Chapter 3

Integration and Inclusion

3.1 Inclusive practices in regard to the education of students with disabilities have become the prevailing orthodoxy. The committee received scarcely any evidence to suggest that segregation of students with disabilities should be the normal learning experience, except in circumstances of serious disability in which the student posed a danger or the likelihood of interference with the learning of other students. There appears to be a formidable body of research which points to significant benefits in inclusive education for children with intellectual disabilities, especially in relation to social outcomes; and rather less than expected disadvantage to students who would normally make fewer demands on the teacher.[1]

3.2 Inclusive education should not preclude the provision of specialised assistance in the mainstream setting, but there is a degree of controversy about the place of segregated units within schools. Some would argue that inclusion practices followed by many schools in some states may be more accurately described as integration. Wills and Jackson, academics who have specialised in the study and promotion of inclusive education, state that the effectiveness of segregated units within mainstream schools is not supported by empirical evidence, but acknowledge that many parents and teachers disagree with their findings.[2] The practice of integration, and the extent of the disagreement among educationists as to what may be properly regarded as inclusive education is explored in this chapter.

3.3 Proponents of inclusion are critical of the medical and expert models used to make decisions about the education of children with disabilities. They look toward a collaborative model of decision-making in regard to the education of each child, believing that both parents and teachers have an important role in identifying an appropriate learning program. Some proponents of inclusion once saw it as part of a radical agenda to have professionals share power and decision-making across the whole spectrum of school life and the school system.[3] For some, inclusion is a process of socialisation: one which would see a salutary confrontation by 'normal' students with the realities of having to live with and accommodate themselves to people with disabilities. This is seen to be education about real life.

3.4 The committee received a number of submissions from advocacy groups and individuals arguing that inclusive education has failed to find committed support from

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1 See Wills, D. and Jackson, R., 'Report Card on Inclusive Education in Australia', *Interaction*, vol. 14, 2–3, 2000, p. 5

2 ibid.

3 Marks, G., *Each an Individual: Integration of Children into Regular Schools*, Deakin University, 1989, p. 14

education systems. The fact that policy statements or descriptions of programs may include references to inclusion does not mean that it happens. This is because, it is argued, the prevailing school and system cultures are inimical to inclusive education.[4] The committee recognises such comment as indicating a different kind of criticism than would be made by parents with more basic concerns on their mind. Although the committee does not believe such advocacy groups have wide support, their emergence does put schools on notice that philosophical issues are up for debate between parents and schools, and within schools as well. There must be considerable doubt as to how well teachers are equipped to engage in debate on inclusion, let alone have the skills to adapt to inclusive classroom methods.

Variations of inclusion

3.5 Two basic positions in regard to inclusion can be identified. The first is characterised as a single educational setting where students with disabilities are taught, for the most part, in regular classes and where special needs are assessed and supported, as far as possible, within this setting. This idea of inclusion may be more accurately described as integration because there may be provision for partial withdrawal of individuals or groups depending on needs and individual programs. Inclusion on these terms assumes that training and support services are available in the school as required.

3.6 The second model assumes complete inclusion, with all students in the same classroom all the time. Such difficulties as may arise which result from social dysfunction or physical handicap of children are dealt with 'appropriately'. Inclusion on these terms presupposes a school structure which is different from the conventional hierarchical structure, and a routine which is also far less structured. This second model is said to be inspired by concerns for equality of opportunity and moral and ethical considerations in regard to the education of those with disabilities as determined at Salamanca in 1994. It is strongly supported by those involved in rights movements.

3.7 The committee believes that there is a degree of utopianism about the second model of inclusion. Its observations of special schools and discussions with specialists and administrators have led it to the conclusion that there are considerable difficulties in dealing with students with particular disabilities in the mainstream classroom: difficulties which are sometimes impossible to overcome in situations where a duty of care, and a duty to teach, are at odds with the need to meet the claims of all students, whether they have a disability or not.

3.8 Inclusive practices in Australian schools lean strongly to an integration model, as would seem obvious, and are, for the most part, similar to practices in other countries where the debate over inclusion follows similar lines of argument. The

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4 For some insight into this opinion see the report *Education for All: UNESCO Report Card on Inclusive Education in Australia,* prepared for the National Council on Intellectual Disability by Darrell Wills and Robert Jackson, Inclusion National, January 2001; and see further discussion in the body of this chapter.

committee noted that there is a discrepancy between theory and practice, with the realities of the classroom impeding inclusive practices to the extent that many education theorists would like. It notes that there is some debate in the United States as to which kind of training for inclusive teaching and learning should come first: the development of new skills; or the development of changed attitudes toward students with disabilities.[5] A report on recent research literature in the United States indicates that skills development may be less important than institutional factors affecting teaching practice, and that examining and developing the culture of schools may be as important to changing attitudes as learning new teaching techniques.[6] In Europe, research indicates that teacher attitudes are similar to those found in Australia, where the extent and the success of integration has depended on the resources available, on class size and workload. Teachers in Europe were less likely than those in the United States to support integration of students with severe emotional and behavioural problems.[7]

3.9 Inclusive policies date from the 1980s. They were argued in the face of opposition from some in the teaching profession concerned about the effect of mainstreaming on the progress of children without disabilities. No doubt much of this opposition also resulted from teachers being aware of their own inadequate skills in dealing with students with disabilities. It was also believed that mainstreaming would discount the specialist skills and the professional status and prospects of teachers in special schools.

3.10 All states and territories follow a policy of integrating students with disabilities into mainstream schools as far as is possible. Those enrolled in special schools are most likely to have multiple disabilities and be dependent to some extent on medication or therapeutic assistance requiring specially trained staff. Special schools and classes are also likely to be linked to specific disabilities. Severely intellectually disabled children are also likely to be enrolled in special schools. The committee heard evidence from state education officials around the country that there has been a gradual reduction in the number of special schools.

How inclusive?

3.11 The committee was interested in the placement of boundaries between inclusion and withdrawal, while recognising that the latter condition may be either transitionary or part-time. There is evidence, albeit five years or more old, from New South Wales, that while the number of special schools has declined in all states, the combined total of students enrolled in special schools and support classes in mainstream schools remains fairly static. This suggests that many students with

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5 Truen, M., van Kraayenoord, C. and Gallaher, K., ‘Preservice Education and Professional Development to Teach Students with Disabilities’, in van Kraayenoord, Elkins *et al*, *Literacy, Numeracy and Students with Disabilities*, Vol. 4, Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs, 2000, p. 8

6 ibid.

7 ibid., p. 9

disabilities spend a high proportion of their time at school in special classes or units.[8] There also seems to be evidence that segregated educational provision for students with emotional disturbance has increased considerably in recent years.[9]

3.12 The committee notes that the withdrawal of special schools does not necessarily equate with inclusion. As one witness explained:

> Inclusion has come to mean inclusion of place, whereas inclusion should be focused on programs. Sitting a child in a regular school classroom is not inclusion. They are not getting inclusive programs which will help them to meet their community needs in later life. That is what inclusion means. We have become too focused on inclusion meaning place—where the student is being taught—but inclusive programs are the key. I think there is a push that, if you have your child in a regular school, there is inclusion. It is absolutely not; it is all dependent on the program.[10]

3.13 One witness was asked how a non-trained teacher can operate in a classroom implementing a policy of integration. The response:

> I think the simple answer is that it cannot. You can go into a typical classroom now of—let us say an arbitrary figure—25 students, and it is quite conceivable that of those 25 you will have five students with a real mixture of even mild disabling conditions. In fact, in some of our so-called units we have moved rapidly from specialised units where we might have had a cohort of perhaps hearing impaired students to a unit where a teacher with perhaps one or two years experience is dealing with two hearing impaired children, a child with visual impairment, a child with Asperger's and some other children with multiple disabilities which include physical disabilities. If that teacher is 50 per cent of their time on their own, or even 10 per cent of their time on their own, the outcomes for those students with disabilities must be questioned. But what about the effect on the other 20 students? Is there not a push for those other 20 students equally to obtain from that teacher the best possible learning environment that she or he can create?[11]

3.14 One early submission indicated the smouldering embers of an inclusion debate. A physically disabled former student of Manly Warringah special school (since closed) submitted that the special education sector should be given more consideration as an alternative to mainstream schools. The submission included a personal reflection:

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8 Dempsey, I. and Foreman, P., 'Trends in Educational Placement of Students with Disabilities in New South Wales', *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, Vol. 44, No. 3, 1997, p. 214

9 ibid., p. 215

10 Mr Peter Symons, member, Australian Education Union, *Hansard*, Melbourne, 13 August 2002, p. 243

11 Dr John Enchelmaier, Vice-President, Australian Federation of Special Education Administrators, *Hansard,* Brisbane, 6 September 2002, p. 440

> …from my own experience, my time in the mainstream education system was a period of great fear, tension and stress. At the time, I of course, did not know how to articulate all these various feelings. Nor do I blame anybody for the fact that my experience was not positive. I do though, remember that palpable feeling of relief when my family and I found Manly Warringah School. This was where I belonged.[12]

3.15 The submission admits that such opinions are not 'politically correct', because they do not 'invoke the administrative/para legal terms of access and equity' but rather the claim to freedom of choice.

3.16 It is interesting to read some cautionary words about the difficulties presented by inclusion in Hegarty and Polklington over 20 years ago in Britain.[13] Some of these comments have current relevance in Australia. The British authors argue that it is nonsense to look at inclusion in emotive terms: that inclusion is a means to an end; that pupils with special needs do not need inclusion so much as they need education. The primary concern should be with individual development, and other considerations about where the education takes place have relevance only in relation to these needs. Inclusion is therefore not a self-evident goal but needs to be argued on the merits of individual cases. Attention has been drawn to the necessity of infrastructure modifications if schools are to accept children with disabilities, but there are far more difficult challenges, such as socialisation patterns, timetabling arrangements and the overall ethos of a school.

3.17 Isolation and the size of a school population have an important bearing on both inclusion policy and on the allocation of specialist resources. As an Education Queensland official explained:

> I think the issue of geographic distribution is a significant issue for us as a state, and we try to deal with that to provide the best service to people by having special education units and classes. What that means is that, because of the low numbers we are dealing with—the low incidence of students; it is three per cent of the student population—in some situations the level of expertise to ensure that a student with a disability is going to achieve their best educational outcome cannot be provided in the local school. So we aggregate resources into special education units and classes and we provide transport assistance to those locations and classes. If a parent wants to send their child with a disability to a school that does not have an SEU [special education unit] or an SEC [special education class], they can do that. We would provide some resources to that school in order to support the student. We would ensure that the student got a level of resources that was sufficient for them to be able to access the curriculum. The issue in regional areas is

12 Submission No. 1, Mr Adam Johnston, pp. 3–4

13 Hegarty, S., Polklington K. and Lucas, D., *Educating Pupils with Special Needs in the Ordinary School,* Nelson, 1981, pp. 13ff

> that the further you go out the more difficult it is, because of the smaller number of students.[14]

3.18 The submission from the Department of Education in Western Australia put the issue of isolation in even more stark terms:

> Western Australia covers nearly one-third of the entire Australian continent. There are approximately 250,000 students in Government schools who may live anywhere in this area. The provision of services to small populations, and often individual students with high needs, presents significant resourcing and operational challenges. The specific location of these students may often also change. These challenges are shared by other Government agencies involved in supporting students with disabilities. They may result in less available, less sophisticated and reliable support. Special programs which require a critical mass of students and high level employee skills are most easily supported in the metropolitan area and may prove practically impossible to establish and maintain in rural and remote areas even if there were no significant funding constraints.[15]

3.19 State education departments have maintained a pragmatic attitude to what constitutes inclusion. Larger systems maintain a diminishing number of special schools, but retain special leaning units within mainstream schools. The Tasmanian Department of Education explained to the committee that it does not currently maintain any special units. Its view was that special units can work very well within a mainstream school, and that one could be established 'if it was right for that school and for that group of students'.[16]

Teacher opinion

3.20 The committee is not surprised to note that teachers have ambivalent views on integration. Teachers are at the 'sharp end' of policy decisions made in this area and meet challenges to the extent that their experience and levels of training permit. Teaching is an increasingly stressful occupation, even in the classroom which does not include students with obvious disabilities. The different stresses under which teachers and parents labour in their separate roles of responsibility for children with disabilities can result in tension.

3.21 Teacher representatives told the committee that the teaching of students with disabilities is an area in which there was considerable potential for conflict between teachers and parents. It is an area which often requires considerable diplomacy. Integration programs place high demands on teachers and create a tension between balancing the needs of the integration student with the needs of the whole class. They

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14 Mr Michael Walsh, Acting Director, Inclusive Education Branch, Education Queensland, *Hansard*, Brisbane, 6 September 2002, p. 501

15 Submission No. 244, Department of Education, Western Australia, at para 3.3.6.

16 Ms Alison Jacob, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education, Tasmania, *Hansard*, Hobart, 3 September 2002, p. 392

can lead to serious undermining of support for teachers within the school community if there is a perception that the interests of particular students are either given precedence or ignored.[17]

3.22 In its submission to the inquiry the Australian Education Union stated its position in relation to the placement of students with disabilities, acknowledging that integration involve more than a student's physical location, and involve the fullest possible participation by all students in the education programs and social activities of the school.[18] The policy, which dates from 1985, states:

> While the concept of education within the most advantageous environment is fully supported, the educational requirements of individuals should have priority over the pursuit of an ideal. Integration into a regular school will be in the best interests of some children; for other children the most advantageous environment, in the sense in which their learning can be maximised, may be a special school. Still other children may be most appropriately taught in their homes or a community or hospital setting. Critical to the future of the student, however, is the quality of the program offered.[19]

3.23 A much more recent view expressed by the president of the Queensland Teachers Union, Ms Julie-Ann McCullough in March 2001, reflects the official line and almost certainly represents the majority view of teachers.[20] While sympathetic to the views of parents, and broadly in support of integration, Ms McCullough emphasised that processes must ensure the most appropriate placement of the student; value the professional judgement of teachers and other professionals; involve parents and take note of their wishes; address the needs of all students in the educational setting; and, provide the necessary resources and support. Specifically, Ms McCullough rejected the claims of disability advocacy groups who dismissed the resources issue as unimportant and who argued that attitudinal change was more important. It was pointed out that teachers and school administrators faced a difficult task of balancing the conflicting demands of students and their parents in the mainstream, and those for whom special provision was required. A similar point was made by a representative of the Australian Education Union appearing before the committee in Melbourne, when he confirmed that there was:

> …considerable potential for conflict between teachers and parents. The handling of this area required considerable diplomacy. It is an area which is potentially a regular source of problems for us in terms of issues raised by members and the way in which parents react within a system that we believe is open to all of the public and where we encourage as many people as possible. …I emphasise that I believe that most teachers have the will and

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17 Submission No. 215, Independent Education Union of Australia, p. 10

18 Submission No. 198, Australian Education Union, p. 6

19 ibid.

20 McCullough, J.A., 'Teachers Would Meet Halfway On Inclusion', *Courier-Mail*, 2 March 2001

> the desire. They sometimes lack the means and the capacity. This places them in a situation where they have to choose between the interests of the student with the disability, the interests of the students who do not have a disability and their own interests in terms of well-being and stress levels. This is an issue that we need to talk through and work our way through.[21]

3.24 This tension has provoked some research and commentary from academics impatient with the attitudes of teachers facing these problems and dilemmas daily at the chalkface. A study orchestrated by academics Darrell Wills and Robert Jackson for the National Council on Intellectual Disability is indicative. Their *Education for All: UNESCO Report Card on Inclusive Education in Australia* examined state practice on inclusiveness on the basis of criteria developed to monitor global progress under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's *Education for All Initiative 2000 Assessment*. In particular, their report responded to the UNESCO follow up study *Inclusion in Education: the Participation of Disabled Learners (2000)*.[22]

3.25 Overall, the Wills and Jackson 'report card' (which appears to have no authorisation from UNESCO) was highly critical of Australia's inclusion policy implementation, and described systemic state-wide resistance to the philosophy of inclusion, as defined by the authors. For reasons to do with methodology and preconceived outcomes of the research, the report does not appear to have been taken seriously in education policy circles**.**

3.26 The committee acknowledges that these are policy issues for the states and territories to work through with teachers and parents. It understands the reluctance of both principals and teachers, as well as education administrators and unions to be hurried into radical changes for which they may not feel themselves to be properly equipped to handle. The committee notes the diverse pressures upon schools to perform across the whole spectrum of educational achievement, and understands that not all expectations which parents have of schools can be met at once.

Inclusion in Queensland

3.27 Particular reference is made to Queensland in this chapter only because its policy of 'ascertainment' has been criticised as indicating a lack of commitment to inclusion. As described in Chapter 2, ascertainment is the method currently used by Education Queensland to identify the educational support needs of students with intellectual, physical, hearing, vision, and speech and language impairments, and students with autistic spectrum disorder. Students are ascertained at levels 1 to 6 in

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21 Mr Roy Martin, Federal Research Officer, Australian Education Union, *Hansard*, Melbourne, 13 August 2002, p. 242

22 *Inclusion in Education: the Participation of Disabled Learners*, Thematic Studies, World Education Forum, Education for All Assessment, UNESCO, Dakar, Senegal, 26–28 April 2000

each of these categories, depending on the severity of the disability and a child's capacity to learn.[23]

3.28 The committee received evidence from the Queensland Parents of People with a Disability (QPPD) about what it sees as the failure of Education Queensland to implement inclusive education. The QPPD submission called for the elimination of policies and programs specifically targeted at students with a disability. The QPPD agenda appears to be much wider than the immediate concerns of students with disabilities. It has much to do with transforming the administrative and pedagogical culture of schools as a catalyst for social change. In arguing that the education needs of students with disabilities are no different from the education needs of other students,[24] QPPD is expressing a view that is unlikely, in the committee's view, to find support in the education community as a whole.

3.29 The difficulty with the view put by QPPD was explained by the principal of a special school in Queensland:

> There are some real paradoxes at the moment. On the one hand, we are saying that all kids are different and have a right to develop to the extent that their individual differences allow. On the other hand, we have some philosophical ideologically driven things which say that all kids are the same and they should be subjected to the same kind of education as everyone else. Those two things are in conflict. I do not disagree with parents who are very concerned that the quality of outcomes must improve. As professionals, we are dedicated to doing that. In special schools, though, we have a major change in the quality and the quantity of the population. Ten years ago, my school had 120 students who were mildly intellectually impaired and had no other disabilities. Most of that cohort are in mainstream schools now. My school now has 42 students who are profoundly disabled, with multiple disabilities—many of whom have spent their first seven years of schooling in the mainstream and who have got to a secondary level. Parents have said, 'I cannot put up with the state that my child is coming home in. I want an environment that is appropriate.'[25]

3.30 Education Queensland officials told the committee that over 200 special units had been established in schools, at the request of parent bodies, to cater to the needs of students with disabilities. The number of special schools in Queensland had been reduced, but the committee was advised that:

> There is no plan to shut down special schools in Education Queensland. There is no evidence or information available … as to how many students can be integrated into a regular classroom. The issue is in terms of the local provision of education services working with the local community and identifying the most appropriate way to provide education services for

23 Mr Michael Walsh, op cit., p. 483

24 Submission No. 151, Queensland Parents of People with Disabilities, p. 4

25 Dr John Enchelmaier, op. cit., p. 437

> students. In special education units in regular schools the majority of those students would attend regular classes but it does not necessarily mean that if you are in a special education unit attached to a regular school you will at any point in time be in a regular classroom. You can attend the unit and not attend regular classes. It is important that it be recognised that the decision is actually made by the local education community in relation to families, teachers and the child themselves.[26]

3.31 Meanwhile, the committee was told that Education Queensland is working on a plan to strengthen its commitment to inclusive education through the employment of more support staff, improved professional development, additional capital works and measures to improve the school-to-work transition of students with disabilities. On the issue of ascertainment, the committee was told that the proposed reforms 'will consider moving the emphasis from the identification and possible segregation of children who have disabilities to the identification of barriers to learning for all children…'[27] The committee notes the careful way in which this statement is phrased, and appreciates that government agencies will always be faced with satisfying the aspirations of particular community interest groups while ensuring that public policy serves the best interests of all. While the committee does not take seriously criticism from parents based on philosophical differences some may have with Education Queensland, it does respond with some interest to a submission that parents are claiming at the time of ascertainment higher levels of dependency for their children because of the additional funding available at those levels, and trusts that Education Queensland is addressing this problem in its policy review.

International reports on inclusive education

3.32 A UNESCO sponsored report on inclusive education, which inspired the National Council on Intellectual Disability's *UNESCO Report Card on Inclusive Education in Australia* referred to previously, did not share the report card's negative conclusions about inclusive education in Australia. Instead, the UNESCO document made only brief reference to Australia in the context of our overall adoption of an inclusive model, balanced by a commitment to parental choice, this last being noted as a distinctive feature.[28]

3.33 In the year preceding the UNESCO sponsored assessment, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) also conducted an international comparative study on inclusiveness in education that had a stronger focus on Australian outcomes. According to the OECD report, which for convenience took New South Wales as its Australian sample, Australia occupies a median position in the ranking of OECD countries in the proportion of children being educated outside

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26 Mr Michael Walsh, op. cit., p. 492

27 ibid., pp. 482–83

28 *Inclusion in Education: the Participation of Disabled Learners*, 2000, pp. 8; 22; 33

mainstream schools. The figure for this country (in 1997) was 1.55 per cent, as compared with none in Italy and 4.9 per cent in Switzerland.[29]

3.34 The OECD report gave a very favourable assessment of the progress being made in New South Wales toward improving the quality of education available to students with disabilities in mainstream schools. It commented favourably on the curriculum materials and the multi-layered network of support specialties available to assist schools and teachers. While it is more than likely that NSW Department of Education and Training officials had some influence over the schools selected for survey, the committee notes that in a highly centralised school system like New South Wales it is unlikely that significantly wide variations in program quality prevail, at least in the metropolitan area and in the more heavily populated regions beyond.

3.35 An authoritative UNICEF report, released in November 2002, a week before the tabling of this report, has found that a child in Australia has a higher chance of being educated to a reasonable standard than a child in Sweden, Germany, Britain or the United States and a number of other OECD countries, but also has a higher chance of falling a long way behind the average if they happen to be a low achiever. Canada, Finland and Korea do much better at containing educational disadvantage. In all the OECD countries surveyed, a strong predictor of success or failure at school is the economic and occupational status of a child's parents. A strong link was found between disadvantage at home and disadvantage at school.

3.36 UNICEF argues that good quality early childhood care and education should have an increasing role to play in minimising educational disadvantage and social exclusion. Extending the educational benefits to all children requires significant public investment.[30]

Parental views and experience

3.37 The committee noted the evidence that parents were not unanimous in their choice of educational setting for their children. The great majority agreed that some form of integrated setting was their preferred option, although the pattern of integration appeared to vary widely. As one witness noted, for some parents the choice was different:

> We have a range of parental views in the community. Some parents are very committed to a mainstream setting, and members of our association support that, and we have members that run services in mainstream settings. We have other parents who are very happy with the outcomes that they receive in a segregated special school. They see that that outcome is entirely suitable for their child—and their outcomes in terms of moving into the community are worth while. We really need to come to grips with the range

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31 *Inclusive Education at Work: Students with Disabilities in Mainstream Schools*, OECD, 1999, p. 55

30 *A League Table of Educational Disadvantage in Rich Countries*, Innocenti Report Card, Issue 4, November 2002, http:www.unicef.com.au/media_details.asp, (access. 28 November 2002)

> of parental views, and we need to acknowledge that there must exist a range of programs to provide for that. We as an association believe that quality programs across all settings are imperative—not just quality programs in special schools but quality programs in mainstream schools, which are just as vital to the outcomes for students.[31]

3.38 The committee was interested in evidence of the contribution of special schools to system-wide efforts to use expertise most effectively. Special schools have become 'lighthouse' schools of best practice in some states; and a source of concentrated knowledge and experience. Given the acute shortage of trained and experienced teachers in mainstream schools, it has become commonplace for special schools to develop curricula and teaching methods which are widely used in mainstream school settings. The concentration of expertise in special schools has an advantage in that shared experience can result in collaborative research and development of curriculum. As one witness pointed out, is that specialist education teachers in mainstream schools often feel alone and unsupported. The evidence continued:

> Often the teacher who provides programs for students with disabilities can be just as isolated as the student. For a first- or second-year graduating teacher, say, that dialogue with a mentor who is a skilled practitioner in the area of disability is something that is missing. One of the things we are talking about in our models is the importance of linking and developing expertise so that we do not lose expertise. We cannot continue to have that occur. We have the twin problems of a group of teachers leaving the profession, ready to retire, and a loss of teachers at the graduate level. Those two things are going to come into play within the next five to 10 years.[32]

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that MCEETYA investigate the development of teacher exchange programs for staff of 'lighthouse' special schools and mainstream schools.

3.39 Mainstream schooling poses particular difficulties for students afflicted by sensory disabilities, because of the expense of human support need. One parent submitted that although he wanted to send his profoundly deaf son to a local primary school, his enrolment would have attracted $18,000 in disabilities funding which would have provided one third of an aide. Thus two thirds of the curriculum would have been inaccessible to the student. This parent stated that inclusion for deaf students in mainstream schools could only work if a full-time Auslan proficient assistant was appointed, with access to a mobile deaf facility. It would also help if

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31 Mr Peter Davis, Secretary, Australian Federation of Special Education Administrators, *Hansard*, Brisbane, 6 September 2002, p. 437

32 ibid. p. 439

Auslan was taught as part of the LOTE (Language other than English) program, in order that a deaf child could eventually converse with classmates.[33]

3.40 A similar point was made by the Australian Association of the Deaf:

> It is of concern that deaf children are being integrated into mainstream schools without adequate support. Anecdotal evidence is available which indicates that deaf children are being expected to manage in schools without adequate support, irrespective of whether they are signing or oral students. Support services required include: teachers of the deaf, interpreters, teachers aides, Auslan teachers, speech therapists. Such policies have also seen the closure of schools for deaf children in favour of integration, at the expense of quality of education.[34]

3.41 The most serious problem facing parents of deaf and blind students, as is explained elsewhere in this report, is the growing shortage of teachers and assistants with specialised skills. In these circumstances, some degree of specialist concentration is the only option for parents even though it results in considerable inconvenience, even to the point of determining where families live. It would be impossible, and inappropriate in any event, for school systems to provide this level of support for such students in all local schools.

3.42 Despite the overwhelming weight of evidence on the benefits of inclusion, the committee received submissions suggesting an ambivalent attitude to the subject: an attitude which may see the continuation of some residual specialisation and a continuation of 'special education' in some form. Thus the committee heard that:

> The inclusion policy that is current in this state at the moment is basically aimed at ensuring that the vast majority of kids with disabilities are integrated into mainstream schooling. We have anecdotal evidence that there is a turnaround happening. Initially, parents with children with disabilities were very keen to see that happen but after a few years of putting it into practice there seems to be a shift back to having the option of having your child in a special school. The problem is that a lot of the special schools are closing and it splits the funding again.[35]

3.43 Parents have expressed concern about the maintenance of funding levels. An Adelaide parent feared that inclusion can be a 'dangerous option' because it so often signals a reduction in funding over time.[36] School systems have not been quite able to convince some parents that the inclusion agenda has much more to it than economising on specialist teachers and facilities: a fortunate coincidence of

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33 Submission No. 27, Mr Robert Morrison, pp. 2–3

34 Submission No. 83, Australian Association of the Deaf, p. 2

35 Ms Yulia Onsman, Media Liaison Officer, Tasmanian Council of State School Parents and Friends Association , *Hansard*, Hobart, 3 September 2002, p. 328

36 Mrs Lorraine Taylor-Neumann, Convener, Special Needs Education Network*, Hansard*, Adelaide, 9 September 2002, p. 512

pedagogical high mindedness and fiscal rectitude. The ambivalence of parental attitudes is again illustrated by the following evidence from another Tasmanian witness:

> We would also support inclusion. However, there are many aspects of inclusion and, at times, parents have said that their children have learnt more by being in a special class that is located within a mainstream school. They would welcome their child being included in the social aspects of schooling in all sorts of activities. We support inclusion, but there need to be choices for parents because for some families accessing a special school has resulted in better learning outcomes for their child. That is weighing up the fact that they are then segregated, which is certainly something that we could not support. Most parents do not support that. They like their children to be included with other children.[37]

3.44 While not part of the evidence given to this inquiry, the following comment made by a parent to the National Council on Intellectual Disability sponsored *UNESCO Report Card* survey sums up the views of parents who are dissatisfied with practices they see operating in schools, often as a result of classes being taught by people lacking in knowledge or experience of the needs of children with disabilities. The comment is a revealing insight into assumptions made by some parents, about their own expectations and their perception of what is wrong with ‘the system’:

> …any efforts the education department has made to provide for children with disabilities are usually driven from a ‘Special Ed’ mindset rather than an inclusive one. The Department of Education and Training keeps employing special education teachers to advise on inclusion, something they know little or nothing about. The Learning Together resource, which no doubt the department (NSW) is very proud of, makes it crystal clear that there is great confusion about what inclusion actually is, as segregated examples continue to be called ‘inclusive’. Within schools it is usually ‘pot luck’ if you strike a teacher who is willing to learn something about inclusive practice. There is then no flow through into the rest of the school. As a parent, you just start ‘educating’ the next teacher each year. Because there is little or no values training for teachers, parents often have to spend six months or more trying to get the teacher to understand the importance of an inclusive education to a child’s life and justifying their choice to enrol a child in the regular class. Some teachers feel that if they don’t agree with inclusion they have no obligation to teach a child, even if they are enrolled in their class.[38]

3.45 The committee notes the ideological tenor to this comment: the suggestion that teachers are guilty of rejecting the doctrine of inclusion as it is narrowly defined, usually by those who do not have responsibility for running schools or education systems. Nonetheless, it is a matter for concern that teachers placed in this position

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37 Mrs Cynthia Betterman, Member, Special Needs Education Network, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 9 September 2002, p. 513

38 *Education for All: UNESCO Report Card on Inclusive Education in Australia,* 2001, p. 58

may not be confident of either their classroom methods, or the theoretical underpinnings of those methods, and are thus vulnerable to criticism.

3.46 The committee makes the point, though it scarcely needs to, that inclusion embraces a wide range of strategies to ensure that children with disabilities receive a mix of educational experiences. In some cases it is the social experience which is most important; in other cases the curricula experience may determine the inclusive experience. There is a half-way approach to inclusion and it occurs every day in most schools. The committee heard of one school's experience:

> At our school probably 25 of the 110 students are involved with their regular schools but many of our particular schools are for kids with severe and profound disabilities and it is not appropriate. For example, we have got one boy who is on oxygen 24 hours a day and needs a lot of support. Yes, that is fairly common and, in fact, some schools in Victoria are actually doing reverse integration and bringing students from regular schools into the specialist school for certain programs. This benefits students that have got a mild learning disability where they will need some intensive teaching and structured individual programming for a short term and can then return to the regular school. I think that is the better model than saying, 'We're going to run segregated settings in mainstream schools.[39]

3.47 Parents of enrolling children are naturally concerned about the chances of their child having as close to a 'normal' school experience as possible. This has provided much of the impetus toward inclusion. Yet severely disabled children are expensive to support in mainstream schools, mainly because of the cost of teacher aides and outside specialist support. In some cases inclusion in a mainstream school is not possible because of the nature of the disability. A special school principal told the committee of his experience in dealing with parents unwilling to accept that a special school is the only option:

> …I have had many of them cry in my office. They come with their five-year-old son or daughter and say, 'Has it come to this? Is this it?'—because they see older students in a special school, and it is very sad. In many cases, a lot of the parents want their son or daughter to be in a regular school with regular schoolkids. And I can understand that. In the last couple of years, especially in Victoria—but also in other states of Australia, because I meet a lot of special principals—there has been far more accountability and individual focus on programs. That delivery has actually got out, and a lot of the parents now are choosing specialist schools.[40]

3.48 The committee accepts that inclusion policies need to be administered in a flexible way. It also accepts that there is a place for special schools, and special units within schools. The committee heard or read no sustained evidence to suggest that backward practices prevail in schools or systems. It heard a great deal of evidence of

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39 Mr Peter Symons, op. cit., p. 248

40 ibid., p. 254

rethinking in regard to inclusion and of strategies to ensure that it was working to the educational advantage of those with disabilities.

Conclusions and recommendations

3.49 This chapter has been included to reflect the committee's consideration of an important educational debate at the centre of the provision of education to students with disabilities. At the core of the debate is an issue of values. Inclusive educational policies have been premised on the basis of the desire to see children with disabilities given their full due as citizens in the making, with the same rights as everyone else, and provided with the same opportunities to reach their potential. Although the committee's acceptance of these premises is unequivocal, the issue of how best to implement policies which recognise these values becomes more debatable.

3.50 The debate arises from the fact that for the most part, educationists and most parents see inclusion as having its principal effect on those who were once excluded. A hard core of inclusionists would reject this assumption. They would argue that inclusion is intended to have an effect on everyone in the education system, not only those with a disability. The effect of inclusion on those with disabilities would be to bring them into the mainstream of social life and learning. The desired effect on the rest of the school population is to have them accept as normal and valued the contribution made to school life by those with a disability. Just how a severely autistic child, or one suffering from multiple disabilities and a behavioural disorder, could be accommodated in a classroom is not an issue which can be satisfactorily addressed by inclusionists. For them, the goal is for the school to become an agency for social change, effecting dramatically altered perceptions of the way people from diverse circumstances view each other. It is for this reason that inclusionists are critical of what they call 'special education' mindsets, which are most commonly on display when teachers and administrators start talking about how to overcome 'education deficits'.

3.51 It follows from this that the role of the school as an agent of change cannot evolve unless the school as an institution changes. This change will alter or even transform the structure of authority and the relationships between stakeholders in the teaching and learning process. It is not difficult to see why the teaching profession and the system administrators avert their gaze from this distant prospect. In the meantime inclusionists of the uncompromising stamp reject anything that suggests special treatment in the classroom, except in the sense that everyone in the classroom needs special attention because everyone has special needs. And then, when everyone is special, no one is special. Targeted funding to provide for particular needs becomes difficult in these circumstances.

3.52 For this reason alone the committee is pleased to see a more flexible interpretation of inclusive education evolving in accordance with local circumstances, and in sympathy with broad opinions and attitudes which are influenced by improved knowledge and deeper understanding of the needs of students with disabilities. Educational thinking cannot move too far ahead of public expectations. The most important expectation, as all the evidence suggests, relates to measures that will

ensure that children are happy in their learning environment, achieving social acceptance and a satisfactory rate of academic progress. For most parents, and not only of those of children with disabilities, these are the most important schooling outcomes. Ideological considerations about the place of particular methods and practices within inclusive education are largely irrelevant to most parents.

3.53 It follows from this that the future of inclusion lies in a meeting of minds between parents and principals and teachers. The committee notes the large number of submissions it received from parents who claimed that they had to bring teachers up to the mark on how to deal with children with various disabilities. This is a matter of concern because it goes beyond a discussion of the needs of a particular child. If parents come to believe that, as a general rule, normally competent teachers are ill-equipped to deal with disabilities, the professional status of teachers comes into question. School systems and schools which expose teachers to these situations are culpable of serious neglect of the professional development of their staff.

3.54 The committee has a made a recommendation in Chapter 5 related to professional development. It makes the point here that professional development is necessary to ensure public confidence in the teaching profession; an objective which would not have been considered important once, but which now is, given the nature of the challenges facing teachers in the area of inclusive education.

3.55 Three international reports were referred to earlier which attempted an assessment of progress made in inclusive education. The committee notes that the analysis of Australian circumstances in two of these reports, carried out by the OECD and UNESCO, were reassuring but rather superficial. The third report, conducted by UNICEF, concluded that Australian educators were significantly less successful than other countries in assisting underachievers. Meanwhile, the *UNESCO Report Card*, the domestic report prepared for the National Council on Intellectual Disability, was extremely critical of present practices in Australian schools, although its findings appear to reflect the preconceptions of its researchers and authors and are of doubtful validity.

3.56 The committee believes there is considerable scope for much more well-founded research into the effects of inclusion policies on educational outcomes for students with disabilities. In particular, there is a need for research of the kind that would have practical value for teachers and school administrators; projects that could link with professional development programs. The committee recommends that MCEETYA contract research bodies to undertake additional studies along these lines.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that MCEETYA commission an assessment of the outcomes of inclusive policies for students with disabilities; and devise implementation and professional development strategies for teachers and school administrators to improve these outcomes.

Recommendation 6

The committee recommends that MCEETYA develop a policy on inclusive education that recognises the importance of having a range of schooling options for students with disabilities.