

S A P P A

**SOCIAL INCLUSION IN SOUTH
AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT
PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

SOCIAL INCLUSION IN SOUTH AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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***A report commissioned by the
South Australian Primary Principals Association (SAPPA)***

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FOREWORD

In November 2003 the Executive of the South Australian Primary Principals' Association (SAPPA) agreed with a recommendation from the SAPPA Social Inclusion Portfolio to focus on the government priority of social inclusion as part of its work for 2004. It was proposed that significant development work be undertaken in this area for leaders in primary school settings as well as providing impetus for policy and program advice to DECS in the future. The first activity was to establish a Social Inclusion Portfolio within SAPPA Executive. The second was to commission a piece of research that would explore this concept in depth in the South Australian Government Primary School context. This research would inform SAPPA in relation to advocacy for policy development and other recommendations that arise from it.

Ms Leonie Trimper, the President of SAPPA, approached the University of South Australia to perform the survey under the second heading. The research was undertaken by Associate Professor Judith Gill of the University of South Australia as Chief Researcher. Her research assistant was Adjunct Professor Robert Crotty, also of the University of South Australia. Both researchers are members of the Centre for Education, Equity and Work at the university. The research was conducted between March and October of 2004.

The objective of this research was to investigate what is happening in the name of social inclusion in primary education in South Australia, and with what effects, in order to inform SAPPA policy on social inclusion.

The expected outcomes of the research were stated as follows:

1. An investigation into the Government's policy and priorities and the rationale/background for them.
2. Exploration of the challenges primary educators are facing in implementing the policy and the surfacing of particular issues as a consequence.

3. Identification of what social inclusion strategies are working well and why?
4. What recommendations SAPPA could make in terms of policy development, resourcing, teaching and other services, community relationships etc.

This report will begin with a summary of an investigation into the background and rationale behind the South Australian impetus towards social inclusion in general, and the impetus towards social inclusion in primary schooling in particular. The following section gives a detailed account of the results of a survey of school leaders in SA primary schooling incorporating aspects of the focus group discussions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The survey undertaken into social inclusion in South Australian primary schools has shown that there is a heightened awareness of social inclusion and social exclusion within the sector. The barriers to social inclusion are clearly recognised with a degree of unanimity across the range of existing schools. Likewise, there is fair unanimity concerning remediation strategies. School leaders provided valuable information about strategies which were seen as working to promote social inclusion as well as those which they saw as relatively ineffectual. From the survey material a comprehensive picture arises which details aspects of social inclusion and social exclusion currently seen to operate in primary schools in South Australia. The degree of agreement about the issues involved is quite remarkable and indicates a basis for optimism about potential improvements.

The analysis of the survey responses, together with the material from the six focus group discussions, gave rise to a list of strategies which were widely understood as helping to build socially inclusive schools. These strategies constitute the recommendations to emerge from the study and are listed below. We are confident that this study provides strong evidence supporting the adoption of these strategies in the interest of promoting social inclusion in SA Primary Schools.

While noting the degree of similarity between school leaders regardless of location, it is important to register some interesting differences, for example the position of outer metropolitan schools which are seen by school leaders as beset with problems similar to those of rural schools in terms of their ability to provide students with access to extracurricular learning experiences. Elsewhere features of a particular school location warrant attention – such as the program at the Port Augusta schools which makes strong working links between various agencies and the schools in the region for the benefit of all. This arrangement could well serve as a model for schools in other areas.

A cautionary note – schools can't be expected to do it all! School leaders repeatedly commented that schools and staff in primary schools in South Australia could not be expected to do everything relative to the promotion of social inclusion within their

schools. Social exclusion is a problem that exists within the wider society, it has its initial roots there, and any realistic move to eradicate it must involve collaboration between government departments and interagency support, together with the primary school constituency.

The following recommendations are presented in the order they appear in the text analysis of the investigation. They are not prioritised.

Recommendation 1: That DECS explore the situation of outer metropolitan primary schools as regards their level of disadvantage in terms of access to educational experiences for their students.

Recommendation 2: That the issue of large class size be addressed as a matter of priority by the maintenance of the JP-160 initiative and its extension to the entire primary school sector.

Recommendation 3: That restrictions on staff selection by primary principals be removed and principals be authorised to select and retain staff on the basis of their performance and their cultural suitability.

Recommendation 4: That the funding formula for School Service Officers (SSOs) and Special Education needs be recognised as inadequate and undergo review.

Recommendation 5: That alternative strategies be developed for those children whose extremes of behaviour render them uncontrollable in the normal school environment.

Recommendation 6: That additional funding be provided for the extension of the school counsellor initiative to all primary schools and for appropriate training to be implemented for all counsellors.

Recommendation 7: That DECS coordinate interagency support to ensure that the issue of mental health is appropriately addressed in the primary school sector.

Recommendation 8: That measures be taken to ensure better links between DECS support personnel and the local primary school sector so that adequate and effective assistance is available when and as required.

Recommendation 9: That the professional development for staff relating to Social Inclusion strategies become an immediate priority.

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1

SOCIAL INCLUSION: THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

*There is a lack of a common understanding of what social inclusion means and of commitment to strategies to support this. ^{*1}*

*People are still developing their understanding of what Social inclusion means – I suspect it means many different things to different people both within and beyond DECS. **

The South Australian context

In South Australia there have been a number of initiatives taken up in recent decades which were designed to lessen the differences in educational outcomes that are connected to differences in family background. The dimensions of these differences include, among other things, wealth, educational level of parents, language and cultural differences, ethnicity and race, physical abilities and gender. Many of the reforms were focused on the notion of disadvantage (such as Priority Projects – in other states known as the Disadvantaged Schools' Project), and they took their place within the rhetoric of social justice. Their orientation was to the schools and families where there were clear indications of need, schools whose outputs were demonstrably below those of other schools in different areas, or with different populations. A good deal of time, energy and professional attention was devoted to these programs. In

¹ All quotations marked with an asterisk (*) are sourced from the survey data and the focus group discussions.

addition, these interventions were taken from the position of doing something *to* a group, a particular school or an area, the latter being the beneficiaries of the action. While the initiatives achieved many commendable results, the differences in schooling outcomes continue to be a cause of concern. It seems that there is a need to do more than simply provide resources to disadvantaged areas if we want to work towards the elimination of social differences in schooling outcomes.

Meanwhile the forces of globalisation have generated an increased awareness of the gap between countries and people who can take their role as players on the world stage and those who cannot. With the general turn towards economic rationalism throughout the western world during the 1990s these differences have become more clearly defined. Within Australia our state, South Australia, has become increasingly recognised as facing very particular problems in terms of economic progress. We have been made newly aware of the need to work together if we are to help to build South Australia into a sustainable and capacity rich community. Education is clearly a key to this endeavour.

These two features – the history of past efforts to target disadvantaged schools for resourcing and personnel and the forces of globalisation and economic rationalism – have led to a re-thinking of the ways in which schooling can serve to create a revitalised notion of community. This re-thinking has led to the adoption of social inclusion as a key aim for South Australia in general. The current project constitutes one attempt to develop the ideas of social inclusion in ways that may be useful and applicable in schools and classrooms. Rather than thinking in terms of doing something to a particularly targeted group, a social inclusion perspective requires that everyone in the group take an active part in building a more inclusive community. This means those we might term advantaged as well as those who might be known as disadvantaged.

The following paragraphs chart some of the origins of the movement for social inclusion in recent times.

Origins of the current social inclusion movement

The story begins in Britain with the election of Tony Blair and the Labour Party after the long years of Thatcherism. The present Blair government's initial wave of success derived in part from the attention it focused on social exclusion – the ways in which certain sectors of the British people were routinely marginalised from accessing education, secure employment, a good standard of living and so on. Blair committed his government to remedying this situation and in doing this he opted for social inclusion, a key term in his platform. At the same time it is important to recognize that both social exclusion and social inclusion are equivocal terms – there is a sense in which you can only speak of social inclusion if you already have a sense of what social exclusion is – and vice versa (Doherty 2003).

In its outline of *Labor's Social Inclusion Initiative* the South Australian Rann Government has explicitly taken up Tony Blair's New Labour narrative. The term *social inclusion* resonates within a paradigm of European social democracy and especially with efforts to build the new Europe in terms of the one economic community. There are evident parallels with multicultural Australia and the need to grow a sense of belonging along with the recognition of difference. The practice of social inclusion goes beyond the idea of righting deprivation by redistribution of wealth, the strategy of successive earlier British attempts to redress inequality in a liberal society (Duffy 1995, p. 5). The Rann manifesto sees the latter paradigm as having ineffectually informed the social policy and social strategies of the former Liberal government in South Australia. The current initiative is dedicated to fostering inclusivity at all levels of the society.

Social inclusion only makes sense when its purpose is defined as creating a 'prosperous, fair and inclusive society' (*Making the Connections* 2003, foreword). Its dynamic is accordingly not just sporadic remedying of transient social ills; social inclusion points to a future society where deprivation in all its forms is no longer a viable factor. Individuals and groups are included in this ideal society by strategies that, according to Premier Rann, must incorporate the whole of government and whole of community.

Without investment in inclusion – investment to reduce social dislocation and ill health, and to increase the capacity of socially

disadvantaged areas to improve their situation – our future will be economically as well as socially burdened. To shape the future we want for ourselves and our children, South Australia must create a strong and cohesive community and use its social, economic and environmental resources in a sustainable fashion. (ibid., p. 12)

Hence the government is looking to schools as social institutions to help shape the future by actively modeling the principles of social inclusion in their functioning and to promote the concept explicitly in their daily practice.

What is social inclusion?

Social inclusion, envisaged as operating to generate a strong and cohesive community, represents an ideal in which all of society is involved. This broad participation will mean that all people will have a say in determining their futures – for themselves and for the society in which they live. Social inclusion goes beyond the right to vote and elect government in a democracy – it relates to all the interconnected social institutions that are involved in social life. Hence social inclusion requires the accomplishment of social participation and social integration in those organizations and communities whereby participants might achieve power over their present and the future. Such organizations and communities would include trade unions, local communities, the professions and even the national community with its rights and associated obligations (see Room 1995). In particular, primary and secondary schools have an evident and important role, both in modelling inclusive environments and in preparing young people to take their place as participants in the broader community. For many young people schools constitute the first experience of a social organisation outside of their home. As such schools have a great responsibility in inducting young people into understandings of the broader society. It is therefore incumbent on schools to respond to this new vision of an inclusive society and to demonstrate the application of this vision in their daily processes. To be excluded from school already entails future exclusion from other societal organizations, since schools feed into so many of them. Retaining young people at school and encouraging their full participation in the life of the school are clear goals.

Empowered by such participation, citizens are enabled to live a decent life. The minimum requirements for life in an ideal society would be secure employment, good

health care, equal chances in education, relief for households in need and the assurance that all children will have a good start in life.

Social inclusion combats lack of social opportunity. Instead of providing a remedy for individual problems by increasing, for example, disposable income or implementing new resources, it aims to establish or restore social opportunity to those who have little or no sense of social cohesion. Enabling social opportunities is the key element in social inclusion. Important central opportunities in this sense would be access to employment and educational achievement (Giddens 1998). Social inclusion does not directly combat such things as poverty or racism or monoculturalism or gender inequity. In other words, social exclusion is not the same as deprivation, even being multiply deprived (Giddens 2000). A socially inclusive society would probably still contain variations in wealth, there would be ongoing issues around disability, race, ethnicity and so on. But in an inclusive society these markers of deprivation would not entail a lack of opportunity to access rights and services and the good of the whole society would depend on the shared understanding of the proper availability of these opportunities.

The terminology relating to ‘opportunity’ has been explicitly taken up by the Rann government in relation to the concept of social inclusion.

Labor’s twin pillars of opportunity and security will underpin our entire social policy agenda and our Social Inclusion initiative will be its engine room. (Labor’s Social Inclusion Initiative, p. 1)

And in particular education is seen as key to the progress of the social inclusion platform. The first plank of which will be the effort to improve retention in schools.

This (a new strategy to increase school retention rates) is a wide ranging program of actions and changed approaches to assist young people to stay at school longer and be connected to opportunities for learning, employment and active participation in the life of our state. (Making the Connection, p. 4)

Social exclusion or lack of social opportunity, whereby people feel trapped in deprivation and locked out of the chance to provide for themselves and for their

family a rewarding and secure life, is caused by a number of factors. On a broad scale, there are first of all harsh and unjust economic conditions. In a global economy such conditions can occur much faster than ever before. These are compounded by difficult social environments and their effects are made more severe when government policies do not see the need to intervene positively and effectively.

Social inclusion and primary schooling

Turning specifically to primary education, the general principles of social inclusion apply. The primary school is a social institution, access to which is essential for social cohesion. While the primary school has been long understood as the arena for basic training in socialisation – in other words it is the place where children learn to get along with one another and to behave in ways that are acceptable in school – the current emphasis on social inclusion takes this aspect of schooling further. Schooling has also the responsibility to develop student understanding of being part of a group, to belong to the group, to take pride in its achievements, to struggle with its problems and to share in its day to day activities. While many school leaders will probably want to say that is what they are already doing, this movement does represent a first in that schools are now to be increasingly recognised for playing this important role in community development. In terms of social inclusion schooling is about more than individual achievement, it requires a whole class and then a whole school approach, which leads logically into participating in the wider community.

For a long time there has been literature identifying the factors which militate against inclusion in the primary school sector: language difficulties; gender discrimination; children with disabilities; heightened emotional and behavioural problems to name a few of the more common. From the catalogue of such excluding categories it is possible to derive some of the barriers to participation in the primary school as an institution and some of the barriers to primary learning. They would include barriers imposed by the system: physical access restricting those with mobility problems; access to modern technology; special education support; teacher attitudes and prejudices; socio-economic circumstances and school fees. There are also personal barriers that are experienced within the individual student such as lack of social skills; cultural differences; competing family expectations; gender discrimination; ethnicity and family support. Clearly the school is likely to be in a position to act on some of

the systemic barriers more easily than the personal ones. However it is also important that schools and teachers are aware of background factors which impact on student readiness to learn and to take part in the school's social life.

Having recognized the barriers which work against building social inclusion, strategies can be put in place to lessen their impact or even eliminate them. Some possible strategies suggested in the literature include: involvement of the school chaplaincy; school counsellors; community agencies providing social workers and health professionals; professional development for staff; establishment of an Aboriginal and Islander Educational Officer; deployment of visiting teachers/support staff; parent/grandparent involvement in school; after-school support for students who experience problems with homework or have learning difficulties; parent education; student involvement in school decision making; new approaches to indiscipline that do not include exclusion; language programs; establishment of a preschool; early intervention programs to combat problems with literacy and numeracy.

Whatever the conditions that apply at a particular site and the strategies that are in place or adopted to reduce exclusion, the impetus of the social inclusion movement is to build strong and cohesive communities that transcend the specifics of local conditions. The adoption of strategies geared towards social inclusion will require school staff to think of new ways of organising students, new models of support, new approaches towards teaching and the curriculum. In short, there will be need for a heightened awareness that could be facilitated by astute use of staff development (Carrington & Robinson 2004).

Within this theoretical framework, which constitutes Outcome 1 as stated above, the specific survey commissioned by SAPPA was designed, intended to produce the other three Outcomes.

2

THE SURVEY INTO SOCIAL INCLUSION

*This survey is long overdue. The government must be fully acquainted with these issues and then act! **

The research process within this project was not so much geared towards the precise definition of social inclusion or how hypothetically there could be a breaking down of barriers by appropriate strategies. It was more related to the raising of consciousness of social inclusion and social exclusion, followed by the recognition of barriers to an inclusive primary school experience, in a specific time and place, and the implementation of relevant strategies to remove the barriers or lessen their impediment.

In this way the general objective of the SAPPA project as stated at the outset could best be attained.

Hence, the first phase of the project was a raising of consciousness about social inclusion both in general and relative to particular contexts. This process entailed charting the current situation of primary schools in South Australia and the extent of perceived deficits in their environments. A snapshot of South Australian primary schools was generated, against which further discussion on social inclusion and exclusion could proceed.

The second phase entailed the recognition of the specific barriers which might trigger social exclusion. In this instance the research was confronted by an earlier paradigm

that was based on performativity (see Lyotard 1979). This orientation had focused on being seen to be doing something about schooling in order to show that the planned outcomes were forthcoming. This paradigm had spawned such institutions as national testing, stress on improved literacy and numeracy, national agreements on teacher education credentials and bullying resistance. Performativity was intended to produce a skilled yet flexible workforce. It saw social exclusion and low levels of school attainment as problems, but it preferred to focus more on those students who could achieve rather than on those who, for various reasons, were unable to achieve. Rejecting this paradigm, the present research sought to identify the real barriers to inclusivity.

Having identified the need for social inclusion and the barriers to its effectiveness, the final phase of research sought strategies already in operation that could be evaluated as effective and new strategies that deserved to be implemented. A list of strategies was suggested to respondents; they resulted from discussion with the SAPPA executive and the Social Inclusion Unit and consultation with the relevant literature.

These three phases formed the framework for the present research into social inclusion. The three phases were incorporated into a questionnaire which was custom-designed for this investigation. Questions 1-14 were geared towards the snapshot of South Australian primary schools, providing information that would be used for describing the general situation in which social inclusion or social exclusion was operating.

Questions 15-21 covered the perceived barriers to social inclusion. These have been divided between 'school systemic' barriers and 'student population' barriers. Questions 22-23 dealt successively with the strategies that either were already in place in the respondent's primary school or the strategies which the respondent wished to see put in place. Finally, in questions 24 and 25, each respondent was given the chance to make a statement about social inclusion in South Australian primary schools. See Appendix 1 for full survey.

Once the survey had been administered and tabulated, a series of Focus Groups was set up: four metropolitan and two non-metropolitan (one in Mount Gambier and one in Port Augusta). Each of these was chaired by Adjunct Professor Crotty and

consisted of four to six members. The raw data from the surveys was discussed and recorded for analysis.

A Report was written on the basis of the survey and this was presented to the SAPP Executive, with recommendations, for further action.

3

THE SNAPSHOT OF SOUTH AUSTRALIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLING

*Data that is collected at systems level doesn't always tell the 'real stories' and can lead to low level initiatives and interventions. We need some more on the ground visits, observations and discussions (not in Flinders St) with decision makers.**

There were 280 responses to the questionnaire. In the case of there being several SAPPA members at any one school they were asked to combine their responses into one survey so that the number of responses is roughly equivalent to the number of schools involved. Not all respondents represented a particular school, but all were school leaders and members of SAPPA.

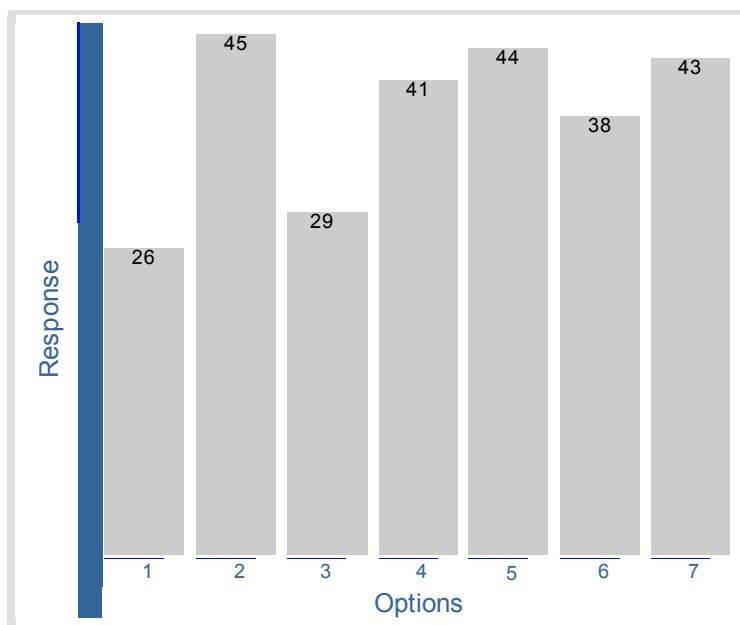
All school types were represented among the respondents to the survey (R-2, CPC-7, 3-7, R-7, Area School and Other). The numbers of respondents were more or less in proportion to the statistics available relative to primary school types in South Australia.

Primary schools in South Australia are graded according to their level of disadvantage, with category I being registered as the most disadvantaged and category 7 the least. This categorisation determines the school's access to some funding levels and can have other repercussions on the school's structure such as regarding class size, resources, personnel and so on.

The reported level of disadvantage in the survey group was as follows:

Question: What is the school's index of disadvantage?

- Option 1: Category 1
- Option 2: Category 2
- Option 3: Category 3
- Option 4: Category 4
- Option 5: Category 5
- Option 6: Category 6
- Option 7: Category 7



It was immediately clear that a significant number of responses had come from schools in the high SES areas as well as those across the social spectrum. Moreover, the level of disadvantage can be further gauged by means of the following statistics provided by the respondents relative to their schools. Note that not all respondents provided such statistics (since some presumably were not actually attached to a particular school) and not all measures of disadvantage applied to all schools.

1. One measure of perceived need is the number of Staff Support Officer hours that primary schools must purchase above their regulative entitlement. The cost of supplying these hours must be taken from the school budget.

Hours	Number of Schools
1-10	10
11-20	36
21-50	82
51-100	65
101-312	40

Around 30% of responses came from schools which routinely purchased 21 to 50 hours per week, indicating that the school leaders felt they required an extra person on board in order to manage. Forty per cent of the respondents routinely purchased more than this. Taken together these figures indicate that schools need more personnel than the standard formulas provide.

2. A second measure of perceived need is the number of Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs) that are employed by a primary school. These are employed in areas where there is a distinctive indigenous population.

Number of AEWs	Number of Schools
Up to 1	26
2	0
3	1
5	1

Thus it appears that 10% of respondents employed an Aboriginal Education Worker for some part of their weekly staff component. The two schools in which larger numbers of Aboriginal education Workers were employed were schools on the lands in the north where there is a very high proportion of indigenous students.

3. In a multicultural society there is need to support a student population where English is not the first language. Hence, the number of bilingual Support Officers indicates measures taken by the school to assist language development and communication between speakers of other languages and the English speaking mainstream, a key element of social inclusion. Note that while 20% of respondents did have bilingual support officers in their schools, many had just one of these specialists.

Number of Bilingual Support Officers	Number of Schools
1	37
2	11
3	6
4	1
5	2

4. Relative to the above statistic is the percentage of children from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) who are catered for in the South Australian primary system. The survey asked school leaders to give an indication of the proportion of students at their schools who came from non-English speaking backgrounds. The responses are listed as follows:

Percentage of NESB	Number of Schools
Less than 1%	27
1-5 %	58
6-10%	19
11-20%	31
21-50%	55
51-99%	9

While 10% of the respondents indicated that they had less than 1% of children from non-English speaking backgrounds in their school community, the next four categories account for more than one half of the schools surveyed, indicating a definite need for language support. Note too that the response from the aboriginal schools who accounted for some of the responses with the larger proportion of

their students from non-English speaking backgrounds are here once again demonstrating their particular and special needs.

5. A further measure along the NESB scale are the number of students, for whom English is not their first language and who are first generation Australian born:

Percentage of first generation	Number of Schools
Up to 1%	9
1-5%	24
6-10%	9
11-20%	9
21-30%	14
31-50%	14
51-100%	28

Here again the presence of significant numbers of children from backgrounds outside Australia indicates the fairly high number of immigrants in some areas of the state and the need for schooling and teachers to avoid making assumptions about uniformity of cultural backgrounds.

6. Lastly, still dealing with the cultural and linguistic situation in South Australian primary schools, the final measure was the percentage of indigenous students in schools:

Percentage of indigenous students	Number of Schools
Up to 1%	55
1-2%	32
2.1-4%	33
4.1-6%	23
6.1-10%	21
10.1-20%	26
More than 20%	11

NB. There were 2 at 95%, 1 at 99% and 1 at 100% – all from schools on the lands in the north of the state largely occupied by indigenous people.

This snapshot reveals that the schools surveyed included a wide range of cultural and linguistic difference – which does not necessarily reduce to disadvantage, but which does present particular problems for learning and teaching in some sites and relatedly for working towards social inclusion. This picture is entirely consistent with the depiction of Australia generally as a multicultural society, one which includes a large number of different languages, different cultures, different social microsystems. This feature needs to be taken into account when considering the perceptions of the school leaders as revealed in the rest of the survey.

One aspect of the survey needs special comment. The survey had presumed that there would be significant differences, as regards the issues relating to social inclusion, between metropolitan and non-metropolitan schools. In fact 180 schools self-identified as metropolitan, while 87 identified as non-metropolitan. Question 15 asked the non-metropolitan schools if their schools were denied experiences that were available to the metropolitan schools. Some of these experiences were named. There were numerous protests in the text responses from metropolitan schools. They maintained that in fact their schools, because of either geographical factors or because of financial constraints were notably disadvantaged. These metropolitan schools, alongside the non-metropolitan schools, took the opportunity to nominate the experiences they considered to be lacking in their schools. This skewed the results of the question which were intended to give an initial overview of the non-metropolitan situation. Out of interest, however, experiences and excursions that were nominated as out of range of possibility for outer metropolitan and country students are tabulated:

City sites (law courts/zoo/Art Gallery/Central Market)	46
Cultural events (Performing arts/music/book launches)	46
Sporting events/meeting elite sporting heroes	12
Scenic sites (beaches/rivers)	9
Camps	3
Visiting Speakers	2

These results do give an insight into what generally South Australian educators consider to be the expected experiences of the normal primary school student. Any systematic exclusion from these experiences would obviously limit their students from full participation in common educational experiences and thus constitute one

form of social exclusion. It is noteworthy that the respondents appeared very aware of this form of social exclusion and saw it as already part of the geographical limitations associated with particular school locations. It would seem that this matter requires attention.

Recommendation 1: That DECS explore the situation of outer metropolitan primary schools as regards their level of disadvantage in terms of access to educational experiences for their students.

We stress that these responses record school leaders' impressions and we are not suggesting that these students do not have alternate outlets and experiences that are unique to their particular settings. Further research is needed to illuminate these dimensions of difference and their impact on schooling.

4

PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO SOCIAL INCLUSION

*Social Inclusion is a powerful tool through which the boundaries of society can be expanded to include everyone. However its implementation is dependent on breaking down the barriers, communicating and sharing resources.**

There is much discussion in the literature on the barriers to social inclusion. The term barriers in this context refers to particular features of persons and environments that prevent full and equal participation in the whole range of school experiences. Within a discourse of disadvantage such features were seen as preventing individual fulfilment; from a social inclusion perspective these features or barriers are seen as debilitating for the whole school community in that they prevent or impede sections of that community from full and active membership and participation. Generally, from focus group discussions and survey responses, one or other barrier is proposed as central at a particular site.

The method adopted in this part of the survey was that the respondents were given the opportunity to consider a list of commonly accepted barriers. As mentioned above, these features were generated from discussion within SAPPA, the Social Inclusion Unit as well as from the academic literature. The list was as follows:

Category 1 barriers - School systemic:

- Restriction of physical access to school
- Lack of educational resources in the school
- Lack of educational facilities within the school
- 'large class size'
- Lack of special education support
- Negative teacher attitudes and prejudices
- Ineffectual curriculum
- Teacher turnover
- Restrictions on staff selection
- Lack of access to technology
- School fees
- Leadership stability

Category 2 barriers - Student population:

- Lack of social skills
- Cultural differences
- Competing family expectations
- Gender discrimination
- Mental health - emotional/psychological problems
- Behavioural difficulties
- Physical health/poor diet
- Disability
- Transience
- Family instability
- Low socio-economic status
- Religious commitment
- geographical location
- children with special needs

In Questions 17 and 18, the respondents were then asked to add any other barriers they thought appropriate to both lists. Under school system barriers the following were added. The number of respondents are added (some respondents added more than one).

Underperforming teachers/lack of cultural awareness in teachers/ ageing profile of teachers/lack of staff turnover	30
Funding formula	19
Physical layout of school/grounds	14
Home environment	14
Counselling support	11
Class size	10
Staff development	7
SSO support	7
Inadequate Curriculum	7
Teacher training/induction/mentoring	6
LOTE support	5
Mental Health provision	3
ESL support	1

These added barriers did not add significantly to those proposed in the text of the survey. Some (for example: underperforming teachers etc; physical layout of school/grounds; class size; inadequate curriculum) were already in the nominated list but with different terminology. Others (for example: counselling support, staff development, SSO support, teacher training etc; LOTE support; ESL support) were identified in the survey as strategies rather than barriers. Others again (for example: home environment; mental health provision cited) related rather to the student population barriers. ‘Funding formula’ or a similar designation was linked to the school’s capacity to buy in extra help, differences in which are revealed in the first part of the survey.

Under student population barriers the following additions were listed:

Parenting skills	29
Absenteeism	16
Parents' indifference to school/education	15
Low socio-economic status in home	13
'Class'/cultural difference	10
Domestic violence/abuse	8
Learning difficulties	8
Drugs/alcohol in home	7
Sleep deprivation	5
Bullying	5
Hearing/vision problems	2

As with the school system barriers, these did not add significantly to the list that had been nominated in the survey. 'Parenting skills' could be incorporated in 'family instability' or else seen as a strategy. Others (for example: parents' indifference to school/education; low socio-economic status in home; 'class'/cultural difference; domestic violence/abuse; drugs/alcohol in house; hearing/vision problems) were there under less specific titles. 'Absenteeism', 'sleep deprivation' and 'bullying' were good additions, although they did not feature in the final listing.

Note the distinction we are making between strategies and barriers. While the term barrier can be seen to just as easily operate within a context of disadvantage and neediness, the term strategy carries with it the notion of possible remedial action.

The respondents were asked to list in order of importance what they saw as the five main barriers to social inclusion in terms, first of all, of school systemic barriers. They were able to include any barriers which they had added to the nominated list. The lists below reflect the choice by first preference and the overall total of choices. (It should be noted in all statistics that not all respondents gave five preferences, and some preferences were too vaguely stated to be catalogued.)

By first preference

Large class size	91
Restrictions on staff selection	30
Lack of special education support	21
Restriction of physical access to school	17
Lack of educational resources in the school	14
Lack of educational facilities within the school	10
Negative teacher attitudes and prejudices	10
Teacher turnover	9
Ineffectual curriculum	4
School fees	4
Lack of access to technology	2
Leadership stability	2

When the preferences for the various barriers identified were parcelled out an overall calculation of the features that school leaders saw as operating against social inclusion in their schools were identified as follows:

Overall

Large class size	150
Restrictions on staff selection	117
Lack of special education support	91
Lack of educational resources in the school	61
Lack of educational facilities within the school	54
Negative teacher attitudes and prejudices	42
Ineffectual curriculum	42
Restriction of physical access to school	32
Lack of access to technology	27
Teacher turnover	26
School fees	19
Leadership stability	11

‘Restrictions on staff selection’ was broadened by some respondents in their text citation to include the restrictions on removal of non-performing staff and staff who were not culturally attuned to the school environment and restrictions on selection of support staff. Presumably, these respondents were those who included such additions in question 17. By error, some respondents identified school counsellors (presumably the lack thereof) as a systemic barrier. The item was not included as it would be dealt with adequately as a strategy.

The outcome of the survey as above was discussed with the six Focus Groups. There was no surprise expressed at the fact that ‘large class size’ emerged as by far the most frequently cited barrier to social inclusion. Some of the members saw ‘restrictions on staff selection’ as a related factor. On two occasions it was stated that ‘large class size’ was aggravated by the restrictions and that ‘large class size’ could be managed in a primary school if only there were appropriate staff who had been selected for their dedication to the particular situation of their school and were culturally attuned to the student population.

Lively discussion about the question of class size was raised in the Focus groups. A recent press statement had announced ‘there was no indication that reductions in class size would contribute to improved school performance’ (‘Smaller classes don’t aid students’, *The Australian* 25 Aug. 2004), a statement that was bitterly contested by Focus group participants. In Appendix 3 there is an extended commentary on the reported research, stressing that the case for smaller class size for better learning has not been discounted, written by the principal investigator in this Survey, Associate Professor Judith Gill.

Several times the issue of JP 160 schools was raised in the Focus Groups. While this is seen as an excellent initiative that has immensely improved the situation in Junior Primary schools, it was widely held that the program should be widened in scope at the Junior Primary level and must be extended into the primary school. One non-metropolitan Focus Group made the telling point that children coming from smaller classes at the Junior Primary level struggled even more than might be expected at Year 3 level when they became part of more extensive class size.

The lifting of restrictions on staff selection and the ability of principals to manage their staff performance were seen, both in the text explications and in the Focus Groups, as essential strategies in the process of promoting social inclusion in schools. One typical comment:

There is a strong connection between large class size and staff selection. It is very hard to staff schools adequately at the present moment. The 'headsets' of staff need to be changed if schools are to be run as they should be run.

The relatively high frequency of 'restriction of physical access to the school' as a first preference, which then tailed off in the overall statistics was explained in the Focus Groups. This feature refers to the difficulties felt by families in rural or outlying metropolitan areas as a result of inadequate public transport, no private car and thus no way of getting children to school when the weather is bad or when the distance is too great for walking. In the survey it was seen as a considerable and even dominating factor in some non-metropolitan schools. However it was one of the few factors that was specific to particular sites rather than being more generally spread throughout the responses as were most of the other factors..

The five top responses in terms of perceived barriers overall, namely:

- Large class size
- Restrictions on staff selection
- Lack of special education support
- Lack of educational resources in the school
- Lack of educational facilities within the school

constitute a well defined reform program for school systemic barriers. The SAPP Executive would do well to make use of this perception by school leaders that this cluster of barriers forms the principal hindrance to social inclusion in South Australian primary schools.

Recommendation 2: That the issue of large class size be addressed as a matter of priority by the maintenance of the JP-160 initiative and its extension to the entire primary school sector.

Recommendation 3: That restrictions on staff selection by primary principals be removed and principals be authorised to select and retain staff on the basis of their performance and their cultural suitability.

The respondents were next asked to name in order of importance the five main barriers to social inclusion in terms of ‘student population’. Once again they were allowed to choose from the nominated list or to include their own category.

By first preference

Lack of social skills	40
Family instability	39
Mental health – emotional/psychological problems	33
Low socio-economic status	29
Behavioural difficulties	25
Competing family expectations	22
Transience	14
Children with special needs	11
Geographical location	10
Cultural differences	10
Gender discrimination	4
Disability	3
Physical health/poor diet	2
Religious commitment	0

When the scores were collated, the following overall table was produced:

Overall

Mental health – emotional/psychological problems	137
Family instability	133
Lack of social skills	125
Behavioural difficulties	121
Low socio-economic status	95
Children with special needs	84
Competing family expectations	80
Transience	63
Physical health/poor diet	51
Geographical location	31
Cultural differences	30
Disability	20
Gender discrimination	12
Religious commitment	3

By both tabulations the same five barriers have been selected, with a considerable gap between these and the other barriers. It is interesting to note that neither gender nor religion was considered to be a barrier of any substance in a primary school setting.

The five selected barriers form a complex, and the change of order between the two tabulations would not seem to be of any consequence. The Focus Groups were asked to comment on this complex and they invariably noted that the five were interdependent although not necessarily was there a direct dependence. For example, low socio-economic status does not necessarily generate problems with mental health or family insecurity. One typically perceptive comment:

They are all interrelated. Mental health includes parents as well as children. Such things as depression, drugs, prescription drugs. The children's behaviour as a consequence becomes exceptionally violent and aggressive.

The key component was acknowledged by the Focus Groups to be family instability. When this was linked with low socio-economic status there was the potential for crisis as far as social inclusion is concerned. Thus children from unstable and/or poor families were seen to constitute an underclass in schools across the social spectrum. Identified as ‘other’ by their peers, as having special problems by their teachers they tended to be isolated from the main project of the school – learning and socialisation. At this point two Focus Groups made special mention of the fact that the barriers to social inclusion were often more likely to originate outside the school than within it. The school systemic barriers aggravated the student population barriers, which were brought into the school from the home environment. One Focus Group summed up the complex of barriers as ‘parenting’. In particular, it was pointed out that male students suffered most from ineffective parenting and this was reflected in the problems at the school level.

The level of “education” in the home before a child commences schooling is a barrier. Most of our enrolling reception students fail to register on the SEA testing, and one third of our district’s speech referrals come from our site, many to do with lack of interaction/conversation at home.

In the main it is evident that much responsibility for this complex of student population barriers lies outside the realm of the primary school system. However, SAPPA should urge the relevant Government departments to acknowledge the reality of what certain primary schools are inheriting by virtue of their location as the only institutional source of assistance for these people. While the primary school system would be willing to cooperate in any joint venture to remedy the situation, it could not feasibly be expected to undertake such a remedy of its own accord. Interaction with other agencies and community groups will be singularly important if such schools are to generate a socially inclusive school community and to operate as a stimulus for socially inclusive practice in their area in line with government expectation (see p. 1 above).

It was particularly evident from the discussion in the Focus Groups that children whose behaviour could be attributed to a mental health problem were particularly worrying. Principals did not think that, within the primary school sector, adequate

attention could be given to them and that alternative strategies would need to be devised. Likewise, it was felt that schools needed more School Services Officers to assist with difficulties that occurred. There were reports of valuable resources being used to fund SSOs over entitlement.

Recommendation 4: That the funding formula for School Support Officers (SSOs) and Special Education needs be recognised as inadequate and undergo review.

Recommendation 5: That alternative strategies be developed for those children whose extremes of behaviour render them uncontrollable in the normal school environment.

In the text replies and in the Focus Groups there was special pleading for overcoming particular barriers.

Country schools are finding that their populations are becoming more itinerant and that many of the families live in low socio-economic circumstances. Students with special needs need extra time and should not be treated the same as students in city schools. More resources need to be pumped into country schools to allow them to cater for the wide range of disabilities, eg. Autism, Asperger's syndrome, intellectual and mental health issues and physical problems. Give us a go to give them a go!

The above quotation was one of the few explicit references to 'country schools'. Most of these schools responded in ways similar to the metropolitan schools.

There is a sense in which the barriers to social inclusion identified here correspond to the previous concepts of disadvantage and many of the measures of disadvantage have been identified as barriers to social inclusion. As with the disadvantage category, the traditional response has been to seek more resources in order to remedy the problem. So too the project of social inclusion will require resourcing. There is an important difference however. Disadvantage projects looked to individual rehabilitation whereas a social inclusion perspective is directed at the whole school community and beyond. This will require a different conceptualisation of the school and its functions, one

which links to the wider community but also sees the whole school as an integrated system within the larger educational system.

5

IDENTIFYING STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION

*Social inclusion in schools needs to be re-badged as social inclusion in the community, where schools are an important and integral part of community cohesion ... More agencies could be encouraged to position themselves within the school and work with the school community especially those with a family or child focus.**

Having recognised the barriers to social inclusion in the primary school, the respondents were asked to turn their attention to strategies which could ameliorate social exclusion. A list of important strategies was devised from discussion within SAPPA, the Social Inclusion Unit and from academic literature. The list ran as follows:

- Involvement of school chaplaincy
- School counsellors
- Provision of community agencies such as social workers and health professionals
- Professional development for staff
- Establishment of Aboriginal Support personnel and programs
- Deployment of visiting teachers/support staff
- Parent/grandparent involvement in school
- After-school support for students (homework; learning difficulties)
- Parent education
- Student involvement in school decision making
- New approaches to indiscipline (not exclusion)
- Language programs
- Establishment of preschool facilities
- 'DECS support personnel' (eg guidance offices, speech therapists)
- Early intervention programs (for problems with literacy and numeracy)
- ISBMs (Interagency Student Behaviour Management)
- Learning Centres
- Access to interagency support such as FAYS, CAMHS etc

The respondents were first given the opportunity to nominate other strategies not included in the list of eighteen above. There were not many identified, but the following strategies were named in excess:

Reduction of large class size	7
Linking preschools to schools	6
Subsidy for school transport	5
Attendance strategies	4
Financial resources	3
Promotion of sport/recreation	3
Introduction of Values Education	3
Provision of breakfast	2
Curriculum initiatives	1

'Linking schools to preschools' was already present under another heading. Large class size had been already identified as a barrier; it could be included as a strategy in the sense of a policy to fund the reduction of class size. In fact, this would become a key choice in question 23. While some of the others were interesting, if perhaps too specific, they did not feature in the nominations that were actually made.

The respondents were next requested to nominate up to five strategies that were actually in place in the primary school system to redress social exclusion. They were also asked to indicate whether the nominated strategy was

- working very effectively to redress social exclusion
- working moderately effectively
- not working effectively

The results under these three headings were as follows:

Very effective strategies

School counsellors	89
Early intervention programs	63
Student involvement in school decision making	34
Professional development of staff	31
DECS support personnel	29
Parent/grandparent involvement in school	22
New approaches to indiscipline	19
ISBMs (Interagency Student Behaviour Management)	18
Involvement of school chaplaincy	16
Provision of community agencies	12
Establishment of Aboriginal Support personnel and programs	10
Decrease class size	10
Deployment of visiting teachers/support staff	6
Language programs	4
Establishment of preschool facilities	4
After school support for students	3
Access to interagency support such as FAYS, CAMHS etc	3
Learning Centres	3
Parent education	2

Moderately effective strategies

Student involvement in school decision making	70
Early intervention programs	69
Professional development of staff	63
DECS support personnel	62
Parent/grandparent involvement in school	39
ISBMs (Interagency Student Behaviour Management)	35
School counsellors	32
New approaches to indiscipline	24
Involvement of school chaplaincy	22
Parent education	19
Establishment of Aboriginal Support personnel and programs	18
Access to interagency support such as FAYS, CAMHS etc	16
Provision of community agencies	7
Deployment of visiting teachers/support staff	6
Language programs	6
Learning Centres	5
After school support for students	4
Establishment of preschool facilities	3
Establishment of special education	2
Bullying strategies	1

Not effective strategies

Access to interagency support such as FAYS, CAMHS etc	31
ISBMs (Interagency Student Behaviour Management)	14
DECS support personnel	14
Student involvement in school decision making	8
Learning Centres	7
Early intervention programs	4
School counsellors	3
Professional development of staff	3
Establishment of Aboriginal Support personnel and programs	3
Parent education	2
Provision of community agencies	2
Parent/grandparent involvement in school	2
New approaches to indiscipline	1
Deployment of visiting teachers/support staff	1
Involvement of school chaplaincy	0
Language programs	0
After school support for students	0
Establishment of preschool facilities	0

Taking the very effective and moderately effective choices together, ‘early intervention programs’ and ‘school counsellors’ are clearly seen by the school leaders as the best way to combat social exclusion and thereby promote social inclusion. It was interesting to note the recurrence of particular strategies across levels of perceived effectiveness, indicating that strategies which depend on implementation at the hands of individuals will vary due to differences in levels of ability, commitment and support. The different views on their effectiveness should not be taken as an indication that the strategy is necessarily an excellent solution, nor that it will be doomed to failure. Rather the picture confirms the commonsense realisation that there will be individual variation and a range of effectiveness in any human endeavour. The issue of counselling also gave rise to discussions about the levels of training necessary and the availability of personnel in this area.

In the Focus Groups it was remarked that school counselling is owned by the school and hence the school which has a counsellor on staff is not dependent on the cooperation of an outside agency in this instance. The Focus Groups made mention of the fact that the principal had become in many cases a de facto counsellor, often without the due training, and that the advent of counsellors had filled an existing lack. The negative side of this was also expressed – that counsellors were the first port of call for all the administration's problems and that this was the real reason for the high level of 'effectiveness'. Likewise, it could be said that the early intervention programs are owned by the individual school and can be used to advantage in the local situation.

The two non-metropolitan Focus Groups made mention of the difficulty of appointing school counsellors who had both educational and counselling backgrounds. The educational background was a pre-requisite for employment as a counsellor but a counselling credential was not. While it was not seen as an insuperable problem, the need for assistance with professional training was an issue. One solution, in the case of non-metropolitan schools, could be the possibility of arranging some counselling training through distance education facilities which already operate at several of the state Universities.

One notable anomaly in the listing was the significant presence of 'DECS support personnel' in each category. This was explained in the Focus Groups as being due to local circumstances. Sometimes the intervention of 'DECS support personnel', as a strategy, works and sometimes it does not. DECS support depended on the person and not the position or the nature of the strategy itself. Due to funding limitations, DECS support personnel tend to be more reactive than proactive. This strategy is also an initiative that is outside the control of the individual school. Depending on the problems within the school and the particular administrative structure in the area, the service rendered by DECS could be very effective, moderately effective or not effective.

In one of the metropolitan Focus Groups the following comment was made:

DECS as a Department does not understand our issues. It is weighed down with too many issues and its bureaucratic process is absolutely cumbersome.

And from another Focus Group:

DECS support personnel depends on the person. Likewise, early intervention programs depend on the situation.

As noted above, a similar comment could be made relating to other strategies that occur across the three categories, although 'DECS support personnel' was probably a unique case.

There was little surprise evinced at the poor showing of 'Access to interagency support' and 'ISBMs'. It was agreed in the Focus Groups that crisis intervention is always very difficult and these agencies are so short staffed and under-funded that it is inevitable that dissatisfaction will simmer among clients.

The related question required the respondent to speak in general about primary schools in South Australia and to nominate up to five strategies that should be put in place to further social inclusion. In fact, this was a wish list. Once more the strategies are listed by first preference and then overall.

By first preference

School counsellors	110
Reduction of class size	38
Provision of community agencies	19
Professional development of staff	11
Access to interagency support such as FAYS, CAMHS etc	11
Parent education	8
Involvement of school chaplaincy	6
Early intervention programs	6
New approaches to indiscipline	4
Establishment of preschool facilities	3
Learning Centres	3
After school support for students	3
Language programs	1
Establishment of Aboriginal Support personnel and programs	1
Student involvement in school decision making	1
‘DECS support personnel’	0
Parent/grandparent involvement in school	0
ISBMs (Interagency Student Behaviour Management)	0
Deployment of visiting teachers/support staff	0

Overall

School counsellors	148
Reduction of class size	67
Professional development of staff	63
Access to interagency support such as FAYS, CAMHS etc	59
Provision of community agencies	56
Parent education	44
Early intervention programs	41
‘DECS support personnel’	33
New approaches to indiscipline	29
Involvement of school chaplaincy	22
Student involvement in school decision making	18
After school support for students	16
Establishment of preschool facilities	14
Learning Centres	14
ISBMs (Interagency Student Behaviour Management)	9
Establishment of Aboriginal Support personnel and programs	8
Parent/grandparent involvement in school	6
Language programs	1
Deployment of visiting teachers/support staff	0

Although the reduction of class size had not been proposed as a nominated category, it was written in, as stated above, by a considerable number of respondents. However, the strategy which was overwhelmingly selected as the most useful was school counsellors. If social inclusion is to be a reality, then the strategy of school counselling must be strengthened throughout the sector. The five selected prime strategies do indeed form a neat whole. They represent a call for a more professional approach to a smaller constituency. Within the ambit of this complex, there is a conjunction of services provided from within the primary school community and from outside the primary school community.

In particular, the issue of mental health was specifically raised in the text responses and the Focus Groups. It was felt that interagency support was particularly required to combat what was considered to be an increasing problem.

Commenting on the selection of strategies, one Focus Group member made the pertinent remark:

Get the crises off the table, then we'll talk about the curriculum.

Hoping to circumvent all the crises may be an overly optimistic position to take in schools at the moment, but certainly the identification of the five key strategies does propose a plan of approach which should place the schools in a much better position to deal with them.

The following three recommendations flow directly from the identification of strategies to promote school inclusion and fit well with recommendations from the research literature around this topic.

Recommendation 6: That additional funding be provided for the extension of the school counsellor initiative to all primary schools and for appropriate training to be implemented for all counsellors.

Recommendation 7: That DECS coordinate interagency support to ensure that the issue of mental health is appropriately addressed in the primary school sector.

Recommendation 8: That measures be taken to ensure better links between DECS support personnel and the local primary school sector so that adequate and effective assistance is available when and as required.

Further evidence of the usefulness of the strategies associated with the above recommendations was supplied from discussions with the Port Augusta Focus Group. This Group introduced into their discussion an initiative that works out of the Port Augusta City Council, called the Social Vision and Action Plan. It consists of a coordinated all-of-government approach in which the primary schools are centrally involved. The executive officer maintains a website and coordinates activities among the Council, the police force, the other agencies and the schools. This strategy could

well form a model for future moves towards fostering social inclusion that involves the primary school sector.²

A final theme in the survey responses that was echoed to varying degrees in Focus Group discussions was the need for more teacher professional development in the area of social inclusion. Such an initiative should ideally be incorporated into initial teacher training and be pursued through existing professional development opportunities within the education system. This theme led to the last recommendation:

Recommendation 9: That the professional development for staff relating to Social Inclusion strategies become an immediate priority.

² Related to this initiative is another reported in the following: Howard, S. and Johnson, B. 2000, Programs for Students in Transition from Primary to High School, A Report to the NSW Department of Community Services and the NSW Department of Education and Training. Published by University of South Australia.

6

REFLECTIONS ON SOCIAL INCLUSION IN SOUTH AUSTRALIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

*Done properly Social inclusion will be one of the greatest things to happen for ALL members of our society.**

*Within the constraints of the education system as it stands we believe that schools are making a conscious and concerted effort to address social inclusion and this needs to be recognised publicly and resourced appropriately.**

The final two questions allowed the school leaders to make more general comments on social inclusion in South Australian primary schools. The first asked how, in their view, the respondents saw social inclusion working. Opinion was spread from ‘too little, too late’ to ‘patchy’. It was felt that social inclusion did work better in some areas of the State by comparison with others. It was more successful when faced with some barriers (for example, NESB) than when faced with others (for example, mental health problems). The need for more resources was frequently mentioned.

Too little money is spread too thinly to make a real impact. There is too little support and training for those children with special needs in the mainstream. Teachers are trying to meet too many varying needs.

Social inclusion is only successful because of the work that individual schools do. There is a general lack of systemic support and often a lack

of understanding of the problems experienced. There is inconsistency between different levels of government and lack of continuity particularly in relation to employment in community projects. The reduction of school counsellor time to create more positions has placed extra pressure on those schools where reductions occurred. Unfortunately, problems don't happen on a part-time basis!

There was an emphasis in the responses on the widespread goodwill among the staff working in South Australian primary schools. In general, it was stated, the staff are dedicated to social inclusion. However, their efforts are hampered in two directions: policy and resources. The principal policy that needed to be implemented, a majority of responses emphasised, was the reduction of class size. Resources called for included straight financial support for initiatives that would facilitate social inclusion as well as financial backing for the employment of more teachers, counsellors, social workers and other personnel.

The last question requested final comments from the SAPPA constituency. These comments largely concerned the fact that social inclusion and social exclusion are whole of community preoccupations. They have their roots long before schooling begins and continue well beyond schooling.

The work on inclusion needs to be undertaken with the whole community.

We need a whole of community approach. It's not just about what schools can do.

It takes a village to raise a child.

There were calls for one or other strategy to be implemented; there were impassioned pleas for something to be done quickly; there were commendations for SAPPA for having taken on this survey of school leaders' perceptions.

7

CONCLUSION

*We are pleased that Social Inclusion has been placed as a DECS priority as it must be in all of our schools if we are to cater for all students.**

*There must always be an explicit focus on social inclusion or whatever it is labelled in the future.**

As education researchers we were impressed by the readiness of this community of South Australian school leaders to take time to offer thoughtful responses to the survey. Some of these people also gave their time to participate in the focus group discussions in which several of the survey findings were developed in greater depth. On the basis of this response we feel confident in finding that the issue of social inclusion is being taken up by the SA primary school leadership with a good deal of interest, a generosity of time and spirit and willingness to engage with the hard intellectual and practical work of working out what the concept means for their particular locations. These are indeed encouraging signs.

The primary schools represented in this study varied along a range of critical dimensions, size, location, level of resources, distance from urban centres and so on. What was perhaps most remarkable was the unanimity of responses on aspects of social inclusion. By and large the respondents agreed on particular features of the current schooling arrangement that worked against social inclusion and they also agreed on some key strategies that they believed would work to promote social

inclusion. The latter have been clearly identified in the recommendations we have made to the SAPPA commissioning body.

In general, the tone of the last two responses to the survey, and echoed in the Focus Groups, was that schools and staff in primary schools in South Australia could not be expected to do everything relative to the social inclusion of the children in their care. Social exclusion is a problem that exists within the wider society, it has its ultimate roots there, and it will require collaboration between government departments and interagency support together with the primary school constituency for any realistic move to eradicate it.

At the same time a message appears from the responses of the school leaders listed here regarding their experience of working within a particular site. School leaders were unanimous in their desire to promote the principles of inclusivity in their schools and wider communities. Their vision extended beyond the physical boundaries of their schools and specifically sought to include interagency support as well as support from other schools.

The Focus Group work allowed and encouraged school leaders to talk across sites, not in terms of competing for more resources as had sometimes been the case in the claiming of 'disadvantaged' status. Here there was a real sense of school leaders relishing the opportunity to discuss whole school issues, to share insights and to develop new strategies for their site as part of a larger community of schools and educational leaders.

In closing it seems that our analysis indicates the need to press for greater levels of social inclusion *within* schools and also *between* schools in terms of a more inclusive state educational system. In this approach problems are less likely to be seen as inevitable properties of a particular area but rather as part of a system-wide concern. Social inclusion then should be ideally modelled and practised within schools and between schools as the whole system strives to promote the common good of the society as a whole.

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APPENDIX 1

THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Preview survey – Social Inclusion Project: SOUTH AUSTRALIAN PRIMARY PRINCIPALS ASSOCIATION

The security for respondents is set to **Open access**
The survey is available from **Monday, 31 May 2004** to **Wednesday, 15 December 2004**.

You can click the **View** button below to view the actual survey display to the respondent.

In responding to the challenges of social inclusion, schools need sensitive educational leadership and a keen awareness of the issues involved. This research project is designed to promote awareness of this important area and to share knowledge about socially inclusive strategies in our schools. The first task is to profile SA primary schools in terms of the range of activities currently operating in schools around social inclusion. We begin with this survey which will be sent to all SAPPA members in schools. We want **ONE RESPONSE PER SCHOOL** (if co-located some sites will need to put in two responses), and so we encourage SAPPA members to cooperate in the response. All responses are confidential to the project and neither you nor your school will be identified in any publications coming out of the project.

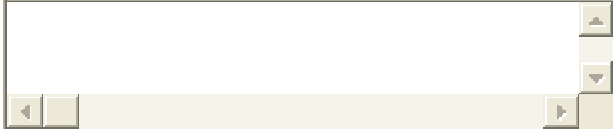
1. What is the school postcode ?

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)

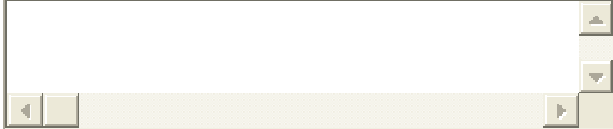
2. What is the School 'type'?

- R-2
- CPC-7
- 3-7
- R-7
- Area school
- Other

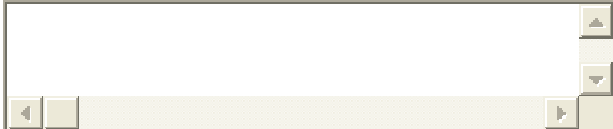
3. How many students at your school currently?

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)


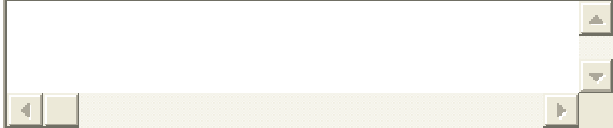
4. How many full time equivalent teaching staff?

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)


5. How many SSO hours are you entitled to?

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)


6. How many are purchased over entitlement?

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)


7. How many AEWs (Aboriginal Education Workers)

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)

8. How many Bilingual School Support Officers?

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)

9. What is the school's index of disadvantage?

- Category 1
- Category 2
- Category 3
- Category 4
- Category 5
- Category 6
- Category 7

10. Estimate the % of children from non-English speaking backgrounds ?

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)

11. Of these estimate how many are first generation Australian born?

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)

12. What % of your students are indigenous?

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)

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13. How many different language backgrounds are represented in your current student enrolment?

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)

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14. In the staffing process is the school recognised as metropolitan or non-metropolitan?

- metropolitan
- non-metropolitan

15. If non-metropolitan, do you feel there are things your students miss out on, such as trips to the museum, zoo, public library etc? Could you please list these.

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)

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16. Is there anything else about your school that we should know in terms of these general demographic features ?

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)

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17. Social exclusion can be triggered by a number of barriers which hinder children from full participation in the primary school community. We have listed below some of the more significant barriers, under two category headings, identified from discussion within SAPPA, the Social Inclusion Unit, as well as from academic literature.

Category 1 barriers - School systemic:

- Restriction of physical access to school
- Lack of educational resources in the school
- Lack of educational facilities within the school
- Large class size
- Lack of special education support
- Negative teacher attitudes and prejudices
- Ineffectual curriculum
- Teacher turnover
- Restrictions on staff selection
- Lack of access to technology
- School fees
- Leadership stability

Can you identify any other School systemic barriers overlooked above?

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)

18. Category 2 barriers - Student population:

- Lack of social skills
- Cultural differences
- Competing family expectations
- Gender discrimination
- Mental health - emotional/psychological problems
- Behavioral difficulties
- Physical health/poor diet
- Disability
- Transience
- Family instability
- Low socio-economic status
- Religious commitment
- geographical location
- children with special needs

Can you identify any other Student population barriers overlooked above?

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)

19. Speaking for your own primary school, name in order of importance the **five main barriers to social inclusion in terms of 'school systemic' barriers**. (You may of course include any that you have suggested yourself in your response to question 17)

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)

20. Speaking for your own primary school, name in order of importance the **five main barriers to social inclusion in terms of the 'student population'**. (You may of course include any that you have suggested yourself in your response to question 18)

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)

21. Having identified barriers to social inclusion, it is important to nominate strategies that would minimize or remove the impediments to social inclusion.

We have listed below some of the more important strategies, identified from discussion within SAPPA, the Social Inclusion Unit, as well as from academic literature.

- Involvement of school chaplaincy
- School counsellors
- Provision of community agencies such as social workers and health professionals
- Professional development for staff
- Establishment of Aboriginal Support personnel and programs
- Deployment of visiting teachers/support staff
- Parent/grandparent involvement in school
- After-school support for students (homework; learning difficulties)
- Parent education
- Student involvement in school decision making
- New approaches to indiscipline (not exclusion)
- Language programs
- Establishment of preschool facilities
- DECS support personnel(eg guidance offices, speech therapists)
- Early intervention programs (for problems with literacy and numeracy)
- ISBMs (Interagency Student Behaviour Management)
- Learning Centres
- Access to interagency support such as FAYS, CAMHS etc

Can you identify any others overlooked above?

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)

22. Speaking for your school, **nominate up to five strategies that are actually in place** to redress social exclusion in order of importance. After each one, indicate whether it is:

- working very effectively to redress social exclusion (VE)
- working moderately effectively (ME)
- not working effectively (NE)

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)

23. Speaking in general about primary schools in South Australia, **nominate up to five strategies** in order of importance that you would want to see in place to further social inclusion in primary schools:

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)

24. Please give your opinion on the way social inclusion works in South Australian primary schools

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)

25. Have you any other comment you would like to make about social inclusions in schools?

- (Enter text into this box, maximum 2000 characters)

Thank you for your time and cooperation. We will be in touch soon with the results. When we have collated the survey results we will be conducting some focus group interviews with school leaders and some school and classroom observations in order to develop the picture more fully.

Judith Gill PhD
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University of South Australia

Robert Crotty PhD
Adjunct Professor
University of South Australia

APPENDIX 2

LIST OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Focus Group 1 (Metropolitan)

Leah Kennewell	Reynella East Schools
Chris Turrell	Wasleys Primary School
Chris Leaver	Hampstead Primary School
Sharon Broadbent	Northfield Primary School
Graeme Charlton	Kilburn Primary School

Focus Group 2 (Metropolitan)

Chris Bayly	Port Adelaide Primary School
Angela Puhle	Flaxmill Primary School
Owen Secombe	Morphett Vale West Primary School
Garry Garnaut	Beafield Education Centre
David Chadwick	Clovelly Park Primary School

Focus Group 3 (Metropolitan)

Tony Osborne	Hendon Primary School
Phil Reid	Reynella South Primary School
Jan Webber	Munno Para Primary School

Focus Group 4 (Metropolitan)

Therese Dunlop	Noarlunga Downs Primary School
Steve Portlock	Greenwith Primary School
Judith Francis	Vale Park Primary School
Sue Mittiga	Swallowcliffe Primary School
Kay Head	Mansfield Park Primary School
Rod Sutherland	Clapham Primary School

Focus Group 5 (Mount Gambier)

Susan Copeland,	Tarpeena Primary School
Janine Milsop	Yahl Primary School
Barbara Munt	Reidy Park Primary School
John Cain	Mount Gambier North Primary School
John McCade	Melaleuca Park Schools

Focus Group 6 (Port Augusta)

Jocelyn Osborne	Augusta Park Primary School
Judy Woolcock	Stirling North Primary School
Sallyann Geddes	Carlton R-9 School
John Sutton	Flinders View Primary School

APPENDIX 3

CLASS SIZE

The effects of class size

The recent Melbourne-based conference *Making Schools Better* was widely reported in *The Australian* (the newspaper was a sponsor of the conference). In particular one article in the *The Australian* carried the banner ‘Smaller classes don’t aid students’ (*The Australian*, 25 Aug. 2004) in which Jennifer Buckingham, the Schools Editor, reported on a paper presented by a team from the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic Research. The article amplified the claim in its title, purporting to quote from the report to the effect that there was no indication that reductions in class size would contribute to improved school performance. On closer inspection the reported study hardly warrants this broad claim and questions need to be raised as to the adequacy of the evidence to sustain such a conclusion.

Firstly the research reported in the paper entitled *Multivariate Analysis of Performance of Victorian Schools* by David Johnson, Ben Jensen, Simon Feeny and Ben Methakullawat, falls within the economic rationalist paradigm in which education reduces to quantifiable benefits for the individual and for the society in terms of increased productivity and related salary gains. While such an orientation appears logical in a certain sense, it is couched within an economic mode of analysis which is decidedly different from an educational one. At the same time it must be noted that the authors are conscious of the potential limitations of their approach as they write:

the issue of quality of schooling has been little understood and is often quite difficult to evaluate (p. 6)

Later they note:

In the education sector it is difficult to quantify efficiency and productivity' and 'Schools provide a range of outputs (sic) which include measurable things such as numeracy, literacy and VCE scores but also less measurable things such as life-skills training, a sense of community and the basis for a civilised and caring society. (p. 10)

Despite these caveats, they proceed to detail an analysis based on student scores on a range of achievement tests (AIM similar to SA's BST) taken at years 3 and 5, which would appear to suggest the authors rate these measurable outputs as more important than those others they acknowledge as emerging from education.

In order to conduct the study, the team used the data available from Education Department sources, data they acknowledge was not always complete and nor as detailed as perhaps they would have wished. However they did accumulate test scores from over 1200 primary schools in terms of student scores at years 3 and 5 on tests in reading, writing, numeracy, spelling and mathematics. These results were analysed against a range of school factors which included enrolment numbers, class size and budget and a range of Special Learning Needs (SLN) constructed to provide indicators of socio-demographic background of the schools.

The report notes early on that the research on the effects of class size is inconsistent and they clearly would like to have something firmer to say on the question. But the data provided here on class size was simply in terms of averages for schools; it does not identify variation within schools apart from the distinction between primary and early years. The writers are aware of the limitation of this aspect of their study as they note:

The current dataset from the Department of Education and Training restricts our empirical model to include only the average class sizes as our component of school inputs. (p. 20)

While the class size in Victorian metropolitan schools appeared set to average at around 24 for Primary and 23 for early years with relatively small standard deviations (2-3), the class sizes in non-metropolitan schools averaged around 20 with larger standard deviations (4). Correlational analysis is used to demonstrate a suggestion that the main obstacle to lower class size is funding – a rather unsurprising conclusion!

More potentially interesting is the analysis of performance against the variables identified above, as this constitutes the core of the report. In this part of the study the researchers applied regression analysis to their raw data in order to gauge the degree to which the variables they had selected were implicated in the measured outcomes (test scores). However on this score the results are rather disappointing insofar as the study fails to find significance in many of the variables it has identified as drivers of school and student performance. They repeat the lack of evidence with respect to class size several times:

... on almost all tests class size was rarely important. (p. 27)

and later:

First we have been unable to find any evidence that class size is an important determinant of academic performance in primary or secondary schools (p. 33)

Note that the statement above is peculiarly accurate – that this study has failed to find evidence does not amount to saying there is no evidence or that these variables are definitely unrelated. In fact the writers adopt a faintly apologetic note in their discussion of the results

This analysis should be viewed as only estimating the effect of characteristics in the available data on school performance (p. 33)

thereby showing a proper degree of caution about interpretations. It is always disappointing when your work fails to produce the desired results. One technique that is fairly common in this event is to attempt to build a case upon what has not been shown – a strategy that these writers commend in the earlier section on p.23 when they warn of:

a mistake often made in statistical analyses is to ignore variables that do not appear to be significant.

However this feature does not indicate that you can claim significance when you haven't been able to demonstrate it!

It is therefore rather disappointing to see that the conclusions are based on what has not been shown:

... perhaps the most compelling finding is what has not emerged. So far there has been little evidence to support the view that further reductions in class size are likely to lead to much improved school performance. (p. 34)

This line was picked up and amplified in the report in *The Australian*. In fact in this study they have not investigated whether lowering class size has an effect on performance. What they have done is to show little effect between the levels of achievement in a narrow range of tests and class size in a very narrow range of averaged class numbers. This is an entirely unsurprising result. By using average class sizes they have forced the conclusion that class sizes are not important when in fact all they can justifiably say is that they didn't find an effect within the narrow range of measures they had available.

Much of the earlier research on class size has shown that research in this area needs to be sensitive to a range of factors associated with school location and population composition. One of the more robust conclusions to emerge has been that there are various ceilings around which little difference emerges. Where you do get significant difference is when you compare students in groups of say 30 with those in groups of say 15, but you are unlikely to get these gross differences between 20 and 22 which was the range tested in the study reported here. In fact the use of averages in this study effectively washed out differences that could have emerged had the authors access to the specifics of variations in class sizes and student results in the schools they studied.

The other major limitation of this study concerns its limited terms of reference. Student performance on these tests is not the only basis on which to produce

education policy around class sizes. Issues of student age range, of inclusivity, of teacher effectiveness and many others impact on ideal class numbers. School leaders have to make decisions on the basis of these and other important variables such as staffing budgets and total school enrolments as well as working for the best possible student outcomes on basic skills and a host of other important schooled products, thereby contributing to the national goal of ‘each citizen having the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life in an educated, just and open society’ (Adelaide Declaration 1999).

The claims to emerge from this study should be treated with extreme caution. Not so long ago in this country one of the widely accepted claims in favour of non-government schooling was that such schools had smaller classes and thus students were likely to get more individual attention and better teaching. This difference has vastly diminished and currently there are many non-government schools with larger classes than those in the public schools. Could it be that the idea that class size is no longer important is consistent with a political agenda that seeks to privatise Australian education and minimise spending on public schooling?

References

Adelaide Declaration 1999, Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century. Available at:

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