A cross-sector partnership to produce professional learning materials for DSE 2005

MSSD Output 6: Training for *Disability Standards for Education 2005*

Catholic and Independent Sectors Queensland
A cross-sector partnership to produce professional learning materials for DSE 2005

Abstract

Catholic and Independent authorities in Queensland are collaborating on the provision of professional learning to improve school staff understanding of their obligations under the Disability Standards for Education 2005. More Support for Students with Disabilities (MSSD) have supported a set of seminars conducted by an expert external consultant organised by Independent Schools Queensland and operated in Catholic facilities in key regional centres. The key messages from these seminars were then built upon and contextualised for schools in a set of multimedia professional learning materials being developed by Brisbane Catholic Education Diocesan Office. These materials have been made available on their intranet website for the professional learning of a diverse range of staff, with a view to stimulating enhanced school practices and improved outcomes for students and parents.

Key elements and actions

Professional learning seminars

Catholic and Independent authorities decided to collaborate in their use of MSSD funds to meet their respective needs. A consultant from the School of Law at Queensland University of Technology (QUT), was contracted to provide on-going external expertise, based on her extensive teaching and research experience on the provisions of anti-discrimination legislation and regulations focused on student disability.

The consultant conducted a seminar for Catholic and Independent school staff in Brisbane in July 2012 and was video recorded. A number of regional seminars followed in five coastal centres: Bundaberg, Mackay, Rockhampton, Townsville and Cairns.

The following table sets out the format followed at each seminar:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Focal points</th>
<th>Key issues addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1 Principals and School Executive</td>
<td>Overview of the Disability Standards for Education 2005 and legal implications for schools</td>
<td>How disability discrimination law works in Australia; Reasonable adjustment informed by decided cases.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 2 Heads of Department and Teachers</td>
<td>Examination of the ramifications of current assessment practices under the Disability Standards for Education 2005</td>
<td>Reasonable adjustment in assessment; Assessment controversies.</td>
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<td>Session 3 Enrolment Officers &amp; staff working with students with</td>
<td>Examination of direct and indirect discrimination, the rights of students with known and unknown disabilities</td>
<td>Limits of reasonable adjustment; Ramifications of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>Focal points</td>
<td>Key issues addressed</td>
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<tr>
<td>disabilities</td>
<td>concerning enrolment, implications arising from school policies and procedures</td>
<td>enrolment standards and protocols; Issues of cost.</td>
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**Professional learning materials**

Negotiations with QUT began in May 2012 for the development of a set of multimedia professional learning materials to address the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* based on the foundation of these key seminar messages. The main actions in the development and implementation of the professional learning strategy were as follows:

- develop a contemporary professional learning package for use across all BCE schools and offices with the support of expert external consultant
- plan for the package to be accessed by all existing staff members over the period 2012-2014
- embed the package into the BCE iLearn staff learning management system with the capacity to audit exposure by staff
- gain endorsement for the BCE Leadership Team for the package to form part of the induction process for all staff
- make the professional learning package available to other Queensland Catholic Education authorities and to independent schools in Queensland through Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ)
- provide opportunities for Catholic schools across Queensland to engage in shared access to face-to-face professional learning delivered by the external consultant as organised by ISQ
- update the package as required in light of results of action which flows from the Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005.

**Outputs and outcomes**

Six seminars to address the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* were conducted across the State in Semester 2, 2012, involving over a hundred schools and many hundreds of school principals, teachers and other staff.

The BCE Office has produced a series of six short DVDs designed for flexible uses in school contexts, each with a specific focus relating the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*:

1. Overview of the Disability Standards for Education.
2. Enrolment issues including topics such as consultation and communication.
3. Participation, physical setting of the school and use of technology.
4. Accessing the curriculum.
5. Support services.
6. Harassment and victimisation.
Some supplementary on-line and hard copy resources for use with group delivery or personal reflection are also available for each topic area. The DVDs were transferred onto the iLearn staff learning management intranet site for use by BCE staff anywhere anytime. Initially, a limited number of high quality DVDs were also made available through BCE School Services for group training sessions, and via QCEC, to ISQ to other schools in Queensland. Other sectors have expressed interest in adapting some of the content to suit their contexts.

A visit was organised to one of the schools involved in the developmental trial of the material to identify any issues associated with implementation. The school is an older Catholic primary with limited experience of students with disability.

Staff agreed that the pilot DVDs were “most helpful and viewer-friendly, while imparting important and vital messages”. The Principal considered that “office staff should also view these DVDs” and that all staff members should be given an outline of a response to give a parent who enquires about enrolling a child who has special needs. It is therefore not surprising that it is compulsory for all current staff at the school to view the package of disability awareness materials and to put into practice its inclusive intentions.

According to the principal, the pathway towards greater inclusivity at the school began with action to eradicate bullying and victimisation, which the School Behaviour Support Plan (SBSP) describes as “unacceptable behaviour that conflicts with the values of the school as expressed in the mission statement.” Clear and specific responsibilities are listed for the principal, staff, children and parents to directly confront the different manifestations of bullying and victimisation outlined in the SBSP document.

The SBSP document also lists the key strategies to be used for the 2-5% of individual students, (including those with verified disability), who “may require specialised services and alternative pathways of care”. These strategies may include the formation of Individual Education Plans, Education Adjustment Plans and/or an Individual Behaviour Plan based on functional behaviour assessment. These students may also require support form specialist staff such as the Support Teacher Inclusive Education and Guidance Counsellor, and be the subject of meetings with outside agencies and other professional personnel who have a vested interest in the student’s welfare. The school appears to be emphasising inclusive education as a key goal for its journey towards increased staff professionalism, greater use of coaching, mentoring and video classroom records to develop shared practices, and enhanced transparency in providing feedback between staff members.

The availability of the BCE Disability Awareness PD materials provided an impetus for broad-based changes to both school practices and communication patterns with potential and existing parents at the school. The materials provide much needed support for staff as they work towards inclusive reforms.

**Lessons learned**

**Key observations**

The work generated for Output 6 is an important initiative for four main reasons:

1. It makes use of professional expertise to address some key educational and legal concerns that can act as blockages to schools making more effective provisions for students with disabilities.
2. The seminar opportunities are being built upon via the production of professional learning materials that can be used in variety of ways in schools with a diverse range of staff.

3. These materials may be built into induction procedures for new staff and the professional learning of existing staff in many Queensland Catholic schools, thereby providing a stronger base for future school provisions for student with disabilities.

4. The initiative is a very good example of how collaboration across (Catholic and Independent) sectors can make more effective and efficient use of resources to meet a high-priority need.

**Sustainability**

All professional learning materials have a shelf life but in this case there are indications that these materials will be relevant for longer than usual. They have been developed according to a clear professional learning strategy to address high-priority school needs. The BCE is committed to ensuring that the materials are updated to address any legal or regulatory changes that emerge. Evidence from the school context strongly suggests that a broad base of school staff – administrators, specialists, classroom teachers and BCE personnel – all welcome the information provided in the materials. It is regarded as being both important and practical, as directly addressing the concerns and fears of school staff grappling with complex issues to better meet individual student needs.

**Potential for adoption in other contexts**

The design features of the professional learning materials make it likely that they will be used by increasing numbers of schools and their staff. If they effectively address school concerns then more jurisdictions will want to negotiate with the BCE to take them up and use them in their schools in their own ways. BCE has indicated that, in addition to Independent schools in Queensland, they have received considerable interest in the materials from schools located elsewhere across Australia and even from international jurisdictions. These are early indications of considerable interest in adoption in other contexts.

**Background**

**MSSD Output**

Output 6: Providing training for all school staff to improve understanding of their obligations under the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* and how to meet those obligations.

BCE staff involved in implementing the MSSD Initiative are focusing their efforts on three MSSD Outputs in addition to Output 6: Output 4 - Health/allied health professionals; Output 8 - Adapt the teaching curriculum to suit current level of ability and report on student progress against adapted curriculum; and Output 12 - Transitions between stages of schooling and/or from school into further education, training or employment.

**Case study methodology**

The focus for this case study is the staff of Queensland Catholic and Independent schools participating in relevant professional learning activities. The methodologies to be used over the life of the case study are as follows:
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 1: Staff of Queensland Catholic and Independent schools attend a seminar on understanding their obligations under the Disability Standards for Education 2005 held in Brisbane or in one of five regional centres over August – November 2012.</td>
<td>Attend a seminar conducted in Bundaberg on 7 September 2012; Identify levels of current understanding by some staff in selected schools; Analyse seminar PPT materials for key professional learning messages.</td>
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<td>Phase 2: Staff from Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) design and produce a set of multimedia professional learning materials based around extracts from the seminar presentation.</td>
<td>Contact BCE Office manager with key questions regarding the design of the professional learning package; Identify rationale, key learning intents and elements, potential uses and issues.</td>
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<td>Phase 3: The professional learning materials are made available to Catholic schools.</td>
<td>Review availability and intended uses of the materials by schools.</td>
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<td>Phase 4: Evidence of improved understanding by Catholic and Independent school staff in Queensland of their obligations under the Disability Standards for Education 2005 and how to meet those obligations.</td>
<td>Interview range of staff in a Queensland Catholic school to identify some key professional learnings and improved practices.</td>
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The initial site visits were completed in October and November 2012 and followed up in November 2013.

**Description of activity**

Surveys of school needs conducted by both Catholic and Independent authorities in Queensland clearly indicated staff felt a strong need to have a better understanding of the provisions of the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*. In response to this the authorities collaborated to focus on legal and professional obligations arising from the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* in school practices.

The largest schooling authority involved in these discussions was the Brisbane Catholic Education Diocesan Office (BCE). In 2012 the BCE was responsible for 160 primary, secondary and P-12 schools and colleges located between the Queensland and NSW coastal border, west to Gatton and north to Childers and Gayndah. Approximately 67,000 students were enrolled and supported by over 10,000 full-time and part-time teachers and support staff. Six BCE Officers support the schools and colleges with policy, strategic directions, resourcing and professional support, as well as direct services relating to accessing and participating in the curriculum.

In 2012 there were approximately 2,500 full-time equivalent students enrolled in BCE schools and colleges who meet the criteria as students with disabilities under the *Education Adjustment Program* in Queensland. The number of students with disabilities under the above criteria within BCE schools has increased annually by approximately 8 per cent over recent years, and they currently comprise an average of almost 4 per cent of the total student population.