 12. It examines the educational compliance and participation requirements for students with disability along with strategies for differentiating curriculum, assessment and pedagogical approaches, and methods for recording adjustments.

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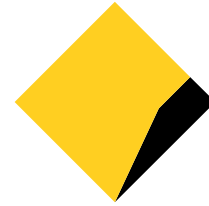
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