



Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System

**Submission by
Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion**

**to
Australian Department of Education
August 2023**

About Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion

Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion (**QAI**) (formerly Queensland Advocacy Incorporated) is an independent, community-based advocacy organisation and community legal service that provides individual and systems advocacy for people with disability. Our purpose is to advocate for the protection and advancement of the needs, rights, and lives of people with disability in Queensland. QAI's Management Committee is comprised of a majority of persons with disability, whose wisdom and lived experience guides our work and values.

QAI has been engaged in systems advocacy for over thirty years, advocating for change through campaigns directed at attitudinal, law and policy reform.

QAI also provides individual advocacy services in the areas of human rights, disability discrimination, guardianship and administration, involuntary mental health treatment, criminal justice, NDIS access and appeals, and non-legal advocacy for young people with disability including in relation to education. Our individual advocacy experience informs our understanding and prioritisation of systemic advocacy issues.

Since 1 January 2022, QAI has also been funded by the Queensland Government to establish and co-ordinate the Queensland Independent Disability Advocacy Network (QIDAN). QIDAN members work collaboratively to raise the profile of disability advocacy while also working towards attitudinal, policy and legislative change for people with disability in Queensland.

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Introduction

The right to education for students with disabilities has long been a focus of QAI's systemic advocacy. Having witnessed the experiences of our clients and many families within our community over the years, QAI is deeply concerned about the extent to which some students with disability are being denied their right to an inclusive education. Practices such as gatekeeping, the overuse of school disciplinary absences, the use of Restrictive Practices and a lack of access to reasonable adjustments, are routinely denying students with disability their right to access education on an equal basis with others.

QAI's submission will comment on Chapter 2 of the Consultation Paper - improving student outcomes. In doing so, we also comment on the topics of student mental health and wellbeing and data collection. If the Australian government is serious about improving learning and wellbeing outcomes for all students, it needs to prioritise creating an inclusive education system that reaches out to all learners.

The Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE) has developed a roadmap for achieving inclusive education in Australia, including a step-by-step approach to the phasing out of segregated education.¹ The roadmap outlines six core pillars where efforts for change should be focused and provides a comprehensive list of short, medium, and long-term outcome measures that will track progress over a ten-year period. QAI urges the Review Panel to consider the roadmap in its work.

Improving student outcomes – including for students most at risk of falling behind

In order to ensure no student is left behind, Australia must commit to implementing a truly inclusive education system. All students, including students with disability, have a right to an inclusive education. This right is enshrined in law (at a state, federal and international level) and allegedly forms the basis of education policies throughout the country, however this right remains unrealised for many students.

The Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education defines inclusive education as:

“...a legally supported, evidence-based way of delivering education that recognises the individual characteristics of all students, offers pedagogic alternatives that cater for the diverse educational needs of each child and respects the right of every child to be a part of their communities. It is also a fundamental human right of the child recognised in a range of international human rights instruments and treaties.”²

Individualised teaching and solutions are fundamental to the provision of inclusive education. Inclusive education is about recognising the right of every young person to be welcomed as a

¹ Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education, “Driving change: A Roadmap for achieving inclusive education in Australia”, February 2021

² <https://allmeansall.org.au/for-parents/>

valued learner and involves adapting learning environments and teaching approaches to ensure the young person can participate in education on an equal basis with others.³

There is extensive research that demonstrates the efficacy of inclusive education and the many benefits it brings, not just to students with disabilities but to all students in the classroom. For example, a systematic review of 280 studies from 25 countries established clear and consistent links between inclusive education settings and substantial short and long-term benefits for students with and without disabilities.⁴

According to the Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education:

“Research indicates that included students develop stronger reading and math skills, have better school attendance, have better behaviour, and are more likely to graduate than students who are not included. As adults, students with disabilities who have been included are more likely to be enrolled in postsecondary education, and to be employed or living independently. Evidence suggests that in most cases there are no adverse effects for typical students who are being educated in an inclusive classroom. Some research shows that these students are more accepting of differences and less prejudiced.”⁵

As previously mentioned, the Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE) has developed a roadmap for achieving inclusive education in Australia, including a step-by-step approach to the phasing out of segregated education.⁶ The roadmap outlines six core pillars where efforts for change should be focused and provides a comprehensive list of short, medium, and long-term outcome measures that will track progress over a ten-year period. QAI urges the Review Panel to consider the roadmap in its work.

By failing to alleviate the impact of inaccessible teaching strategies and learning environments, students with disability are pathologized and seen as a problem. By failing to consider the environmental factors that can trigger challenging behaviour, students with disability unfairly and solely carry the burden of change. They are blamed for behaviour that occurs because of factors that lie beyond their control. Consequently, negative attitudes towards disability remain, entrenching stigma and resulting in discriminatory practices, such as the over-use of school disciplinary absences for students with disabilities. By failing to provide individualised supports and reasonable adjustments, we thwart the attitudinal change that needs to occur for people to become accepting of difference.

³ Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education, *“Driving change: A Roadmap for achieving inclusive education in Australia”*, February 2021, p4

⁴ Hehir, T., Grindal, T., Freeman, B., Lamoreau, R., Borquaye, Y., & Burke, S. (2016). A summary of the evidence on inclusive education. ABT Associates. ERIC. http://alana.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/A_Summary_of_the_evidence_on_inclusive_education.pdf

⁵ <https://allmeansall.org.au/for-parents/>

⁶ Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education, *“Driving change: A Roadmap for achieving inclusive education in Australia”*, February 2021

Student outcomes which should be measured in the next NSRA

Many students with disability throughout the country do not receive the support and reasonable adjustments they require. As a result, students with disability are disproportionately receiving school disciplinary absences (SDAs). QAI therefore recommends the next NSRA focuses on measuring the extent to which students from priority cohorts, including students with disability, are receiving SDAs. This requires more than merely reporting on the number of SDAs issued in a given school. We need to track the use of informal exclusions, the number of SDAs versus the number of students who receive an SDA, the intersectional characteristics of the students receiving SDAs, as well as the frequency with which some students receive multiple and repeat suspensions.

Despite suspensions and exclusions purportedly being a last resort measure, QAI has obtained data via a Right to Information request that shows school disciplinary absences in Queensland state schools are going disproportionately to certain cohorts of students, particularly students with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.⁷ For example, students with a disability received between 46%-48% of all short-term suspensions and between 41%-47% of all long-term suspensions between 2016 and 2020.⁸ This is despite the fact that students with disability only make up about 17% of the whole Queensland school population. Further, despite only constituting approximately 10% of the school population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students receive approximately one quarter of all suspensions and exclusions.⁹

While school disciplinary absences may be appropriate in very limited circumstances, they are being used more frequently than is required.¹⁰ Further, it might be assumed that the number of school disciplinary absences reflects the prevalence of challenging behaviour within a school, however there are numerous reasons why school disciplinary absences are used, many of which do not directly correlate to the behaviour of the student concerned.¹¹ For example, a suspension may be used as a 'warning' to other students or used as a way of removing non-compliant students during inspections by accreditation authorities.¹² In these situations, the limitation on a child's right to education is neither necessary nor proportionate.

QAI considers that the prevalence of school disciplinary absences among students with disability typically reflects the culture of an individual school and the extent to which it values and promotes the principles of inclusive education. Whilst some schools provide exemplary support to students with disability, others appear to reject the values of inclusion and operate practices that are discriminatory towards students with disability. For example, unreasonably denying requests for reasonable adjustments that would ensure students with disability can access education on the

⁷ QAI and ATSILS 'The need for inquiry into school disciplinary absences in Queensland state schools', February 2022

⁸ Ibid, p8

⁹ Ibid, p9

¹⁰ Graham, L. (2020) Questioning the impacts of legislative change on the use of exclusionary discipline in the context of broader system reforms; a Queensland case study; *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 24:14, 1473-1493

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Parsons (2018) cited in Graham, L. (2020) Questioning the impacts of legislative change on the use of exclusionary discipline in the context of broader system reforms; a Queensland case study; *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 24:14, 1473-1493

same basis as others. The absence of reasonable adjustments for many students with disability, particularly students with autism and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can lead to escalations in behaviour that would otherwise be avoided if reasonable adjustments appropriate to their needs were in place. An absence of trained staff skilled in behaviour management techniques can then lead to further escalations in the child's behaviour, resulting in disciplinary measures such as a suspension or exclusion and/or the use of restrictive practices, further entrenching the child's segregation within the school community.

This was a key finding of the 2019 South Australian inquiry into suspensions, exclusions, and expulsions, which found that exclusions were being used for students with disability who were not provided reasonable adjustments necessary to prevent incidents that then led to the use of school disciplinary absences.¹³

Even when reasonable adjustments are provided, the allocation of resources can fail to provide what is needed for a student with a disability. Money might collectively be spent on equipment or additional teacher aide hours, however the individual support needs of the student can remain unaddressed.

All of this is occurring despite overwhelming evidence as to the ineffectiveness of school disciplinary absences in reducing behaviours of concern. Graham highlights the fundamentally flawed assumption upon which school disciplinary absences are based – that is, that challenging behaviour is a conscious choice enacted by individuals who can self-regulate their emotions.¹⁴ By punishing students who exhibit challenging behaviours, it is presumed that school disciplinary absences will act as a deterrent and change the student's decision-making prior to 'choosing' their behaviour in future. However, this grossly misconstrues the nature of 'challenging behaviour', which is often a reflex communication strategy for an individual with communication difficulties in situations of heightened distress. It can also be a manifestation of a person's disability.

The consequences of inappropriate and excessive recourse to school disciplinary absences are profound for individuals, families, and the broader community.

Students removed from educational settings through school disciplinary absences are denied access to fundamental educational materials, learning opportunities and critical chances for relationship building and skill development. Students do not always receive work to complete at home or appropriate support to continue their education.¹⁵ They report feeling anxious, humiliated, and isolated from their peers, all of which then impacts their ability to successfully reintegrate back into school following their absence. Sometimes students are prevented from re-enrolling at a school following an exclusion. Attempts to enrol in other educational institutions can be futile due

¹³ Graham et al. (2020). Inquiry into Suspension, Exclusion and Expulsion Processes in South Australian government schools: Final Report. The Centre for Inclusive Education, QUT: Brisbane, QLD, p362 – Finding 5.1

¹⁴ Graham, L. (2020) Questioning the impacts of legislative change on the use of exclusionary discipline in the context of broader system reforms; a Queensland case study; *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 24:14, 1473-1493

¹⁵ Quin, D., & Hemphill, S. A. (2014). Students' experiences of school suspension. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 25(1), 52-58.

gatekeeping practices of some school principals, leaving the student faced with either Special Education or home schooling and thus reinforcing the segregated model that inclusive education policies are seeking to overcome. This is particularly problematic for students in rural or remote parts of Queensland, where there are limited or no other schools in which to enrol.

Immediate consequences for parents can also be significant, with many reporting elevated levels of psychological distress as well as financial hardship and risks to the sustainability of their employment. This occurs due to being unable to attend work and/or being forced to take leave whilst tending to their children unexpectedly. These risks are especially high for low-income or single-parent families with limited supports.

Anecdotally, there are instances where families are forced to uproot and move to a different regional centre to find better schooling for a child who is repeatedly treated unfairly and whose education is highly disrupted by the misuse of school disciplinary absences. This can have a significant impact on a single parent who has to find alternative employment and housing in a new location in order to move the child to another school. This also impacts the siblings of the affected child who must also leave their established schooling to move to the new location and new school.

The inappropriate use of school disciplinary absences has widespread consequences and can result in a loss of more positive measures. For example, other students are taught to segregate themselves from peers who exhibit challenging behaviour, rather than show understanding, empathy, and compassion for people whose behaviour is likely trying to communicate an unmet need. The long-term impacts of school disciplinary absences can also be severe. Research has demonstrated that students who have received SDAs can go on to experience poorer mental health, prolonged unemployment, increased stigma and feelings of rejection, and an increased risk of homelessness.¹⁶

Education is fundamentally about socialising students and preparing them for adult life. It teaches essential skills and facilitates pathways to employment and the realisation of a meaningful life. However, for some students, it is the beginning of the 'school-to-prison pipeline', where marginalised and excluded young people are at greater risk of incarceration.¹⁷ The association between school disciplinary absences and antisocial behaviour resulting in prison sentences is well established, both in Australia and overseas. The lack of supervision that occurs following a school disciplinary absence increases the likelihood of students engaging in risk taking behaviour and therefore coming into contact with the criminal justice system.¹⁸ This is particularly concerning for students with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, given the overrepresentation of both people with disability and First Nations Australians in Queensland's

¹⁶ Graham, L. (2020) Questioning the impacts of legislative change on the use of exclusionary discipline in the context of broader system reforms; a Queensland case study; *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 24:14, 1473-1493

¹⁷ Australian Institute of Criminology (2017) Trends and issues in crime and criminal justice; <https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/tandi531.pdf>

¹⁸ Hemphill S, Broderick D & Heerde J 2017. Positive associations between school suspension and student problem behaviour: Recent Australian findings. *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice* no. 531. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi531>

correctional facilities. The long-term costs can be very high. For individual students, they can become alienated from school and engage in behaviours that become 'an entrenched lifestyle'. For society, there are repercussions for community safety and a need for increased expenditure on an ever-growing prison population.

QAI therefore recommends that all schools should be required to publish disaggregated data on the use of SDAs and make these reports freely accessible to the public. This includes tracking the use of informal exclusions, the number of SDAs versus the number of students who receive an SDA, the intersectional characteristics of the students receiving SDAs, as well as the frequency with which some students receive multiple and repeat suspensions. Currently in Queensland, the publicly available data on the use of school suspensions is divided into year level, region, SDA type, reason and student Indigenous status. However, this needs to be expanded to reflect the depth of knowledge required to address the disproportionate use of suspensions for students with disability, students in out of home care and/or First Nations students and to uncover the impacts for students with intersecting identities. QAI also submits that the 'reason descriptions' within this data does not provide adequate insight into the events that result in an SDA decision. For example, there is no explanation provided to allow researchers or other invested parties to understand what "verbal or nonverbal misconduct" relates to in this context, nor is there any justification for why certain SDA categories, such as "absences" is an appropriate or justified response. This is a potential indicator that internal reporting processes are insufficiently detailed and fail to capture adequately a students' circumstances. The limitations of data published, and the lack of differentiation between the number of students suspended versus the number of suspensions further highlights the inadequate monitoring practices which must be amended to provide better insight into the use of SDAs.

Evidence based practices to improve student outcomes, particularly for those most at risk of falling behind

There are numerous evidence-based approaches to student support which have proven successful in reducing challenging behaviour in the classroom and which have improved outcomes for students at risk of falling behind.

Firstly, reasonable adjustments are a key determinant of success for students with disability in education and are a fundamental human right enshrined in state, federal and international law, yet they are often overlooked as an evidence-based mechanism for ensuring long-term educational engagement and success. Reasonable adjustments ensure students with disability have access to the necessary support for their general education, social-emotional learning, relationship building, and classroom behaviour. They are highly individualised and must be evidence-based to appropriately support students with disability in the classroom. Despite the availability of processes to request reasonable adjustments, many students experience significant barriers to obtaining the supports that they need. The adequacy of such processes therefore requires further consideration and there must be more accountability for decisions regarding reasonable adjustment requests.

Secondly, there is the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) model. MTSS is an education-based support structure that focuses on layering support to students in order to identify those with additional academic, behavioural, and social-emotional learning needs.¹⁹ MTSS was a key recommendation of the inquiry into suspensions and expulsions in South Australia. MTSS emphasizes the importance of problem-solving, instruction and intervention in educational environments.²⁰ MTSS includes three tiers, the first being a universal layer of support designed to provide assistance and instruction to all students. The first tier is also used to identify students requiring additional support.²¹ These students are then introduced into the second tier, that focuses on small group learning and instruction. From tier two, the students needing additional, individualized support or guidance are identified. The third tier is intended to only be used sparingly as it takes students away from the classroom.²² MTSS prioritises inclusion through focusing on group learning, providing all students, regardless of disability, a level of support and guidance and aims to be responsive to the changing needs of students.²³ The entire framework has the ability to be modified to suit the needs of different schools or cohorts and is highly compatible with other inclusive education models, including Collaborative and Proactive Solutions.

This model has been used successfully in some very challenging public school districts in the United States, such as Chicago Public Schools. For example, students were explicitly taught self-regulation and responsible decision-making skills, as part of a focus on their social-emotional learning needs. On page 111 of the final report on the inquiry into suspensions and exclusions in South Australia, Professor Graham writes:

“After decades of negative impact from “zero tolerance” school discipline policies, which highly respected scholars have tied to increased involvement with the justice system, especially for poor children and children of colour, the United States has engaged in evidence-based reforms aimed at improving school climates, teaching quality and student support, recognising that educative responses are more productive than punitive responses.

...In November 2014, the US Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Education (2014) jointly issued a statement strongly discouraging the use of exclusionary discipline with young children, due to the known impacts on children’s academic, social-emotional and behavioural development....Other reforms have included reducing suspension length (e.g., Chicago, Philadelphia), limiting suspensions for minor infractions (e.g., California, Chicago, Philadelphia), requiring skill-building in-school-suspensions alongside tight approval systems and limiting grounds for out-of-school suspension (Chicago), banning out-of-school suspension for truancy (Arkansas) or eliminating suspensions entirely (e.g., Miami-Dade County Public Schools) (Anderson, 2020; Hinze-Pifer & Sartain, 2018).

¹⁹ Linda J Graham et al., “Inquiry into Suspension, Exclusion and Expulsion Processes in South Australian Government Schools,” 2020, pp.140-141.

²⁰ Ibid pp.140-142

²¹ Ibid pp.141-145

²² Ibid pp.141-145

²³ Ibid pp.140-141

While each of these reforms have met with significant opposition from conservative commentators and think tanks claiming that they have resulted in an increase in school violence and serious incidents (Eden, 2019), the empirical evidence shows the opposite. Longitudinal analysis of data from California from the 2011-2012 school year (prior to their school discipline reforms) through to the 2016-2017 school year (several years post-reform), clearly shows a large and significant decline in the number of instructional days lost and a narrowing of the racial gap, attributable to a reduction in the use of suspensions to respond to minor behaviours in all grades (Losen & Martin, 2018). The same study found no evidence that abolishing suspension for minor incidents had resulted in “chaos” and an increase in school violence, as claimed by some commentators (Losen & Martin, 2018). Rather, significant decline in suspensions has been accompanied by improvements in school climate and student academic outcomes.

...Importantly, the recent reforms in US public schools systems did not just involve banning or limiting the use of exclusionary discipline, but rather substituting a non-educative response with evidence-based educative alternatives, including restorative practices, together with the implementation of preventative measures, such as social-emotional learning, as part of a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework that traverses academic, social-emotional and behavioural domains and which is designed to improve students’ academic achievement, social-emotional understanding, and behavioural interactions.”²⁴

The following sources provide additional analyses of the benefits of MTSS:

- Sailor, W., Skrtic, T. M., Cohn, M., Olmstead, C. (2020). Preparing Teacher Educators for Statewide Scale-Up of Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 1 –18 (Online First). DOI: 10.1177/0888406420938035.
- McCart, A., Choi, J. & Sailor, W. (2020, Apr 17 - 21) Collaboration for Equity and Inclusion Through Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Implementation: Longitudinal Evaluation of Student Outcomes [Paper Session]. AERA Annual Meeting San Francisco, CA <http://tinyurl.com/sdts33e>
- Choi, J. H., McCart, A. B., & Sailor, W. (2020). Achievement of Students with IEPs and Associated Relationships With an Inclusive MTSS Framework. *The Journal of Special Education*, DOI: 10.1177/0022466919897408.
- Choi, J. H., McCart, A. B., Hicks, T. A., & Sailor, W. (2019). An analysis of mediating effects of school leadership on MTSS implementation. *The Journal of Special Education*, 53(1), 15-27. DOI: 10.1177/0022466918804815.

Thirdly, there is the Collaborative and Proactive Solutions (CPS) model, by Dr Ross Greene. CPS views ‘challenging’ behaviour as a form of communication through which children demonstrate

²⁴ Linda J Graham et al., “Inquiry into Suspension, Exclusion and Expulsion Processes in South Australian Government Schools,” 2020, p111-113

that they are having difficulty meeting expectations.²⁵ It is not limited in application to students with disability but is of specific value to this cohort. The framework seeks to avoid the negative characterisations of students with additional support needs by focusing on understanding the reasons influencing certain kinds of behaviour instead of attempting to stop this behaviour entirely.²⁶ In education this model can be used to identify students' lagging skills and/or areas where they need additional support.²⁷ CPS focuses on crisis prevention as opposed to crisis management through seeking to proactively identify and resolve the issues or challenges a child is facing in order to reduce the prevalence of 'challenging' behaviours.²⁸ To do so, CPS seeks to engage all parties closest to the issue, including students, teachers, guardians and other caregivers in order to find a well-rounded approach to supporting a child that is consistent both inside and outside of school.²⁹ This approach supports educators' and their classroom management, promotes students' skill development and engagement in problem-solving, and providing cohesive standards of care for students.³⁰

Fourthly, Circles of Support is a visual model for understanding the rings of support that surround a child that advocate for their needs and support their goals.³¹ This model can be used to better understand all students and their specific support networks but is particularly beneficial for assisting students with disability. In an education setting, where students are exhibiting behaviour that educators wish to address, there is an opportunity to facilitate a formal meeting of a student's circle of support. These meetings should involve parent, caregivers, educators and any other specialist involved in a student's care to collaborate to understand a student's behaviour and develop an action plan to better support them in and out of school. This model is highly congruent with establishing reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities and the Collaborative and Proactive solutions framework. The value of Circles of Support is the bringing together of all those responsible for caring for a student to ensure they are receiving consistent support and that all parties are equally informed about a child's circumstances. Circles of support is a highly individualised way to best support vulnerable student groups, particularly those most at risk of receiving an SDA, as these communication structures are able to be tailored to best suit a students' personal family and care arrangements.

Introducing additional student support staff also has the potential to break down many of the barriers students face in relation to accessing an inclusive education. Greater funding must go

²⁵ Ross W. Greene and Lives in the Balance, "To End the Use of Restraint and Seclusion, You're Going to Need New Lenses, New Timing, and New Practices: True Crisis Prevention," Lives in the Balance, 2020, <https://truecrisisprevention.org>. pp.1-4

²⁶ Ibid p.2

²⁷ Ibid p.2

²⁸ Ibid p.3

²⁹ Ross W. Greene and Jennifer Winkler, "Collaborative & Proactive Solutions (CPS): A Review of Research Findings in Families, Schools, and Treatment Facilities | SpringerLink," *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, no. 22 (2019): pp.550-553; Glenys Mann et al., "Developing Productive Partnerships with Parents and Carers," in *Inclusive Education for the 21st Century* (Taylor & Francis Group), pp. 336–353

³⁰ Ibid p558

³¹ Resourcing Inclusion Communities, "Circles of Support," 2019.

towards dedicated school staff whose role is to work with students at risk falling behind. These staff could include:

- Additional teacher aide roles
- Inclusion Officers
- NDIS navigators to ensure students with disability are on the NDIS, and if they have access to the NDIS that they are using their plans effectively to get their needs met. This is not about the NDIS being used in schools, but to ensure that when students with disability step outside the gate, they have appropriate access to supports like therapy and services to enhance their learning and build capacity, which will then result in better outcomes in school.
- Mental health professionals and advocates to support students with disabilities, their families, and the school to get on the same page about what the student needs to succeed.
- Occupational therapists, speech therapists and psychologists to immediately ensure every student with disability has the adjustments they need to succeed in their learning environment.

There is also a growing number of inclusive education experts throughout Australia who could provide further information. For example, SINE – School Inclusion Network for Educators - is a national network of education professionals seeking to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to support diverse learners in their classrooms. Among other purposes, the group meets to share information, resources, and best practice ideas on how to deliver education in ways that uphold the principles of inclusive education. SINE is an initiative of All Means All which is the Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education.

Reporting on targets in the next NSRA

Transparency and accountability will be critical to the success of any reforms associated with the next NSRA. QAI recommends the mandatory use of inclusion scorecards for all schools to monitor the implementation of inclusive education practices and to prioritise the reporting of outcomes for students with disability. Scorecards could investigate and disseminate information regarding SDAs, attendance, reasonable adjustments, intersectional representation of vulnerable student populations, student voice feedback, family feedback and educational outcomes to the public.

Scorecards would assist in identifying schools or regions that are underperforming on these metrics and would allow governments to direct resources where they are most required. Specific focus should be placed on establishing targets, such as the target to halve the number of suspensions of students with disability within five years, as called for by the *A Right To Learn* campaign in Queensland.³² The grading system used on the scorecards should be transparent and publicly available and schools should be independently assessed.

³² <https://www.arighttolearn.com.au/our-asks>

QAI also recommends the establishment of an independent advisory board to oversee the use of inclusion scorecards. This would involve overseeing data collection, analysis and publication of the inclusion scorecard system and would require access to high-quality, disaggregated data from all states and territories. The board could produce an annual report and provide recommendations to further enhance the realisation of an inclusive education system throughout Australia. The board should consist of people with lived experience of disability and other priority cohort groups, including First Nations students and students living in out of home care, in addition to any standardised qualification requirements.

Conclusion

QAI thanks the Review Panel for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. We are happy to provide further information or clarification of any of the matters raised in this submission upon request.