

## Diverse Needs Policy

### Introduction

At Child Side School this Policy aims to ensure that, within the context and capacity of the school, all children's lived experiences are recognised and acknowledged through their perspective, and that all children have access to resources to support their participation, including opportunities to engage with their community and demonstrate their learning in meaningful ways to themselves. It aims to support and advocate acceptance and acknowledgement of diverse needs and approaches to learning and contributing, recognising the potential for diverse needs to be personalised within an individual's capacity. The policy aims to both protect and enable:

- children learning with diverse needs arising from neurodiversity, disability and impairment, mental health, trauma to engage through the Universal Design for Learning principles and practices embedded within our school design and culture
- the learning and working conditions for the community of children and staff, within each cluster and across the whole school
- staff working and communicating with parents/caregivers who may also have neurodiversity, disability and impairment, mental health, trauma

Working with and within 'diverse needs' means 'different' rather than 'more or additional' needs. We approach diversity with an equity lens so that other children/families/staff members do not experience less attention/time/effort/resourcing/opportunities. We work with and within diverse needs in the capacity of educational professionals, not as medical, neurodiverse, or mental health and well-being professionals.

### Relevant Legislation:

#### Federal Legislation

- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 including the Disability Standards for Education 2005
- Fair Work Act 2009

#### State

- Equal Opportunity Act WA 1984
- Work Health and Safety Act 2020
- School Education Act 1999

### Definitions: What is a disability or an impairment?

The Federal Disability Discrimination Act (section 4) defines disability, in relation to a person, to mean:

- (a) total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions; or
- (b) total or partial loss of a part of the body; or
- (c) the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness; or
- (d) the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness; or
- (e) the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body; or
- (f) a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction; or

(g) a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment or that results in disturbed behaviour; and includes a disability that:

- presently exists; or
- previously existed but no longer exists; or
- may exist in the future (including because of a genetic predisposition to that disability); or
- is imputed to a person.

To avoid doubt, a disability that is otherwise covered by this definition includes behaviour that is a symptom or manifestation of the disability.

The WA Equal Opportunity Act (section 4) defines impairment as:

- (a) any defect or disturbance in the normal structure or functioning of a person's body; or
- (b) any defect or disturbance in the normal structure or functioning of a person's brain; or
- (c) any illness or condition which impairs a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment or which results in disturbed behaviour, whether arising from a condition subsisting at birth or from an illness or injury and includes an impairment —
  - which presently exists or existed in the past but has now ceased to exist; or
  - which is imputed to the person;

#### **Related Policies:**

- Guiding Children's Behaviour Policy
- Excursion Policy
- Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Policy
- Risk Management Policy
- Enrolment Policy
- Grievance Policy

#### **Scope and Application**

This policy applies to all employees, parents and children of Child Side School. This policy will be reviewed and amended in accordance with this Policy and the Policy Guidelines and Procedures Contents Schedule. The use of the word child/children in this Policy refers to students in the context of the school environment.

The **context** of the school refers to the educational purpose and work that schools are responsible for within the scope of their registration as a school, noting that school is not the only nor the primary place to access support and learning for any child, family or staff member. We work with and support diverse needs in the context of educational professionals only and within the context of our Shape of Day Design.

The **capacity** of the school refers to the dynamic nature of capacity dependent upon critical factors such as: time (a finite resource); staffing levels and experience; numbers and ratios of children/families/staff members with diverse needs (especially in one cluster); accessibility and availability of timely, real support and information from and through medical, neurodiversity, mental health and well-being professionals; workloads and time schedules that the leadership team and Continuity and Cohesion educators are bound to in the course of their positions and any additional associated workload such as writing, communicating and reviewing Personal Education Plans; additional time to communicate with families and therapists, completing observational data for diagnosis required by medical and neurodiversity professionals; time to engage with professional

learning and access specific resourcing.... Neurodiverse perspectives of children/staff/families are often significantly different to neurotypical perspectives, interpretations of behaviours and responses especially when Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD) is involved and in particular when it may, as yet, be undiagnosed and unrecognised by individuals, adding to confusion and cross purposes when communicating, addressing diverse needs and solving conflict. The expectation of neurotypical staff/children to account for neurodiverse perspectives, especially RSD, impacts upon the capacity to work efficiently and effectively.

### **Policy Statement**

Child Side School is committed to providing all eligible children with the opportunity to engage in a quality educational programme, with consideration of any diverse needs enabled through the application of the Universal Design for Learning UDL principles and practices accessible within our context and capacity. This commitment towards educational equity extends across all children to protect and enable through the provision of the National Quality Standards. Our focus on educational equity ensures that diverse needs are balanced in perspective with the needs of all children and staff to have access to safe, welcoming, productive working and learning conditions and an accessible learning environment within our school capacity. We aim to support and advocate acceptance and acknowledgement of diverse needs and approaches to learning and contributing, recognising that diverse needs are highly personalised within an individual's capacity but that specific diverse needs are always considered within (not separate to) a community learning context. All children, including those with diverse needs, are expected and supported to contribute and participate, learning how to recognise diverse capacities and apply their own Personal, Social and Relationship, and Communication Competencies to advocate, adapt and adjust. We are committed to enabling all children and adults through the benefits of recognising, understanding and engaging with others who live and learn with diverse needs. We recognise, highlight and teach the 'agility' within the 'fragility' of diverse needs and vulnerable circumstances.

The 2016 systematic review of the evidence for inclusive education by Harvard academic Thomas Hehir and his colleagues concluded "there is clear and consistent evidence that inclusive educational settings can confer substantial short- and long-term benefits for all students with and without disabilities". K. Cologon 2019: Children and Young People with Disability Australia CYDA

### **Essential specific details underlying policy:**

Educators recognise that all children will learn and develop asynchronously and work within a range of different learning, support, communication and context capacities (Capacity Matrix) across different tasks and shapes of the day/week. Specific diverse needs are supported within our design, culture and the framework of the Capacity Matrix.

The enrolment of a child with specific diverse needs is done through consultation with the leadership team, the child's family/parents/guardians and appropriate support services, within the school's capacity to cater for the individual child and the needs of the rest of the learning cluster (with regards to ratios within each cluster). It is important that any specific information required to assist educators in planning for children with specific diverse needs be provided to Child Side upon enrolment to ensure that the appropriate education and care for that child can be arranged, within our capacity. Families are informed and frequently reminded that we are educational professionals not medical, mental health or neurodiverse professionals.

Families are considered to be an active part of their child's learning team, and this particularly applies to children with specific diverse needs, and they are expected to respond constructively and act upon advice and feedback from the educators' professional observations through consultation with the leadership team, especially if there is no prior recognition of any additional need. Neurodiverse perspectives influence the process and outcomes greatly, especially those living with Rejection Syndrome RSD around conflict resolution, and we know that many diverse traits can be genetic and

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hereditary (ASD, ADHD) and frequently run across generations within families, therefore the leadership team is involved in communication and interactions with families to support educators and other children.

As part of our commitment to closing the reality gap between expectations and the reality of learning and working in a school context, we acknowledge to all families that not all needs of children can be met at school, and in particular some diverse needs, especially if the child is in the same cluster as other children with a range of diverse needs that may require opposing learning conditions and de-escalation strategies. We recognise the need to work through relationships with families to enable productive outcomes of any communication processes and keep the time allocation manageable, especially in context of creating individual plans, reviewing and communicating plans.

Supplementary funding may be sought for each child who will require assistance, on an individual basis, including professional training for educators if this enables the educator and the rest of the learning community to cope, engage and tailor interactions. Training and professional learning for each and every disability, condition, impairment and the combination of these in individual cases is carefully managed and prioritised by the leadership team so as not to overwhelm and reduce capacity of cluster and educator to function.

Our approach to managing children's behaviour is congruent with Dr Louise Porter "Guiding Children's Behaviour" and Maggie Dent's Resiliency Toolbox through the Search Institute's Developmental Relationship Framework and underpins our work with all children enrolled in Child Side, including those with specific diverse needs. Enrolled families and support services will be expected to understand and acknowledge this is how we work with all children, including children with specific diverse needs, as part of our Caring for Community pillar.

Children with diverse needs are referred to appropriate therapy programs and experiences in consultation with families and specialist professional support services, with any recommendations made by these professionals that are appropriate and accessible within our school context and capacity, acted upon in a timely manner. Recommendations are actioned within the capacity of the cluster and the availability of resources: human, ICT and physical resources. It is acknowledged that some recommendations are impractical and unsuitable for a school context and may be better actioned through other means in other contexts, such as one-on-one tutoring.

Families are involved in, and fully informed about, any strategies or professional support which is being planned for their child, give consent to any assessment or reports on their child and have a right to copies of such documents, as well as actively implementing their responsibility to share and access information that supports the inclusion of their child within our setting and within what is available to support their child during times of change/difference in routines eg: excursions, emergency drills, exhibitions of learning, relief staff... and how they can help their child.

Educators are provided with support and information for working with individual children as they develop relationships, within the capacity and context of the school.

The learning cluster and community of children are provided support and coping strategies in order to accommodate their own learning needs alongside the diverse needs of others.

### **Impact of Diverse Needs Considerations:**

We acknowledge to our Governing Council GC the impact of many diverse needs, especially in a 'small by design' setting as an independent school, on staff, the other children, the viability of the learning programme and families' choices and decision to join or remain at Child Side School long-term. We communicate the perception from the wider community (and other local schools) that our design and culture are the best fit for children with diverse needs. We also acknowledge to the GC the impact of staff and families with specific diverse needs, in particular neurodiversity, on their capacity to fulfil the

requirements of their employed position (staff) and their enrolled position (families as part of 'Education is Everyone's Business' expectation, made clear upon enrolment) and the increased workload and responsibility upon neurotypical staff. Staff burn-out and staff retention, especially with national teacher shortages, is a major consideration when considering the impact of multiple enrolments of children and families with diverse high needs. This also applies to the impact of multiple staff employed with neurodiversity. The desirability and feasibility of our school as a choice for neurotypical children needs to be considered and carefully managed as part of our long-term sustainability and succession processes, this always needs to be part of our risk matrix and risk management process. High ratios of neurodiverse needs in any community requires careful consideration and management within an honest, brave, kind, equitable and accountable space. We are a 'small by design' school without the capacity or desire for siloed, specialist roles and departments such as a Human Resources department or a Diverse Needs team. Our whole approach is integrated for staff, children and families and we function through continuity and cohesion with our 3 pillars: Caring for Country, Caring for Children, Caring for Community shaping and prioritising our decisions and actions.

## Appendices

Appendix 1	Procedures to Support Children with Diverse Needs
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## Version Management

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## **Procedure to Support Children with Diverse Needs**

*"No one is excluded as supports for inclusion are embedded within everyday educational practices. Inclusive education is about everyone learning together, in all our diversity. This means that everyone has genuine opportunities to learn together, with support as needed, and all students are meaningfully involved in all aspects of the curriculum, thus making inclusion a shared experience". K. Cologon 2019: Children and Young People with Disability Australia CYDA*

### **Strategies to support inclusion:**

*'Inclusion ... in typical early childhood programs has value for all children. It has the potential for many positive outcomes and doing it with thoughts and preparation will assist in ensuring its success'* (Chandler, 1994, p8). This successful inclusion of children with additional needs in children's services is dependent on a number of factors. This includes educators:

- Believing in the underlying value of inclusion
- Understanding their feelings about children with additional needs and inclusion
- Planning for inclusion, carefully preparing themselves and the environment
- Providing support for the child as needed
- Assisting all children in the inclusion process
- Providing support to the child's family and to the other families
- Closely collaborating with other agencies and professionals

### **Getting started for educators:**

We can't possibly know about every potential condition or factor that can impact on a child's learning and development. Nor is this necessarily helpful. There are, however, some important factors to consider when working with children with additional needs.

Children with additional needs - like all children - are very different from one another. Even children with the same diagnosis will have varying abilities and needs, and their learning and development may be influenced by a number of factors.

Just because you have worked with a child with Autism in the past doesn't mean the abilities, needs and interests of another child with Autism will be the same as the first child. Rather than focusing on the label alone - and your knowledge of the label - remember to get to know this child in the same way that you would all other children.

It is imperative that you spend time getting to know the child and speaking with the child's family. This will give you the most useful information required to ensure you are on the right track in the early stages of making inclusion happen. Talking with other professionals involved (with family permission) can also be a very helpful exercise.

It is also important to ensure that a child's diagnosis does not unduly impact on your image and/or expectations of the child. The child is an individual and it is not possible to predict their future functioning or potential on the basis of a label alone. 'Early childhood educators who are committed to

equity believe in all children's capacities to succeed, regardless of diverse circumstances and abilities' (EYLF, p12) © Community Child Care Victoria 2009 - Rather than placing undue emphasis on what an assessment report might say about a child, trust in your skills and expertise in working with children and getting to know them in the way that you would with other children. This does not mean discarding the report altogether or not reading up on a particular disability as it relates to a child you will be working with. It does mean taking care not to let this information alone influence the way you think about, respond to and plan for the child.

In the same way, identifying and knowing the cause of a disability or delay does not result in precise educational and care practices. While knowing the cause may be relevant to the family it is not always helpful in determining educational programs. In children's services, it is generally more relevant to base your planning on the child's current or emerging abilities, strengths and interests and the goals and priorities identified by the family.

While information and training is helpful, what matters most is what you believe and how you behave. When working with children with additional needs it is important that you reflect on your attitudes, values and beliefs about difference and differing abilities in order to ensure they do not impact negatively on your actions and behaviours, and your relationships with children and families.

### **Specific Strategies to Support Inclusion:**

#### **For the child:**

- Encourage the child and family to visit the school for short periods prior to enrolling
- Use the enrolment and orientation procedures as an opportunity to find out all necessary information about the child, for example: their specific needs- in particular for self-care and self-help needs and physical safety needs of both themselves and other children, interests, abilities, sense of humour, learning style, cultural background, communication preferences, likes and dislikes, progress made in other areas, levels of social and academic interactions... etc.
- Use the enrolment and orientation procedures as an opportunity to inform families and support services of how we approach managing children's behaviour and the theories, evidence and lived experiences that underpin our teaching and learning practices. These are our foundation principles and are intrinsic to how we plan, interact, engage and reflect upon teaching and learning for ALL children, including children with diverse learning needs. This gives families the opportunity to see if our school approach best fits the specific needs of their child.
- Audit the physical environment to ensure the child is able to access, participate and contribute within our design, culture and shape of day/week with particular reference to safety of self and other children.
- Recognise that children with high specific diverse needs inevitably require additional time and can be considered as a 'double enrolment' which may influence enrolment numbers in each cluster to ensure educational 'equity' for all children and reduce the possibility of staff burn-out.
- Consult Inclusion Support Facilitator (AISWA) to discuss the development of a plan of action detailing what educators need to do, know and have to support the child's inclusion in the education programme.
- Invest time getting to know the child and building a positive relationship with them.
- Recognise and build on the child's strengths, abilities and interests, just as they do with other children
- Talk as a team about their own individual and shared responsibilities in supporting this child with additional needs, and all other children.
- Ensure that family is aboard the support triangle with the best interests of their child within our particular community setting. Ensure families are able to support their child with additional needs during excursions, incursions, changes in daily rhythms, transitions between clusters, staff changes (including relief staff), especially in terms of physical safety when leaving the school to learn. The learning intentions behind the planned excursions etc need consideration to ensure that this is



the best match for both the child with additional needs and the rest of the learning cluster with adequate parental/guardian support.

**To support the family with a child who has diverse needs:**

- Invest time in building a trusting relationship with the family so they feel accepted, respected and valued
- Consider the family as the primary consultants and acknowledge them as experts on their child and engage with them as part of the learning team within the school setting
- Ask the family about their goals and expectations for their child, and talk with them about how to work together to make them happen within our school setting and learning culture (approach to guiding children's behaviour and building resiliency, approach to learning collectively and collegiately)
- Ask the family to provide support during high needs times such as excursions, whole school reshuffling eg: NAPLAN testing weeks, incursions and physical programmes such as mountain-biking and skating, going on buses, staff changes (including relief)
- Ask the family to become advocates for their child and their additional needs within our community and develop reciprocal relationships with others who make accommodations for inclusion, whilst understanding the practical, safety, financial and physical limitations of some inclusions
- Ask the family to share any relevant changes daily with educators that may impact significantly on their child during the day or a period of time such as: changes to family circumstance, health of family members and child, sleep, food, toileting, holidays, FIFO work shifts, testing, clinics and other appointments...

**To support other children who share their education and care with a child who has diverse needs, educators:**

- Understand children need honest answers to questions about diversity and difference. Children are naturally curious and are generally satisfied with a simple and honest response.
- Offer children explanations about what the child's behaviours might mean. This can help them to understand that something they interpret as 'naughty, intentional and deliberate' is the child's way of communicating a basic need or desire to join in
- Help children understand the back story of the child with additional needs and how to support the child and themselves and meet their own needs, especially during the transition phase in a new cluster or new to school
- Help other children to see and understand what they have in common with children with additional needs. Acknowledge their differences and any differences in needs as ways to understand and support children with additional needs.
- Avoid encouraging children to 'help' children with additional needs when it is not required. Instead, suggest that they ask if help is required and acknowledge that all children need opportunities to do things in their own way and time. Avoid over burdening other children with helping and accommodating to their own detriment and coping strategies.
- Challenge stereotyped ideas and discriminatory behaviours where they occur and talk to children about the extent to which this is fair or unfair. Offer alternative ways of thinking about ability and diversity grounded in social justice
- Understand their influence as a role model to children in demonstrating respectful relationships and communication with others
- Support other children's needs for space and adult support when interacting on a case by case or situation by situation need. Reassure children that they are not responsible for the children with additional needs and that adults are there to support them all.
- Explicitly teach and actively model to the cluster of children (and indeed the whole school) the skills to interact and engage with children with a variety of additional needs and to model tolerance, diversity, protective behaviours and reasonable expectations.

- Understand and acknowledge the unintended outcomes and added stress associated around transitions, growth, new experiences, illness, unpredictable responses and unexpected events for both the child with additional needs AND the other children.
- Do as much as possible to reduce the impact of diverse needs on self and others, keeping perspective and a constant reality check of how much is humanly possible and probable.

**Acknowledgement:**

<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-01/InclusionOfChildrenWithAdditionalNeeds.PDF>

**Related Documents**

Calmer Classrooms- A guide to working with traumatised children- Child Safety Commissioner (State Government Victoria 2007)

Maggie Dent: Resiliency Tool Box

Dr Louise Porter: Guiding Children's Behaviour

Search Institute's Developmental Relationship framework

Early Years Learning Framework EYLF

ACECQA : Self- guided Learning Package PDF- Inclusion of Children with Additional Needs

Towards Inclusive Education: A necessary process of transformation- Cologon, K. (2019) Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation. Report written by Dr Kathy Cologon, Macquarie University for Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA)

[https://cyda.org.au/images/pdf/towards\\_inclusive\\_education\\_a\\_necessary\\_transformation.pdf](https://cyda.org.au/images/pdf/towards_inclusive_education_a_necessary_transformation.pdf)