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Media Release

Including everyone from the start - time to end a life of segregation for people with an intellectual disability

The experiences of young people with disability in different education settings will be the focus of the Disability Royal Commission this week.

We welcome this public hearing as an opportunity to talk how we can make education inclusive for everyone, and not set young people on a lifelong pathway to segregation.

No way back for students with an intellectual disability

Many students with an intellectual disability don't go to a mainstream school. Instead, they are told they have to go to a segregated school. This is sometimes called a 'special' or 'specialist' school.

When students with an intellectual disability go to a segregated school, they rarely go back to a regular school. This means they don't mix with or get the same education as students without disability. As a result, they are more likely to end up living in a group home and going to day services, or working in a sheltered workshop for pay rates below the minimum wage. It also means that people with an intellectual disability are more likely to live in poverty.

We don't think this is fair. Everyone has a right to a good life.

The right help for the big decisions

Some of the big decisions about segregated education happen at particular times in young people's lives. This includes starting primary or secondary school, or near the end of secondary school (Year 10 and 12). There can be a lot of pressure on families to move from regular to segregated school at these times.

We think there should be a plan to provide better support to young people and families at these times and help them stay in the regular school system.

We are also calling for

- all segregated schools to stop letting students with an intellectual disability into Prep and Grade 1 by 2024

- more resources for mainstream schools about how students with an intellectual disability learn, how to support them properly, and how to include them in all parts of school life
- Better coordination between the NDIS and state and territory education systems.

A shared commitment to inclusive education

Inclusion Australia CEO Catherine McAlpine will appear as a witness at the hearing with Mary Sayers, the CEO of Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) on Wednesday. CYDA has been a long-time advocate and leader in calls for a national approach to inclusive education and convenes the Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education.

As CEO of the peak representative body for people with an intellectual disability and their families, Ms McAlpine will address the ‘polished pathway’ to segregation that starts in schools for young people with an intellectual disability.

Quotes attributable to Catherine McAlpine, CEO, Inclusion Australia:

“We’ve known about the benefits of inclusive education for decades, but little has been done to genuinely include students with an intellectual disability. It’s time for talking to stop and real changes to happen.”

“We call on governments to work closely with young people, families and schools to support every student to be included from the start and smash the polished pathway to segregation.”

Ends

Public hearing 24: The experience of children and young people with disability in different education settings will run from 6-10 June 2022 in Canberra. For more details visit:

<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/rounds/public-hearing-24-experience-children-and-young-people-disability-different-education-settings>

Catherine McAlpine, CEO, Inclusion Australia, is available for media comment on catherine.mcalpine@inclusionaustralia.org.au or 0419 530 524

[Inclusion Australia](https://www.inclusionaustralia.org.au) is the national voice for people with intellectual disability and their families.