

Inclusive Education For Children With Disabilities

'How can one feel a member of the human race if one is set apart from an early age?'¹

Children with disabilities are gradually being included in mainstream schools. More parents are saying they do not want their children to be cut off from their brothers and sisters.

Traditionally children with sensory, physical, emotional and learning disabilities have had to go to separate schools. Although called 'special' these schools do not in fact provide better education than mainstream schools.

Segregating children with disabilities is an injustice. We have to make a commitment to ending this wrong. That requires a commitment to learning how we can include **all** children no matter what their disabilities.

Why we must enable *all* children to be included in their local mainstream schools²

- Good schools get better when they include all the children in the school's neighbourhood.
- Good teachers grow stronger when they involve each child as a member of a class of active learners by offering each the individualised challenges and supports necessary for learning.
- Students develop more fully when they welcome people with different gifts and abilities into their lives and when all students feel secure that they will receive individualised help when they need it.

- Families get stronger when they join teachers and students to create classrooms that work for everyone.
- All people, including children who have disabilities, must have equal access to community programs (schools, day care, recreation, transport, and job training). We believe that children who have disabilities have a right to grow up in typical settings with their typical peers.
- Institutions serve no positive end, institutions only isolate people and dehumanise people.
- Most decisions involving children who have disabilities are not scientific questions for professionals to answer. Rather, most are political and moral decisions that the entire society, and especially consumers themselves (parents and their children) should make.
- All children, including those who have disabilities, have a right to equal treatment.
- The problem of serving children with disabilities is not essentially one of bricks and mortar or of money, but of our prejudice and discrimination.

*Action For Inclusion*² provides a clear presentation of the values behind full inclusion and outlines a sensible series of actions that can be followed to make full inclusion a reality. Both parents and educators will find it an extremely helpful handbook that can guide them in their efforts toward building inclusive schools. This is a plain language guide to inclusion. Nominally it is about education, globally it is a guide to building inclusive communities of living.

¹ Stephen Hawking, Professor of Mathematics, Cambridge University, quoted in *Stephen Hawking: A Life In Science* by M. White & J. Gribbin, Penguin Books, 1992.

² From:

Action For Inclusion: How To Improve Schools By Welcoming Children With Special Needs Into Regular Classrooms by John O'Brien & Marsha Forest, with Judith Snow, Jack Pearpoint & David Hasbury. Available: Inclusion Distribution, 29 Heron Drive, Poynton, Stockport SK12 1QR. Tel: 01625 859146.

Let Our Children Go by Douglas Biklen, Human Policy Press, P.O. Box 127, University Station, Syracuse, New York 13210.

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