



Social Inclusion In Schools

Getting Staff Dialogue Started



The Australian Government's policy document "A Stronger, Fairer Australia" defines social inclusion as:

"..... ensuring no Australian is left behind by giving all the opportunities, resources, capabilities, and responsibilities to learn, work, connect with others and have a say in community life."

Is there a level playing field in education in Australia?

Evidence exists pointing to social class being the strongest predictor of student academic outcomes from mid primary school age through to the completion of secondary education. In addition to underachievement, other indicators of social class inequities that impact on educational outcomes include:

- lower retention rates in disadvantaged socio economic settings,
- higher levels of family stress and mobility that create a need for frequent changes of school
- higher absenteeism from school
- heightened health and wellbeing needs which schools are asked to respond
- Differences in student outcomes between geographic areas in Australia and between indigenous and non indigenous students.

What does this mean for schools?

A key question for education in Australia is:

Do systems of schooling perpetuate social stratification, or are they agents for change that break the cycle of inter-generational disadvantage?

The Big Challenge

“by comparison with the world’s highest performing school systems, Australian students from low socio-economic backgrounds are under-represented among high achievers and over-represented among low achievers”

Melbourne Declaration On Educational Goals For Young Australians, December 2008

In addressing the goal of promoting equity and excellence in Australian schooling, the Melbourne Declaration charges all school sectors to commit to:

- *Ensure that socioeconomic disadvantage ceases to be a significant determinant of educational outcomes*
- *Reduce the effect of other sources of disadvantage such as disability, homelessness, refugee status and remoteness*
- *Ensure that schooling contributes to a socially cohesive society that respects and appreciates cultural, social and religious diversity*

What does an inclusive school look like?

An Inclusive school will:

- establish a climate of welcome and inclusivity
- address issues of access and affordability so that all students can participate in all that the school offers
- provide strong leadership focused on improving teaching and learning
- develop a teaching and learning program that builds in achievement for all students
- provide wellbeing services that support students and work in partnership with other community agencies.
- find ways to value the experiences of all members of the school community

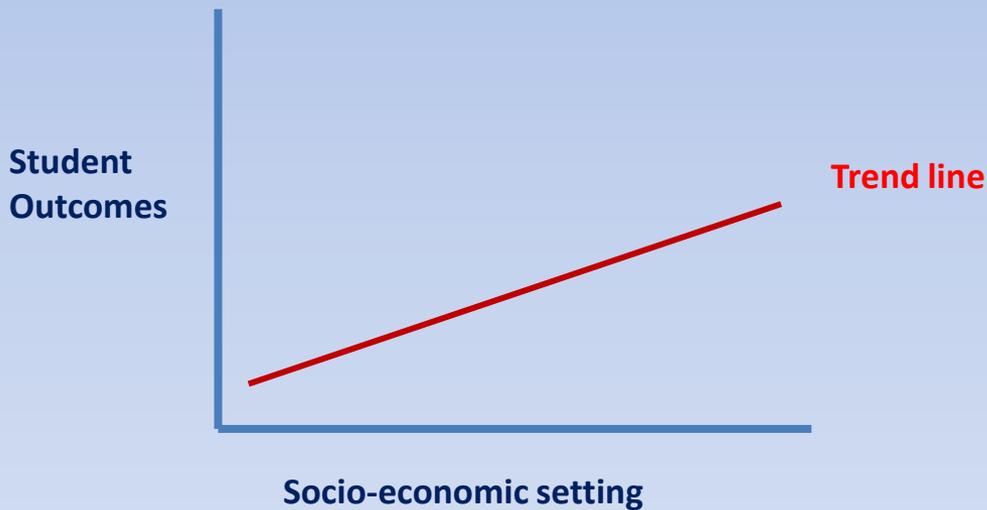
Using these characteristics as a general starting point

- **How well are we doing?**
- **What are our strengths and areas for improvement?**
- **What areas should we focus on in the future?**

A Closer Look at Some Key Areas

1. Student Achievement

- Student Outcomes and Socio-Economic Backgrounds



(Some schools will be above or below the trend line)

Consistent evidence exists from NAPLAN results (Grade 3 onwards) and VCE data that demonstrates that the socio economic setting of students is the strongest predictor of student outcomes. Significant differences exist between urban and rural settings, and between eastern and western suburbs of Melbourne.

(Richard Teese)

Other data

- **Across school sectors, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are:**
 - More likely to leave full time education before the end of the secondary years
 - More likely to study VCE subjects that do not provide as many career or tertiary pathways as other subjects e.g.
 - Further Maths rather than Methods or Specialist
 - No LOTE, Chemistry etc.
 - More likely to study VCAL rather than VCE

(Richard Teese)

Some Key Questions For Consideration

- Where does this school stand in terms of student outcomes compared to “like” schools?
- What factors influence this school’s student outcomes?
- How would you rate the importance of the factors on the next slide?
- How strong is our focus on continuous improvement in teaching and learning?

Social Factors

- Early language training
- Parenting skills
- Health Care
- Cultural factors/social capital
- Social networks
- Aspirations/expectations, following family trends
- Family income
- Family stress

School Factors

- Enrolment Policies
- Focus of school leadership
- Quality of teaching & learning
- Staff networks – working smartly and collaboratively
- Peer effects
- Resources
 - Facilities
 - Class sizes
 - Support services

2. Staff Awareness

Staff awareness is critical if inclusivity is to be present

Without awareness, there will be no response

Consider the following:

Diversity v Homogeneity

In a class of 28 from a mid range socio-economic setting school (all the appearances of being 'middle class')

- 4-5 will come from a family receiving social security benefits e.g health card and receive the Educational Maintenance Allowance
- 6-10 will have or will experienced their parents divorce and the social and economic consequences of this
- Up to one third have, or will at some stage, experience some form of un-invited sexual interference
- Many will have experienced some form of mild or more serious harassment from their peers
- A language other than English will be spoken at home, at least partly, in 5-6 families
- 2-3 will be questioning or be pre-occupied about their sexual identity
- The reading age and level of other basic skills will be spread over 4-5 chronological years with some identified and funded students operating well below this range

Diversity prevails. Pockets of disadvantage exist in almost all schools. Such diversity must be recognised in all manner of school operations.

Some key questions....

- How well do we know our students?
- Do we adopt a “one size fits all” or is individual difference recognised and responded to?
- What specialist support mechanisms exist for student’s with particular needs?
- Is social and emotional learning built into the curriculum?
- How are the life situations of students passed on to next year’s teachers with respect and confidentiality?

3. Curriculum

The inclusive school:

– Builds achievement in for all

- **Achievable goals**

- The work must be 'doable' or failure is built in

- **Assessment & reporting:**

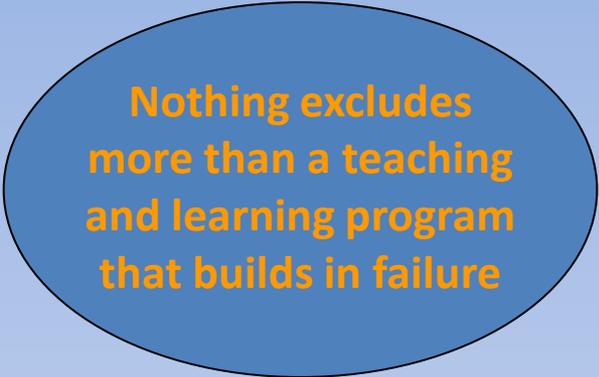
- Individual mapping of student progress occurs rather than comparative rank ordering
- The emphasis is on formative rather than summative assessment

- **Classroom processes**

- Teachers understand about preferred learning styles for individual students
- A sense of partnership exists between teacher and students
- Sensitivity exists to group dynamics, especially in group work

- **Curriculum planning & professional development**

- Strong collaboration exists between staff, supported by organisational leadership



Nothing excludes more than a teaching and learning program that builds in failure

Some key questions

- Is assessment and reporting heavily influenced by norm based criteria or is there an emphasis on mapping individual progress?
- Is curriculum being excessively influenced by the narrow demands of NAPLAN testing?
- What curriculum delivery planning processes exist that focus on how students best learn?
- To what extent is staff collaboration in curriculum development valued ?

4. Embracing the community

Inclusive schools value and welcome the involvement of parents and engage community agencies in supporting families.



Some key questions

- What strategies exist to welcome parents into the school?
- What specific initiatives occur to support:
 - Non English speaking families
 - Recent arrivals from overseas
 - Those experiencing significant financial hardship
 - Those who are on the margins of mainstream society
- What linkages exist with community agencies to support the work of the school?
- What specific specialist expertise is needed?
- What potential exists to further develop community support mechanisms?