

Specialised not Segregated

I have the privilege of working within a special school. I see each day the benefits that a school such as ours has in supporting and caring for the students in our school. A special school provides specialised and unique supports that meet the specific needs of the students.

Whilst I wholeheartedly support the inclusion of students with additional needs in mainstream settings, parents need a choice. I regularly have parents meet with me as they search for the most appropriate school setting for their child. They often recognise that the overstimulation of being in a mainstream class with over 25 students, or with multiple teachers and classrooms, would not provide the necessary supports for their child. Many students with disability, require small class sizes and a very individualised teaching approach. Teachers in mainstream schools do a wonderful job in supporting all students in their classes and work hard at providing the necessary supports for each child. However, there should never be a one size fits all approach to schooling.

The recent release of the Royal Commission Report has prompted many responses to its findings, particularly on the prospect of phasing out special schools. The fact that the commission was split over this proposal provides some indication of the complex nature of the proposal. The report labels special schools as segregation. I prefer the term 'specialised'. Teachers evaluate each student's needs, develop an individualised plan to support their needs. Providing the same level of resourcing and supports in a mainstream setting that is currently available in special schools would be challenging. This shift would require a significant change in the way that mainstream schools function and how they are funded.

The school in which I work, is located on the same property as a mainstream school. The two schools exist as one community. In this way, there are many opportunities for inclusion and connection between the two schools. **Each day we welcome students from the mainstream school to our playground space, where students from both schools interact in a positive way. The students who visit, do it because they choose to. They want to be supportive, and they enjoy the interactions. Similarly, students from our school have opportunities to participate in classes and activities with the mainstream school.** Opportunities for inclusion in mainstream settings are considered and supported where appropriate. **This model of two schools and one community has been adopted by a number of Christian Schools in NSW who have a special school attached to a mainstream school. It is a model that allows for interaction not segregation.**



Special Schools provide a school experience that is highly valued by the parents. Strong communication with parents is one of the key components of our school. Support is also provided in assisting students and their families as they navigate post-school options for their child. This partnership is critical as unique decisions are made for the benefit of the child. In our schools each student is valued and feels valued. They are able to develop good relationships with peers that understand them and where they feel like they fit in.

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11 October 2023

