



The RICEAN

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liberation through
inclusion



EDMUND RICE EDUCATION
AUSTRALIA

...educating for liberation and possibility.



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editorial

'Inclusion' is topical in most arenas of today's society and especially within our school communities. The challenges of inclusion through enrolment, families, faith traditions, curriculum, activities, experiences and the like are at the forefront of most schools agenda.

To be inclusive has a number of interpretations, approaches and attitudes as we move beyond the rhetoric towards authentic practice.

Australian society has been active in the promotion of Social Inclusion and a fine example of this is the creation of Social Inclusion Week by Dr Jonathon Welch AM. This initiative "aims to help ensure that all Australians feel included and valued, giving everyone the opportunity to participate fully in society. It's about connecting local communities, workmates, family and friends in order to build and strengthen relationships and networks, addressing isolation and exclusion by supporting people who may be unable to help themselves. It's about encouraging communities to reconnect and be inclusive of all cultures, age groups, nationalities and the disadvantaged."

This year Social Inclusion Week runs from Saturday 24 November to Sunday 2 December. The theme this year will be: Collaborate, Connect and Celebrate! – a strong call to action to encourage people of all ages to join together and engage with the objectives of the Week by hosting or attending a social inclusion focused event.

Key social inclusion target groups include: young people 12-15 years of age, jobless families with children, disadvantaged Australians, people with a disability or mental illness, people who are homeless, older people and Indigenous Australians. Within this context and beyond, it continues to remain a challenge for all of our EREA school communities to ensure that they are authentically inclusive.

– Bob White, editor EREA Melbourne.

inclusivity

in our environment

reflection

Fairness and belonging are the right of every person, both in and out of a school system. Efforts to create equity and inclusion at any level – classroom, school, community, society - are linked to a worldwide movement to achieve respect for all human rights. Teachers and school staff everywhere are engaged in this work all the time, though we may not have identified it as such. Any teacher who tries to create a classroom environment characterized by fairness and belonging, where differences and commonalities are acknowledged and embraced, is making a contribution to this movement.

Creating environments that foster equity and inclusive education is as much a process as an outcome. Those who are engaged in this work strive to identify and remove barriers to full participation in society, while simultaneously seeking to create new conditions that promote equity and inclusion. Our vision is a society where the full range of different human needs, experiences, values and perspectives are recognized, respected, appreciated and validated.

Working to achieve equity and inclusion is a collective endeavour. Everyone's rights are jeopardized when anyone's rights are threatened. When we strive to ensure that one group's rights are respected, we are advancing the rights of all.

Equitable and Inclusive schools :

How does this vision translate into a school setting?
What do we imagine when we think about a school that fosters and embraces difference?

In an equitable and inclusive school, the development of skills and understanding necessary for the creation of an equitable and inclusive climate are given as much priority as learning to read. All students feel welcome and accepted in our school, where they see themselves reflected in their learning and in the environment. Students feel and are respected and fairly treated, according to their different needs and experiences. They are actively engaged in ongoing efforts to create the conditions necessary to make this vision a reality.

From the very young to teens, children need to know and understand that they have rights. Not only is this essential for their safety, it allows them to flourish as they learn to respect themselves and others. "Safe, Strong and Free" encapsulates an overarching vision of what it means to live free from all forms of abuse, assault and discrimination, in a world where equity and inclusion are a reality.

– "Safe at School" Project: The Ontario Ministry of Education

In Germany they first came for
the Communists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't
a Communist.

Then they came for the Jews,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.

Then they came for the trade unionists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't
a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Catholics,
and I didn't speak up because
I was a Protestant.

Then they came for me —
and by that time no one was left to speak up.

– Pastor Martin Niemoeller



social inclusion



Professor Sue McGinty – James Cook University
EREA Deputy Board Chair

Social inclusion is so obviously a good thing, it's a wonder we have to talk about it at all. Of course, we should include people; it goes without saying. After all, even the Federal Government has a policy to include the marginalized in our society, those who 'can be trapped in a spiral of disadvantage caused by family circumstances, low expectations, community poverty, lack of suitable and affordable housing, illness or discrimination – often leading to early school leaving, long-term unemployment and chronic ill-health' (www.socialinclusion.gov.au).

But, there's the problem. 'Social inclusion' can be a temptation to use the idea of social inclusion just to get results, as a means to get something done. Admittedly that may be something that is good, but it is using other people, nevertheless. It's as if we have everything and that those we wish to include have nothing.

Executive Director of EREA, Wayne Tinsey, put this dilemma beautifully when he wrote in his most recent newsletter: "As followers of Jesus we should never be satisfied by giving to the poor from our excess. It is never enough. It is a hallmark of charity not commitment. Our commitment must be to 'centre' the poor and make our response to their plight the core of our mission. Who we are is determined by whom we include!"

And that is so true. Inclusion is a two-way street. We gain as much from including others as we give. We are determinedly shaped by whom we include.

In the 1980s I was fortunate to live and work with the Walmajarri Aboriginal people who were living in Fitzroy Crossing, Western Australia. They were keen to return to their traditional country in the Great Sandy Desert. They had not been back since the 1960s when they first walked out of the desert and joined communities in the surrounding areas. So as part of our adult education classes we made the trip, recording stories and took video footage to use later in class and later still in native title claims. My experience of inclusion



by the Walmajarri was nothing short of gobsmacking. What I learned on that trip about Aboriginal ways of being, doing and thinking will stay with me forever. Not only was my knowledge enhanced, friendships were forged which have lasted over the years.

The poor and the marginalized don't have nothing; they often have a rich universe of knowledge, experience and resilience that can simply enrich us who think we have everything. It's not charity; it's to our mutual benefit that we have 'social inclusion', we are all enriched.

from the erea charter

Inclusive Community

Our community is accepting and welcoming, fostering right relationships and committed to the common good.

Expression

A Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition:

- provides pastoral care that nurtures the dignity of each person as a child formed in the image of God;
- demonstrates a preferential option for the poor by standing in solidarity with those who are powerless and marginalised, and strives to provide access to those who otherwise would not seek enrolment;
- is sensitive to the economic situation of each of its families, designing school programs to empower all to participate with dignity and confidence;
- promotes social inclusion and views diversity as beneficial to a liberating education;
- works in collaboration and partnership with the local Church;
- acknowledges the service and contribution of the Christian Brothers and welcomes them into the life of the school;
- acknowledges the primary role of parents and guardians in the growth and development of the child and provides opportunities for their participation in the life of the school;
- recognises the traditional ownership and cultural heritage of Indigenous peoples of Australia, and welcomes them into its community;
- looks beyond itself to contribute, according to its means, to the overall growth and development of Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition and to Edmund Rice ministries in Australia and overseas

Inclusion

Brother Sean McManus

Oceania Province Christian Brothers, Tasmania



“Inclusion is essentially a Gospel Value. Our tradition recalls Jesus refusing to exclude women, children, lepers, tax collectors and prostitutes.”

As a student at a 1960s’ Christian Brothers’ primary school, some of my strongest experiences were of exclusion and bullying. So I have had a “nose” for young people who are excluded or on the edges. I remember at my Christian Brother’s secondary college, paying attention to the new lad from Flinders Island - he was brought home at morning recess for a cuppa from Mum – and the rare-at-the-time exchange student from Chile. At the same time, my fellow school-mates were the children of Europeans who had fled totalitarian regimes and poverty and lack of opportunity for something better. We could spell equally well Skrzecznski and Szysz as we could Smith and Bird, though the spelling of Sean always remained a problem.

As a Christian Brother myself, I have always had an eye for those on the edge, whether because of home circumstances or because they were new arrivals- something I certainly picked up from the Brothers around me.

At an inner city Melbourne school in the 1980s, I remember we had students escaping from oppression in Chile, Poland and South East Asia. I once stood in the shadows around a campfire at Lake Eppalock as a one-armed Vietnamese lad, who survived an attack on his refugee boat, compared his escape story with those of a Laotian and a Cambodian student. On another occasion, a 15 year old student came alive in his broken English when the class quizzed him on why he had been put in gaol after trying to escape from Vietnam. In the same school, my heart-impulse to inclusion also extended to supporting young teachers from Croatia and Italy and the Philippines, themselves children of migrants.

In some ways, being a Brother and mostly a teacher, much of my working life has been about inclusion: inclusion in a class group, inclusion in a football team, or dramatic performance, inclusion in the school, inclusion in Church and parish, and in wider Australian society. It is about giving young people (and fellow workers) the skills and confidence to be able to be part of something bigger, and to feel at home with it. In a sense

integral to the **Edmund Rice** ethos

inclusion is about liberation. It helps decide who sits with whom, how I rotate players in a sporting team, how a liturgy is constructed and who takes part in it; it helps decide learning strategies so that the one struggling with English can be part of the class activity. Inclusion helps to free someone to be whom (s)he can be.

Inclusion is essentially a Gospel Value. Our tradition recalls Jesus refusing to exclude women, children, lepers, tax collectors and prostitutes. And Jesus himself is portrayed as learning a lesson in inclusion from the foreigner - the Syro-Phoenician woman.

Inclusion is also a core value in the Edmund Rice tradition. We recall the stories of Edmund buying the freedom of the African slave John Thomas, of him taking Italian immigrant Carlo Bianconi under his wing and giving him a start in business, and of Edmund literally carrying a small lad as he took children to be included in his liberating education.

The Christian Brothers' first Oceania Province Chapter (meeting) in 2008 called for the Edmund Rice Network in this part of the world to "adopt a focused, specific ministry thrust towards Indigenous peoples and refugees", that is a particular new focus on the inclusion of First and last Peoples.

In Australia, our Edmund Rice schools have along with other Catholic schools, opened the doors to the huge post-war influx of migrants and refugees, and each succeeding wave – often covering the cost of tuition fees, books, uniforms and providing special aides and programs.

The decade since 2000, saw the largest influx of refugees and asylum seekers into Australia since the 1970's post-Vietnam war arrivals. Over 100,000 Humanitarian Entrants have come in this time, the result of wars in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The Western

Suburbs of Melbourne (as in other Australian cities) saw the arrival of Dinka Sudanese, Ethiopians, Eritreans, Burundians, Liberians, and Chin from Burma among others. As in all waves of post-conflict migration and new arrivals, these people faced barriers and exclusion due to language, unemployment, being large families in inadequate housing, living with trauma-induced stress and other health issues, and having interrupted or no prior access to education. Their family and community based cultures with strong notions of respect (and shame), were different from the individualistic "flatter" Australian version of Western culture. This also was Australia's first experience of Africans in their midst. Despite having all come from somewhere else, this was sometimes difficult for our Euro-centric society.

In 2002, Br Chris Meehl and other Brothers set up Edmund Rice Refugee Services in St Albans in Western Melbourne, as a response to needs of these newly arrived communities. From late 2004 I worked with Chris and others in this ministry – attracted partly because of having worked in Africa for some years previously.

A Homework Help/ Tutoring program was developed where new arrival students were given one-on-one help with their homework and assignments in a communal setting. Starting with eight students on the first day, the concept grew to where in ten years up to 400 students per year have used the program at least once for tutoring.

... continued next page





Inclusion integral to the **Edmund Rice** ethos

Tutors were initially Christian Brothers (some retired). However a particular feature developed such that school students and their teachers from the seven Victorian Christian Brother/Edmund Rice secondary schools formed the core tutors. By the end of the decade, more than 20 schools were providing tutors. Some came as part of Community Service Programs, some as members of St Vincent de Paul, Justice or Duke of Edinburgh Award groups, some just because it was something the school did.

I was often thrilled and moved, looking across the crowded tuition space, seeing African and other students from primary through to even post-school, sitting with their tutors, with their heads over textbooks or reading books or computers. It was usually a noisy affair.

It was soon observed that the learning was mutual. Student tutors appreciated the cross-cultural connections and talked of having their eyes opened "to a whole new world". An older tutor talked of "coming for me: it shows a world that's larger than me - it's part of my week." Tutors and students kept returning, some for years. Edmund Rice Schools made it a normal part of their outreach. Young students grew in their ability in reading and writing. They became more confident in tackling their homework. Older refugee students struggled through texts that at first seemed incomprehensible to them. Students became confident in tackling more complex mathematics. Students developed social skills and confidence in relating to other Australians. Above all it was their space. They were included.

Financial support for the Refugee Service was mostly supplied by the Christian Brothers Southern Province, though Edmund Rice and other schools contributed from activities such as Walkathons. Some small grants were obtained from Government and Local Council.



Out of this initial program other initiatives developed. Some lasted, some limped. There were small mentor programs for vulnerable youth, a Drop-In Centre and a Basketball club for older Sudanese youth, camps for Refugee youth, holiday activity days with volunteers from Edmund Rice Schools, and activities in partnership with other agencies for Unaccompanied Refugee Minors. A volunteer dinner and an end-of-year picnic became annual fixtures. Schools in Geelong and Ballarat started their own programs of Homework Help for refugee background youth, based on the peer model of ERRS St Albans/Sunshine. In 2008, the Victorian Government gave to Edmund Rice Refugee Services, an Award for Excellence in Community Education to Multicultural Victoria.

Another consequence of the involvement of Victorian Edmund Rice Schools in the Refugee Homework Help program, was that Edmund Rice schools in Melbourne began to offer opportunities for African students to study at their schools- more inclusion. In turn some of these African students from St Kevin's, St Patrick's, St Kilda and Parade Colleges came as tutors to the Homework Help Program.

Edmund Rice Camps Victoria have offered special camps for new arrival youngsters and an annual Refugee Family camp. Indeed that was the impulse for their original camp. In doing Edmund Rice Camps since 1983, I would have to say that the Refugee Family

Camp was the outstanding experience. One Ethiopian mother who had fled gaol and torture, attended the camp with her daughter. She said that it was one of the best weeks of her life. On another camp composed mostly of Burmese Chin families, the tables were turned when the older Chin girls took over and taught the Edmund Rice leaders the Chin language version of *Heads Shoulders Knees and Toes!*

Another volunteer program in the Edmund Rice Network Victoria is the Edmund Rice Asylum Seeker Project which has welcomed Asylum Seekers to a Drop-In location in Richmond (right where Ambrose Treacy used to work and near EREA headquarters) and also engages in visiting asylum seekers at the Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation.

Support of Refugees and new arrivals is not confined to the Edmund Rice Network in Victoria. Edmund Rice Centre Mirrabooka (Perth), Edmund Rice Camps across Australia, Edmund Rice Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support Service NSW, and the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education (Sydney) have each become a well-known part of the network of agencies which have responded to the influx of humanitarian arrivals. Brothers and Edmund Rice volunteers and schools in many states have become involved with support of refugees through groups such as Vinnies, the Brisbane Romero Centre and Rosalie Centre, and the Men's Sheds movement.



Inclusion requires effort. It is easy to ignore or not even see the one who is excluded. Inclusion demands that I move from where I am to enter the culture and world and even language of the other so that they can be included in my Australian world. Inclusion is about making space and a place, but also enabling the newcomer to have the skills to participate and engage in our culture and community while being the best person they can be.

As members of EREA or the Edmund Rice Network, there will always be the call to include others, invite others, to enter into the world of others. For in doing so we are engaged in Kingdom values and Kingdom work - the work of bringing about God's dream, God's desire for the world, which is always inclusive.



“Inclusion is about making space and a place, but also enabling the newcomer to have the skills to participate and engage in our culture and community while being the best person they can be.”





ben wyatt

Aquinas College Salter Point WA – 1986-91



Ben Wyatt – State Member of Parliament Western Australia

“... students are forming friendships with Aboriginal kids from other parts of the state. They then develop a much better understanding of the challenges Aboriginal students ...”

I was at Aquinas from Year 8 to 12. My father was also educated by the Christian Brothers, first at Clontarf and (for Year 11 and 12) at Aquinas.

I have fantastic memories of my secondary school years. I had, and continued to have, a strong group of friends I formed during those years who I continue to see regularly. And also a school that allowed me to develop, not just emotionally, but also intellectually with great support. Certainly I remember at the time Brother McGlaughlin, who was the deputy head and was fantastic in terms of encouraging students to perform, to study, to achieve beyond their own expectations. During years 8, 9 and 10, I was actually a fairly average student, but during 11 and 12, I was able to do very well.

There were a number of Brothers present during these years. Brother Carrigg was our headmaster for the entire time I was there. And then after Brother Carrigg it went to Brother Kevin Paull and then it moved to lay principal, Mr Bob White. When I started at Aquinas, quite funny, in year 8, Brother Redmond was still there. Brother Redmond taught my dad, and so when he saw me he kept calling me Cedric. He called me Cedric for the first twelve months and I kept correcting him.

From my experience, inclusion was just natural. No doubt these things don't just happen and no doubt a lot of work and school administration goes into ensuring that, but certainly as a student there it seemed to be natural. We had a big class of about 160 in my year level and I certainly felt as though I was a part of a school community. I was involved in army cadets and cross-country running. Forming friendships I found very easy. I found the environment at Aquinas absolutely supportive. Now, whether that was just natural or whether that was my personality or whether that was something that was developed by the school, I think it was probably a combination of all of those.





interview

When I go back to Aquinas now - and I go back there quite regularly - the pastoral care side of things there is very much a focus on developing each student as a young man. I think that is more apparent now than it was when I was there. Now that's not a criticism of when I was there, as I said I had a great time, I just think it's become more obvious. When I go back to school assemblies, you certainly see it with the range of extra-curricular activities that are offered to the students of Aquinas, such as the Derby immersion or whatever there is certainly much more of a stronger focus on developing students in all of their areas.

In my year there weren't many indigenous students. Certainly there are now and the last ten years has seen a much stronger focus, not just at Aquinas and other schools on getting Aboriginal kids into school and I think that's what you want. It is important that Aboriginal kids have some opportunity to go to these schools.

I'm delighted that there is a very strong focus now from Aquinas, not just increasing their numbers of Aboriginal students, but also giving students an alternative to travel to Derby to participate in Aboriginal life outside Perth which is very important. It's certainly something that's developed strongly over the last ten years.

It also means students are forming friendships with Aboriginal kids from other parts of the state. They then develop a much better understanding of the challenges facing Aboriginal students.

Inclusion includes all

I'd hate to think that you could go through school and not be exposed to Aboriginal culture or Chinese culture or Italian culture. I think an important part of going to an Edmund Rice school, is recognition that when you finish year 12 you need to have more of an understanding than life simply in inner-city Perth.

Edmund Rice values

I chose politics and public service because I guess it's a combination of the lessons taught to me by my parents and reinforced at Aquinas. I was very fortunate. When you're a student you can never appreciate what you've got of course, you're a young fella. But I look back now and realise what an incredible opportunity I had in going to Aquinas. I had the good fortune of having parents who made the decision to invest a lot of money and effort into sending me there. At the time you don't realise but certainly without any shadow of a doubt the greatest investment in my life was my school education. Now I'm very aware of that, I'm very aware that not many people have these opportunities and so am very aware there is an obligation on me, both as someone fortunate enough to go to a great school and as someone with an Aboriginal heritage to try to ensure that we can extend high quality education to a much broader range of people.



Aquinas College Salter Point 2012

a country moving t

... with small steps, but big hearts!

Over Easter this year, thirteen educators travelled to South Africa to learn from, with and about our partners, who are making an extraordinary difference in the lives of so many. Below are some of the things that we learned.

"I do not say it lightly when I state that the immersion program to South Africa was life changing.

It has taken me on a journey of discovery, connectedness and learning. While it was a very physical experience in seeing, touching and interacting, it was equally, if not more an internal journey exploring my role in contributing to build a world of justice and hope.

... Having the opportunity to meet with the Brothers and Sisters was inspiring. Through dialogue I felt connected more than ever to the work of Edmund Rice. I felt I understood and shared their quest of transformation through education.

... Everywhere we went in South Africa I heard OUR story. Through the townships, farms, programs and schools the song of poverty, struggle, strength, dreams and opportunities filled the air. While the messages were strong and loud in South Africa due to the enormity of it all, I was constantly reminded of Australia.

...I have left South Africa in body but am now filled with the spirit of South Africa. I carry the shared dreams of the Rainbow Nation and the global community. I am driven more than before to continue the work of Edmund Rice in the Flexible Learning Centres. I feel obligated to strive for honesty and true reconciliation in Australia and to begin at our heart, education. I feel holistically connected to Edmund Rice Education Australia and will continue this through the friendships I have made by sharing our stories and experiences between the schools that make up EREA."

– Jasmin Crouch, Head of Campus, Gympie Flexible Learning Centre

"I do not say it lightly

when I state that the immersion program

to South Africa was life changing."

"The progression in South Africa is about progressing 'human wrongs to human rights'. This quote applies to me as an educator. Many students and people undertake wrong doings in their daily lives, sometimes without the knowledge of their own actions. This is most prevalent in young people, as they are still undertaking the process of growth and education. I see it as my responsibility as an educator and adult to change these wrongs into rights. Education is an ongoing process and regardless of what stage we are at in our own lives it becomes pivotal that we are constantly open to change, education, new ideas and an ability to allow ourselves the opportunity to broaden our horizons and to experience the unexpected. These challenges and opportunities force us to flourish as people and to act as catalysts in our own communities fostering positive change by following in the image of Christ which is at the centre of everything. In essence my immersion to South Africa has provided me with this exact opportunity and challenge. I am so grateful for what I have seen, what I have experienced, what I have learnt, and how it has changed my way of thinking about the real life human struggle for freedom." – Michael Bongers, CBHS Lewisham

"I am not only asking my students to live out the story of Jesus, I too am placing myself in challenging and confronting circumstances so that I can develop and grow into a better person with a greater sense of compassion and justice. Attending Mass at Regina Mundi in Soweto was an invigorating moment for me. I realised that in a place where there is so much hardship, the South Africans still have a deep seeded faith and hope. The service broadened my understanding of spirituality and allowed me to reflect upon what gave me meaning in my own life. Although I couldn't understand much of what was said during the Mass, I listened to the mourning, passion, determination and desperation in the voices as these people united together to pray for a better future. I remember thinking about the virtue of forgiveness as I sat listening to the Soweto community sing together. How a once devastated, tortured and enslaved community could sit in the church (which ironically enough had been a



towards inclusivity

Reflections on the EREA South African Educators' Immersion

place of tragedy) and forgive. I decided that this was something I was not very good at and that I needed to learn from them, so that I could more closely model the behaviour of Jesus for the students in my care. I remember thinking about the theme of freedom that is so often spoken of in South Africa and how forgiveness and freedom must go hand in hand.

I also found visiting the Christian Brothers' Novices in Cape Town amazing experience. Being able to talk openly, frankly

and truthfully about how they saw their mission in life was inspiring and reinforced that in some small way, I was carrying on some of their good work as not only a teacher, but as a leader in a community that had the power to influence many. Their commitment and dedication to creating a better South Africa was motivating."

- Leanne Gair, St Edmund's College, Canberra



Remembering the liberation of South Africa



Christian Brothers' Novitiate, Cape Town



Jasmin (Gympie FLC) with an ex-political prisoner on Robben Island, discussing strategies for reconciliation education programs



Kyamundi Township, Cape Town



inclusion an 'imperative' at

Gerry Crooks, Principal

The four Touchstones of the Charter clearly define the expectation of a Catholic School in the Edmund Rice tradition towards inclusion. We read exhortations such as 'each person is hope-filled and free to build a better world', 'our community is accepting and welcoming', 'we strive to make Jesus' message of compassion, justice and peace a living reality', 'we stand in solidarity with those who are marginalised.'

As a small inner-city school which has struggled academically, financially, socially and culturally throughout most its 144 year history, St James has nonetheless, I believe, strayed little from what it believes is an authentic response to its calling as an Edmund Rice school, made even more clear and challenging through the touchstones of the Charter.

Many schools, like our own here at St James which has a population of only 410 students, welcome students from a wide variety of cultural and social backgrounds as well those with learning differences and behavioural needs, many of whom are themselves marginalised by society or peers.

So how does catering for such student diversity in a school translate into inclusion?



It can never be presumed that a school is 'inclusive' merely because its student population is diverse culturally, socially, religiously or educationally.

In a Catholic school and indeed in this Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition, inclusivity is a moral imperative to provide an education that is non-discriminatory, available to all, and within an educational framework, philosophy and environment and in turn says to the student: "we will do our best to provide the best education we can for you that meets your particular needs and goals because we believe in you and in your aspirations."

At St James, inclusive practice is a whole-school agenda which takes a variety of forms.

One example is in the area of working with students with a disability and/or learning differences.

Our inclusive policy means that all such students (of which there are nearly 60, most with a verified autistic disability) are fully included in all mainstream classes – no 'special units', no block withdrawal time.

This, of course, has challenging implications for staff – both teachers and teacher-aides. With assistance, training and allocated funding, teaching staff are very adept at making adjustments for such students to enable them to access the curriculum, achieve curriculum outcomes and participate fully in school life. Teacher-aides are assigned to classes both in core subject areas and elective areas according to need.

The Educational Adjustment Program (EAP) at St James is a process for identifying and responding to the educational needs of students within a wide spectrum of learning difference, including those on the ASD spectrum. A teaching and learning package developed by staff here entitled "Embracing Diversity" is used extensively as a support to classroom practices.

Inclusive practice, however, is not just about what happens in the classroom. If a young person does not feel safe, secure and supported, if he or she is not able to access opportunities available to others, then our inclusive policies and practices are merely words.

st james college, brisbane

Inclusivity, therefore, can be seen as an attitude underpinned by a quality of relationship that demonstrates to each young person that they are welcomed and valued as an individual, that they are an integral part of this community, and that it's OK to be different.

Inclusive practice at St James expects that each of us as staff members is aware of and truly lives their obligation and calling to engage with, walk with, sit beside, laugh with and sometimes cry with those who, because of their background or circumstances, struggle each day to fit in and feel a part of their community. And not only is that expected of each of us but it is also expected of those among the students for whom social interaction and engagement comes relatively easily.

Each day, out in the schoolyard, when I see groups of students playing together all from different year-groups as well as ethnic and cultural backgrounds, when I see a Year 12 student leader walking a quiet, insecure younger student down to the train through the hustle and bustle of the city, when I see a young boy in Year 8 walking aimlessly around talking to his imaginary friend and the other students just accepting him for who he is because that's just him, when I see teachers sitting with groups of kids at the lunch tables, laughing and bantering and enjoying each other's company, when I see and smile at the way kids really just 'get on' with each other; these are the times I pinch myself to remind me how privileged I am to be part of this place.

You see, inclusion is not only about what you do but the way you do it. It is about what you believe is the real meaning of human dignity and how you can live it every day as you walk across the schoolyard, prepare your lessons and teach your class, calm a distressed and anxious student, engage with a struggling parent, and manage a challenging behaviour that isn't really about you but about something deep inside this troubled young person in front of you.

We don't always get it right in the way we do things and we struggle daily with making the Touchstones a lived reality, but I would like to think that here, in the craziness of this little place called 'Jimmies', Edmund himself wouldn't mind spending a day or two!



“ It can never be presumed that a school is ‘inclusive’ merely because its student population is diverse culturally, socially, religiously or educationally.”



disability is only a state of mind

st edmund's

Kathy Freeman, Principal

Edmund Rice Special Education Services consists of two special schools, St Edmund's at Wahroonga and St Gabriel's at Castle Hill. An article about inclusion from the perspective of these special schools may surprise some but both schools are committed to inclusion and believe we play an integral role in the inclusion model for EREA.

Both schools began as specialised schools offering educational options for students with hearing impairment (St Gabriel's) and vision impairment (St Edmund's). As inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream settings became the norm, both schools were able to move their students easily into these settings due to the well structured educational opportunities they provided to their students. This meant that both schools had to reassess their role and their commitment to the inclusion model. They both have opened their doors and their programs to students with a wide variety of disabilities who were being excluded from the educational system in many areas. Our students come from many different faith traditions and from locations all around Sydney and adjoining regions and they and their support networks are all welcomed with open arms.

The aim of both schools is to provide programs and experiences that are geared towards community involvement and work placement so that upon the completion of their school years all our students will have the opportunity to be fully included in their community professionally, socially and spiritually. Both schools aim to be centres of excellence of education allowing their students to explore all their abilities and fulfill their potential as appreciated members of our society.

St Edmund's is organised using a regular high school model which involves 7 period days that include all the subject areas offered in mainstream schools. The students follow a Board of Studies program that is fully adapted to the students' needs but not to their disability. They are treated as teenagers first and allowed to develop their interests and talents as they progress through the school. The school offers a very well balanced co-curricular program based around music, dance and sport.



Our Eddie's Entertainers are quite well known now throughout the local area and throughout our local educational network where they have performed. The school's sporting prowess is also well respected at both local community and regional representative level. These programs also offer great opportunities for establishing relationships and partnerships with other schools around Sydney which sees our students included in activities and projects with the students from our partner schools; some of which are EREA but also schools from different faith traditions and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Our Social Justice and Disability Awareness program provides opportunities for students from other high schools to come into St. Edmund's every Monday and interact with our students in the classroom and the playground setting. Many schools take advantage of this program and feel included in our school during their day with us. They learn about disability, with a special focus on vision impairment, and they meet our students as equals in activities that provide chances to communicate with each other. Our goal then is for these students to take the knowledge and feelings they experience on the day back into their schools, communities and families and develop a more inclusive approach to all people they come across during their life journeys.

state of mind at ereses and st gabriel's, sydney

Inclusion of community and family are also a big focus of both schools. Parents are included at all times with regular meetings to discuss the student's Individual Plans and their desires for their children as they progress through the schools. The local community organisations are regularly involved with both schools and these relationships are beneficial to both parties and both are seen as equals in the partnerships.

There is also a great emphasis placed on social skill development so that our students can establish good friendships with a variety of people, both within the school environment and outside in other community settings and are then able to maintain these relationships into the future. ERSES, where the kids are cool, life is celebrated and disability is only a state of mind!



*“ERSES,
where the kids are cool,
life is celebrated
and disability is only
a state of mind!”*



caring for all who arrive

Daniel Lawler, Principal

At 13 years of age, a refugee without a visa, under government supervision and moved around the country for over a year, 'A' arrived at St Paul's with two social workers and a defeated father. He needed many things - legal status, a settled place to live, regular food and help for his trauma. But what he most wanted was what St Paul's can offer - a school, a uniform, books and a bag, a place in a class, teachers and hopefully some friends. He wanted to go to school, just like other boys his age. He wanted an education.

Inclusion at St Paul's means not trying to meet every student's every need, because we can't – and given

our diverse enrolment, needs abound. For us it means having a clear understanding of what we have that we can provide access to for our students - education. The boys are very clear that is what they come to us for.

We are a 'normal' suburban school, with students typical of many Edmund Rice schools – eventually heading off to trades, university or work. However, part of our normality includes such things as 10% special needs and 18% ESL, which incorporates 12% of our students who have refugee experience (African and Afghani). This is to say nothing of the rest.

“Victory is aspired to but not paramount

– but being part of the team is.

Talent is nurtured, but not an obstacle when lacking.”

Given our diversity we could easily become a school dedicated to and defined by special programs. Many have been tried over the years. The risk is that with the best of intentions they can become a pathway out of the classroom. Thus, inclusion for us is anything that leads into learning; and many things can pave the way for a student to find educational success.

Fundamentally inclusion begins by making enrolment possible (fees and remissions), and by providing structures to help boys belong – such as uniforms, rules and processes, houses and traditions, all of which counter a tendency towards self-exclusion. Making things easier or optional does not work. By reinforcing the basic school offerings we more effectively connect more boys to their ultimate educational purpose. Religiously, all faiths are welcomed to be part of our Catholic community. Strengthening our sporting, musical and co-curricular

programs, re-introducing camps at each year level, developing more student leadership opportunities – these all include and connect boys to school. And the idea of inclusivity permeates these activities – victory is aspired to but not paramount – but being part of the team is. Talent is nurtured, but not an obstacle when lacking.

In the classroom, extra assistance where it is needed is provided, not as a separate program but to enable students to experience educational achievement. The education program of the school is for all students and any support, such as ESL or special education exists to support inclusion in that program, not to provide an alternative. Student academic awards are structured to be accessible to any student, be it for achievement, improvement or effort. Teachers are given skills to differentiate the curriculum to enable them to more effectively include all students in their classes. Time is set aside for teachers to collectively analyse



e at our door st paul's college, adelaide

the needs of each student, particularly via the use of data, to ensure their lessons are planned to cater for each boy. And subject and course offerings are reviewed continually to ensure there are suitable options for each kind of student – some academically challenging and some practical and demanding – but all aiming to provide the authentic educational rigour needed for our students to open the doors to their future.

St Paul's is on a long and never ending journey to develop our capacity to include all the boys who arrive at our door. Their needs constantly evolve and change according to the social and other currents of our time. The above reflects some of what we do, unexceptional in many ways, and reflective of the shared mission of all Edmund Rice schools.



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It can never be presumed that a school is 'inclusive' merely because its student population is diverse culturally, socially, religiously or educationally.

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Inclusion is about making space and a place, enabling the newcomer to have the skills to participate and engage in our culture and community while being the best person they can be.

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ERSES, where the kids are cool, life is celebrated and disability is only a state of mind!

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EDMUND RICE EDUCATION
AUSTRALIA

...educating for liberation and possibility