

Inclusive practices in Catholic schools in Queensland

A position statement of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission

1. Introduction

This position statement presents the views of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission for Catholic schools in Queensland regarding inclusive educational practices.

Catholic schools share a role in preaching the Good News *"I have come that you may have life and have it to the full"* (John 10:10).

Catholic schools cater for students who have a diverse range of personal characteristics and experiences. These characteristics and experiences may be attributable to physical, religious, cultural, personal health or wellbeing, intellectual, psychological, socio-economic or life experiences. This diverse range of personal characteristics and experiences enriches the communal life of schools.

Despite these practices there will be children with needs beyond those which can be met by Catholic schools.

2. Definition

An inclusive practice is the provision of educational opportunities that may require reasonable adjustment but does not impose an unjustifiable hardship on the school, for students with a wide range of abilities, backgrounds and aspirations in school settings (van Kraayenoord, Elkins, Palmer & Richards, 2000, p.9).

3. Rationale

The Queensland Bishops' Project – Catholic Schools for the 21st Century (2001) has as one of the five defining features of a Catholic school: "Be open and accessible to those who seek its values". Furthermore, "the mission of the Catholic school will extend to all families who identify with and seek the values of Christ". Queensland Catholic Education Commission believes that the concept of inclusion is predicated on the intention to provide an educational environment that promotes the human dignity of each student within a supportive Christian community. The concept of inclusion recognises:

- the uniqueness and the diversity of students as children of God;
- the need for belonging within a community;
- a whole school approach to planning, curriculum development and school organisation;
- access to reasonable differentiated resources and learning opportunities to facilitate the participation of students;
- Catholic social teaching and practice is informed by legislative requirements, educational philosophy and societal expectations.

'The Catholic school sets out to be a school for the human person and of human persons. The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ's teaching: this is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school.' (The Catholic School on the Threshold of The Third Millennium, 1998: paragraph 9)

4. Position Statement

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission advocates that Catholic school authorities commit to establish policies and procedures that incorporate inclusive educational practices into their operations.

5. Implications

- Applications for enrolment from families *"who identify with and seek the values of Christ"* (The Queensland Bishops Project – Catholic Schools for the 21st Century, 2001) will be welcomed by Catholic school authorities in accordance with diocesan and school enrolment policy.
- Students enrolled in Catholic schools will have a diverse range of personal characteristics and experiences.
- Applications for enrolment of students with specific needs will need to be considered with the aim of identifying that students' specific need or needs, identifying what adjustments are required to be made to meet the child's needs, determining whether these adjustments are reasonable, and finally considering whether they can be made without creating unjustifiable hardship for the school.
- Collaborative planning and decision making which includes students, families and educators will be encouraged.
- Collaborative partnerships and service agreements with agencies beyond the school authority to support the particular needs of students will be sought when appropriate.
- Professional development of staff to support the participation of students in the life of the school will be required.
- Flexibility in system approaches, school structures, procedures and curriculum will be required to facilitate options and pathways for students.
- Physical environments that are accessible, stimulating, safe and welcoming will be required.
- Students and their families will be supported and assisted, where appropriate, to discern the most satisfactory educational arrangements, particularly in times of transition, may be required.

6. References

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