

Disability Royal Commission - Education

QDN Member Forum

9 April 2024



QDN

QUEENSLANDERS WITH DISABILITY NETWORK
NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

About Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN)

Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) is an organisation of, for, and with people with disability. QDN operates a state-wide network of 2,000+ members and supporters who provide information, feedback and views based on their lived experience, which inform the organisation's systemic advocacy activities. We believe people with disability should always be at the table when decisions are made that directly impact their lives.

Introduction

The Disability Royal Commission (DRC) Final Report was published on 29 September 2023 and made 222 recommendations. Education is featured in Volume 7 of the Final Report and is available [here](#). On 9 April 2024 QDN held a member Education Forum covering the Final Report recommendations related to education, specifically segregated education, inclusive education, and mainstream schooling. The forum provided an opportunity to hear from QDN members on these important topics.

Following a brief presentation on the key themes in the recommendations, members were divided into break out rooms to discuss the themes. QDN staff were available in each breakout room to facilitate the conversation and provide further information about specific recommendations if requested by members.

In total there were 16 members who came together to share valuable feedback, insights and ideas. Members strongly expressed the crucial importance of co-design and reiterated the value of lived experience of disability. Members emphasised the importance of maintaining choice and control, flexibility, valuing every child in the classroom and progressing true inclusion. Members also expressed disappointment that there is no united conclusion after all the consultation done during the Disability Royal Commission.

This report shares what we heard from members during the forum.

Breakout room discussion on key themes

Equal access to mainstream education, participation, and phasing out segregated education

Aligns with Recommendations 7.1, 7.4, and 7.1

Participants provided the following feedback:

- Every child has the right to inclusive education.
- Children with and without disability should be together in the classroom.
- We do not want to see children segregated or put in 'pathway's where children are segregated in 'special needs' classes.
- We want every child to have a chance to be different and celebrate that difference.
- Children who go to segregated schools may not have the same opportunities for life experiences including going to university, having relationships, moving out of home or getting work that's permanent.
- It is great for young people's mental health to feel part of a mainstream community instead of being segregated.

- Segregated education needs to be phased out now, rather than over a 28-year period – change should be commenced now.

An alternative approach – choice and control

Aligns with Recommendation 7.15

- Some participants provided feedback on a ‘third option’ as opposed to either complete integration or complete segregation – A mix of mainstream and segregated education.
- Children need to be given a chance to be who they are - Use children’s areas of interest and skills to lead classrooms discussions.
- It is important for children from different schools to spend time with each other and build relationship – school visits, celebrations and trips.
- Flexible, open learning and inclusive learning.

Reasonable adjustments

Aligns with recommendation 7.3

- School students must have access to reasonable adjustments.
- Reasonable adjustments need to be flexible.
- Reasonable adjustments need to be advocated for - in many cases it’s not accessible or encouraged.
- Assessments need to be flexible and designed around individual need instead of being standardised.

Career guidance and pathways

Aligns with Recommendation 7.5

- People with disability who attend segregated schools are missing out on opportunities to do TAFE courses and receive career guidance.
- Introduce internships and mentor programs that give students with disability real world experience to help build their careers.
- Ensure school students with disability have access resources that they need so they have a pathway to their passion whether that is higher education or work.

Including parents with disability

Aligns with Recommendation 7.6

- Implement co-design and value the lived in experience of parents with disability.
- Implement a mechanism so parents of children with disability or parents with disability have an ongoing co-design relationship with schools and can share feedback and ideas and have their voices heard.
- Secondary schools in particular are not always inclusive of parents with disability. For example, parent teacher interviews are very rigid in format. There's a need for more flexibility to include parents with disability.

Workforce capabilities, expertise and development

Aligns with Recommendation 7.8

- Have adults with disability as a resource in the learning environment either as volunteers or as a paid teachers aids.

- Roll out disability inclusive procurement – make sure schools and universities purchase goods and services businesses that support people with disability or are owned by people with disability.

Funding

Aligns with Recommendation 7.12

- Adequately resource schools to provide students with the accommodations they need.
- Allow children to use NDIS funding for education. For example, to fund support workers in the classroom.
- The resources from segregated schools could be channelled into mainstream supports.
- Link Early Interventions proposed in the NDIS Review with inclusive education to make sure these areas are well resourced.

What can QDN do?

- Be a very strong voice in the inclusive education space and advocate for real change to take place and utilise members as part of that.
- Advocate for the need for flexibility and new perspectives to discuss inclusive education.
- Support people with disability or family members of people with disability who want to be part of tertiary education process.
- Establish education champions.
- Get involved in storytelling and awareness raising and share stories with relevant ministers.
- Undertake research to find new ways to help people with disability succeed in education through inclusive education programs, making sure that there are programs that help all people with disability to get the education they need, this includes things like accessible materials and support services. ***Aligns with Recommendation 7.9***
- Key messaging:
 - Inclusive and integrated education benefits everyone.
 - All education must be inclusive.
 - Flip the narrative that inclusive education would be to the detriment of able-bodied students.
 - Everybody has a role to play in the education space.