

Every Child.
Every Need.



Every Child, Every Need: A Rights-Based Pathway to Inclusion, Care and Workforce Sustainability

Australia's commitment to inclusion is grounded in human rights, fairness, and opportunity. Yet for a small but growing cohort of children with profound and complex disability, the current early childhood education and care (ECEC) system is producing the opposite outcome: exclusion.

The **Every Child Every Need** campaign does not challenge inclusion as a principle. It challenges a system that uses the language of inclusion to justify the withdrawal of care options, specialist supports, and workforce capacity — leaving families with nowhere to go.

This paper demonstrates:

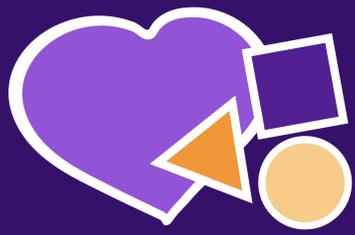
- where the campaign aligns with inclusive education frameworks, the Inclusion Support Program (ISP), and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC);
- where tensions arise in practice; and
- how a **middle-ground policy solution** can protect children's rights, support educators, and preserve genuine inclusion.

1. The Shared Foundation: Rights, Inclusion and Participation

Australia's inclusion frameworks, national early childhood policies, and the UNCRC are united by four core principles:

1. Non-discrimination – no child should be excluded because of disability
2. Best interests of the child – safety, dignity, and development must come first
3. Participation and voice – children and families should be heard in decisions affecting them
4. Equity, not sameness – different needs require different supports





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Every Child Every Need is explicitly grounded in these same principles. It exists because these rights are **not being realised in practice** for children with the highest support needs.

2. Where the System Is Breaking Down

2.1 Inclusion in theory vs inclusion in practice

Inclusion frameworks correctly state that:

- inclusion is not mere physical presence;
- **participation must be meaningful**; and
- environments must adapt to children, not the reverse.

However, families and educators report a widening gap between these principles and lived reality:

- children are enrolled but repeatedly sent home;
- attendance is reduced to partial days;
- educators face unsafe conditions without adequate staffing or training; and
- services decline enrolments altogether.

This is **exclusion by attrition, not inclusion**.

2.2 The funding vacuum for children with the highest needs

The Inclusion Support Program is designed to:

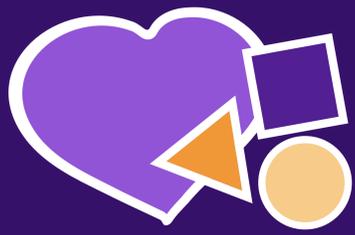
- build the capacity of mainstream services;
- support educators to include children alongside typically developing peers; and
- supplement, not replace, base staffing models.

However:

- ISP is not a 1:1 disability program;
- Specialist ECEC services are explicitly excluded from eligibility; and
- There is no alternative funded pathway for children requiring sustained higher-ratio care.

As specialist services close and mainstream services struggle, families are left without viable options — despite their child's right to care, education, and participation.





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3. Why This Is Also a Workforce Issue

The **UWU and QTU have both been clear**: inclusion must be safe, sustainable, and properly resourced.

Educators report:

- escalating occupational violence and burnout;
- moral distress when unable to meet children's needs;
- insufficient training for complex disability support; and
- being placed in unsafe ratios without specialist backup.

A system that fails children also fails workers.

True inclusion cannot be built on:

- unpaid emotional labour,
- unsafe classrooms,
- or goodwill replacing professional support.

4. The False Binary: Inclusion vs Specialist Care

A central tension in the debate is the idea that: "If specialist care exists, inclusion has failed."

This is a false binary.

Segregation is separation without rights, voice, review, or choice.

Specialised care, when rights-based and properly regulated, is a form of reasonable **adjustment** for children whose needs cannot currently be met in mainstream environments.

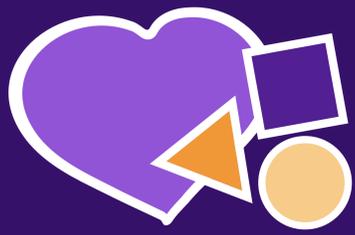
The campaign does not argue that:

- mainstream inclusion is undesirable, or
- specialist pathways should replace inclusive education.

It argues that:

- inclusion is the outcome (belonging, safety, participation),
- not a single physical location.





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5. A Middle-Ground Policy Pathway

5.1 Principles for reform

A sustainable solution must:

- uphold the UNCRC;
- preserve inclusive education as the system norm for children where this is in their best interests;
- protect educator safety and wellbeing; and
- ensure no child loses access to care because their needs are higher.

5.2 The proposed model

Right supports, right setting, right time

1. Mainstream inclusion remains the default for children where this is in their best interests

- Supported by ISP and workforce investment.

2. A defined specialised care pathway

- For a small cohort with profound, ongoing support needs.
- Rights-based, reviewed, and family-led.

3. Funded transition supports

- Where children can move between settings safely over time.

4. Clear safeguards

- Preventing permanent placement without review.
- Ensuring dignity, quality, and participation.

This approach strengthens — not weakens — inclusion.

6. What Every Child Every Need Is Calling For

- Recognition that exclusion is occurring despite inclusive policy intent
- Acknowledgement of the funding gap for high-needs children
- A workforce-safe approach aligned with union concerns
- A rights-based specialised care option for children with nowhere else to go
- Policy reform that restores choice, dignity, and access.

