Inclusion in early childhood education and care: A literature review of best practice

Review undertaken for the Department of Education, Skills and Employment

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Overview

This review was undertaken to identify from a literature review elements of best practice for inclusion in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Australia. While it has identified a large number of documents which address the subject of inclusion, it has found many limitations in the literature, with significant gaps, and only a relatively light coverage of inclusion in ECEC, as opposed to schools. Practice in the literature is also variable, and is exacerbated by the extent to which much research is small scale and context-specific (especially with regard to children with particular forms of need), but these findings are generalised well beyond this. Sitting over this are fundamental differences in approaches to inclusion.

In considering the question of best practice this review has adopted three lenses: practice and pedagogy; the legal framework; and financing. Discussion of these is preceded with a discussion of the definition of inclusion and of the changes in the role of ECEC and the scope of inclusion. The report's final chapter presents an overview of some of the other literature reviews and meta-analyses undertaken in the field.

The key findings of the review, reflected in the conclusions of the main chapters, follow:

Defining Inclusion

While there is a strong commitment to the concept of inclusion, the grounds of this commitment, and what is perceived as being 'inclusion', varies. In particular there is a very strong divide between those who pursue it from a rights based perspective, and those who see it in its instrumental role in improving outcomes.

'Best practice' requires taking a normative position on this question. In terms of government ECEC policy there is a need for this to be undertaken with full awareness of the competing approaches, recognising that while in large part many activities and strategies are common to both, there are equally areas of wide divergence.

Two of particular note are:

- The role of evidence based policy. This has quite different interpretations under approaches which are primarily concerned with what outcomes are achieved, relative to those which focus on evidence of compliance of processes and behaviours with a set of principles.
- The issue of identification of individuals and of their differences/needs. This is discussed in subsequent sections, but relates to the extent to which seeking to identify children, whether for funding decisions, program targeting, or for evaluation and research, results in labelling and a focus on diagnosis, and disability or deficits, which in itself is creating difference and exclusion.

Evolving roles and focus

There are two strong emergent themes from analysis of developments in the role of ECEC and the concept of inclusion which have specific impact on understanding and policy making in the ECEC sector, in particular with respect to inclusion.

- The transition of a focus on ECEC as being primarily concerned with enabling the workforce participation of parents, to a recognition of it playing an important role in child development and in education. Within this particular element is the potential role and effectiveness of early intervention, and hence the question of ensuring participation by those who face disadvantage.
- A transition of inclusion from a heritage with a focus on special needs associated with disability, to special needs relating to child development, education, and social integration –at the individual and societal level.

While in both cases best practice can be defined as being associated with the 'transition to' goals, it needs though to be informed by the history of its development, and by awareness of the values associated with these destinations.

Practices and pedagogy

The literature, while abounding with strategies and approaches, is somewhat weaker when it comes to substantive evidence on best practice. A number of researchers and others have sought to derive, from their understanding, lists of what they see as effective strategies. These provide a useful resource, and while they can by synthesised in a number of ways, it is considered that there are six important domains that emerge:

- Promoting access – for policies of inclusion to be successful strategies to promote and facilitate access are critical.
- Staff competencies and professional development (PD) – It is recognised that staff competencies (underpinned by sufficient resourcing) are critical to quality ECEC and inclusion in this. While there is much unknown about these, and how they are developed, PD appears to be important, in particular involving peer support.
- Partnerships with families – inclusion of children in ECEC services is not sufficient, rather there is a need for the inclusion of families, both directly, and as partners in children's development.
- External collaboration and partnerships – for many children who are vulnerable to exclusion ECEC cannot fulfil all the roles required to address the child's needs. There is a need for collaboration and partnership with those who provide these services.
- A child centred approach – which focuses on abilities, recognises agency, and sets expectations.
- Effective monitoring and evaluation – this has many dimensions – knowing who is being included and who is not, understanding the extent to which children are achieving progress, and evaluating what works and what does not.

Legal framework

The literature would suggest, on balance, that there is a strong case for robust legal underpinning to inclusion. At the same time care needs to be given to the way in which this is enforced. Specifically systems which appear to rely heavily upon individual parents to seek enforcement through appeal rights and similar mechanisms, not only involve a heavy operational burden, but appear to favour those in the community who can pursue such processes. In this regard some external monitoring and enforcement, underpinned by clear and authoritative communication of the underlying legislative responsibilities upon providers, appears to be an alternative strategy. Within the

Australian framework the exclusion of child care services from the Disability Standards for Education appears to be an anomaly.

At the same time the literature suggests that to be truly effective these mechanisms also need to be underpinned by actions and processes to increase the commitment of those involved in provision to the principles of inclusion. Much of the literature points to a critical role for the attitudes of educators and providers.

A second major limitation of the legislative pathway to access, is the role of expulsions and suspensions. Clear policies and strong practical support appear to be important mechanisms. As well as playing a central role around enhancing commitment to inclusion, PD makes a large contribution to both strengthening the capacity of educators to deal with difficult behaviours, and understand, and manage the processes of escalation of issues which often lead to suspension. Understanding trauma may be significant in this. There may also be, in this process, a need to more clearly articulate the intersections of different legal responsibilities, including those with respect to Occupational Health and Safety.

Underlying these processes is a need for improved information – on problems of access, and on the incidence and circumstances of expulsions and suspensions. This information is critical to both monitor the extent to which participation in ECEC may be constrained, and for the development of practical responses. From an inclusion perspective it is essential that this data also provide information on child characteristics, including whether they are vulnerable or have additional needs.

Financing of Inclusion

Three key themes can be drawn from the literature on the financing of inclusion:

- Literature on the financing of inclusion in ECEC is sparse. While some insights can be derived from the education literature, this has some limitations and does not address the substantial care role ECEC services. Additionally it is noted that most ECEC services do not have the scale of educational institutions, and their organisational structures tend to be simpler.
- While there is debate on the best funding approaches, it would appear that the input model has particular merit for consideration.
  - A key consideration here concerns the uneven distribution of children with additional needs across services (and across locations), and the small size of services which means they can be disproportionately impacted by even a small number of children with special needs.
  - However more generally there appears to be agreement that there is no single best way in which to provide resources for inclusion, but rather each has some disadvantages.
- Where additional funds are provided, the balance of studies suggested that best practice is leaving the decision making on application of these resources to the service. It is noted however that parental expectations around this need to be addressed.

Overarching lessons from the literature

In considering the above, the limitations of the evidence base must be considered. A strong recurrent theme across the literature is what is not known, and the need to invest to understand

what works and does not work, and in having data collections and other information that can inform an understanding of the actual state of inclusion.

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Glossary

AASE	Australian Association of Special Education
ACECQA	Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority
ACIE	Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AHDN	Additional Health and Developmental Needs
AIM	Access and Inclusion Model
ARACY	Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorders
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CBDC	Centre Based Day Care
CHCs	Chronic Health Conditions
CNC	Cross National Classification
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CoP	Code of Practice
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CRPD	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability
DESE	Department of Education, Skills and Employment
DHHS	Department of Health and Human Services (US)
DPC	Dispute resolution due process
EBP	Evidence Based Practice
EC	Early Childhood
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECE	Early Care and Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECMHC	Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation
ECPD	Early Childhood Development Program
EHCP	Educational Health and Care Plan
EI	Early Intervention
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs
EU	European Union
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act
IE	Inclusive Education
IECE	Inclusive Early Childhood Education
KISS	Kindergarten Inclusion Support Scheme
LEA	Local Education Agency
LEAP	Learning Experiences- An Alternative Program for Preschoolers and Parents
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
LSA	Learning Support Assistants
NHES ECPP	National Household Education Survey – Early Childhood Program Participation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PBIS	Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports
PD	Professional Development
PD	Professional Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment.
PSD	Program for Students with Disabilities
QKFS	Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme

RTI	Response to Intervention
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Index for Australia
SEN	Special Education Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SRS	School Resource Standard
SWD	Students with Disability
SWSEN	Students with Special Education Needs
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization;

1 Introduction and Background

This paper presents a literature review on aspects of inclusive child care. While an initial ambition for the project was to seek to identify a small key set of literature which would provide a guide to best practice, this has not been possible.

Rather the literature reviewed here suggests that there are many core aspects of inclusion which are highly contested, and considerable debate on many aspects of practice, and indeed whether what some see as best practice is in fact in conflict with principles of inclusion. Central to this are strongly divergent views on the conceptual approach to inclusion. These are explored further in discussion but in large part reflect two alternative approaches. These can be characterised as:[1]

- Seeing inclusion from a human rights perspective, with best practice effectively being those practices which best embody this perspective.
- An outcome focus which sees best practice as being that which achieves the maximum beneficial outcomes for children in early childhood education and care.

As such the first approach focuses on the processes and the extent to which these align with the moral objectives of this rights based approach, while the second is more concerned with the extent to which specific policies and programs make a contribution towards improving outcomes, with these being framed in the context of the goals of the education and related systems.

While the second approach places emphasis on evidence based policy, and the scientific measurement of program and policy impacts, the role for this in assessing effectiveness is much less in the first.

A second issue impinging on this review, and indeed many of the other reviews of the subject that have been drawn upon in preparing this, is that much of the literature has significant limitations:

- Much is flavoured by strong advocacy.
- A large number of the studies are small scale, and frequently qualitative in nature. Additionally many focus on interventions with respect to very specific groups of children with particular defined needs. There are significant questions as to whether these are generalisable more widely, in particular in the light of the diversity of circumstances and needs of the children who are the focus of inclusion.[2]
- Frequently related to the above limitations of much of the research, a recurrent theme in the literature is the need for further research, including more rigorous testing of what works.

[1] This conceptualisation reflects the framework in which the questions are approached. This does not mean that those focused on a rights perspective are unconcerned about child outcomes, nor that those with an outcome focus ignore the question of rights.

[2] In describing the way in which the literature is often treated Nilholm (2020) argues "The endeavour to generalise across contexts tends to make the contexts of the original studies almost invisible. Thus, studies from different countries with different educational systems and cultural underpinnings are treated as being about the same 'thing', without the consideration that this 'thing' will mean different – and sometimes substantially different – things in these contexts" (p. 2).

The third issue is the extent to which literature with a specific focus on inclusion in ECEC is limited, relative to the much richer literature on inclusion in education as a whole. While this latter is most frequently focused on the formal school sector, given the overlap of the education function in both sectors, and the commonality of many of the issues, in undertaking this review this literature has also been drawn on.

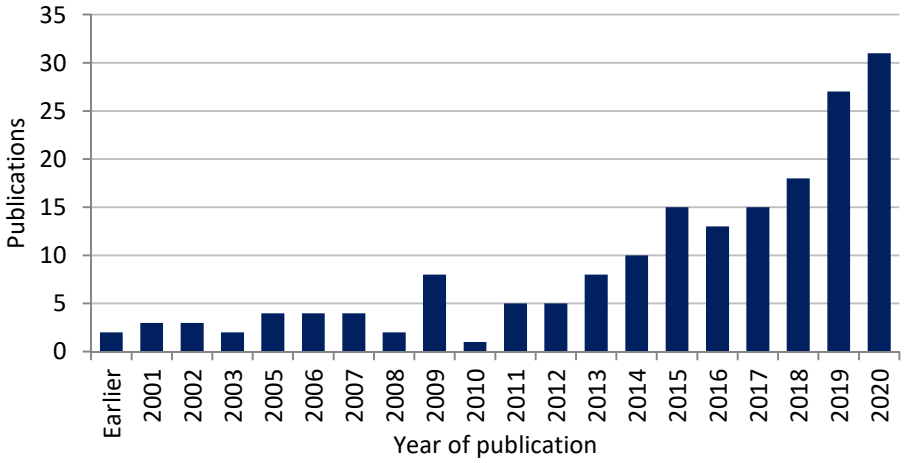
Given the nature of much of the literature, and the extent to which many findings are context specific, or contain qualifications, where possible material has been cited at sufficient length to allow the author's voice to be heard, and to allow the reader to better understand any limitations, or otherwise, of findings and perspectives.[3] While section summaries provide an overview of key issues which emerge, no attempt has been made to draw formal overarching conclusions, beyond echoing the frequently voiced concern about the limitations of the research and the underlying data in this field.

1.1 Literature considered

This review directly draws upon over 170 studies, reports and in some cases advocacy documents, including many existing literature reviews and meta-analysis of the research. It specifically covers academic literature in Australia and overseas, as well as government documents and the outputs of various studies and inquiries. All of these are seen as being valuable sources. These documents have been drawn from a much wider pool which was identified through a range of key word and other searches.

In the review a focus has been placed on more recent literature.[4] This is illustrated in Figure 1 which shows the year of publication of the literature which is referred to here.

Figure 1: Cited publications by year



[3] Such quotations have been edited in place – with ellipses used to indicate where this has occurred. In particular edits have occurred to reduce references to other specific sources. Additionally in some cases initial capitals have been converted to lower case to permit a better flow of text.

[4] This was a deliberate strategy focus on the most recent understandings of what is effective. This concentration is underpinned by the material in section 7 which focuses on meta-analyses and literature reviews which draw upon, and consolidate the earlier literature.

1.2 Lenses of consideration

The question of what constitutes best practice is very broad, and different readers will have different perspectives as to the domains they view as being a priority. Reflecting this, this review focused on three dimensions of inclusion as it relates to early childhood education and care.

- Pedagogy and practice: what happens within the care environment;
- Legal frameworks for inclusion: what mechanisms work best to achieve inclusion and inclusive practices.
- The resourcing framework for inclusion: what are the resources needed to achieve best practice and what should financing structures look like.

1.3 Structure of this report

The structure of this review is:

- Section 2 addresses questions associated with the definition of inclusion and the implications of the different approaches to this, in particular for research on the policy.
- Section 3 turns to the development of inclusion as a policy in early childhood education and care, including different national approaches and in the context of the evolving focus of child care itself.
- Section 4 is the first of the 'lenses' and addresses the 'what' of inclusion within early education and care services. In doing so while it notes the diversity of pedagogical approaches, it focuses rather on some of the issues which arise from these, questions of professional development and presents a selection of the wide range of checklists of best practice which have already been developed across the literature.
- Section 5 addresses the legal framework, and the role of the legal framework, relative to other approaches to promoting and achieving inclusion, including a brief examination of the approaches in the United States and United Kingdom.
- Section 6 is the third of the 'lenses' and considers financial structures to support inclusion. As discussed, this is perhaps the most under-developed aspect of the literature.
- Section 7 complements the other sections and seeks to provide an overview of some of the many literature reviews and meta-analyses of research on inclusion in early childhood education and care. It considers three groups, those largely concerned with research and related findings, those addressing more pedagogical approaches, and thirdly a group, similar to the first, but approaching the question from a stronger advocacy perspective.

2 Definitions and Concepts of Inclusion

This section considers the definitions of concepts of inclusion and some of the implications of the different approaches.

2.1 Definitions of inclusion

The most frequently cited foundational source document on inclusion in education is the 1994 Salamanca statement and framework for action. This describes inclusion as:

> The guiding principle that informs this Framework is that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups. …In the context of this Framework, the term 'special educational needs' refers to all those children and youth whose needs arise from disabilities or learning difficulties… There is an emerging consensus that children and youth with special educational needs should be included in the educational arrangements made for the majority of children. This has led to the concept of the inclusive school. (UNESCO 1994, 6)

The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, which was developed by the Council of Australian Governments in 2009, describes inclusion as an approach which:

> involves taking into account all children's social, cultural and linguistic diversity (including learning styles, abilities, disabilities, gender, family circumstances and geographic location) in curriculum decision-making processes. The intent is to ensure that all children's experiences are recognised and valued. The intent is also to ensure that all children have equitable access to resources and participation, and opportunities to demonstrate their learning and to value difference. (COAG 2009, 27)

This wording is similarly echoed in the definition provided in the Glossary to the Guide to the National Quality Framework (ACECQA 2018a, 625). In this it identifies, as a guiding principle, that the framework is underpinned by "equity, inclusion and diversity", and that reflecting this "Inclusion is acknowledged as an approach where diversity is celebrated". This latter statement can be taken not just as a reflection of the outcome of inclusion, but rather in terms of seeing the 'celebration of diversity' as the driving force.

Within the literature a number of authors have sought to systematise the various conceptualisations of inclusion which are used in the literature and in practice. Nilholm and Göransson (2017) identify four clusters of definitions in the literature they review. These are:

(a) placement definition – inclusion as the placement of pupils with disabilities/in need of special support in general education classrooms;

(b) specified individualised definition – inclusion as meeting the social/academic needs of pupils with disabilities/pupils in need of special support;

(c) general individualised definition – inclusion as meeting the social/academic needs of all pupils; and

d) community definition – inclusion as the creation of communities with specific characteristics (which could vary between proposals). (p. 441)

Referring to earlier work by Ainscow, in the context of 'equity', Opertti et al (2009) suggests four dimensions to the concept:

(a) treating everyone equally;

(b) minimizing divergence across social groups by bringing the achievements of the less advantaged to the same level as those of the more advantaged groups;

(c) achieving a common standard for all learners—for example, basic literacy and numeracy; and

(d) meeting the needs of all individuals through differential treatment in order to take student diversity into account. (p. 206)

Waitoller and Kozleski (2013) present it as a more dynamic process:

> Inclusive education is a continuous struggle toward
>
> (a) the redistribution of quality opportunities to learn and participate in educational programs,
>
> (b) the recognition and value of differences as reflected in content, pedagogy, and assessment tools, and
>
> (c) the opportunities for marginalized groups to represent themselves in decision-making processes that advance and define claims of exclusion and the respective solutions that affect their children's educational futures. (p. 35)

2.1.1 Inclusion as a means or moral principle

Notwithstanding these definitions, a more fundamental issue concerns the extent to which inclusion is seen as a means of maximising outcomes for children, or is rather conceived of in terms of enforcing a set of rights of a child.

This difference was discussed in the context of social exclusion in a 2001 paper commissioned by the OECD which presents this in terms of whether policies to address such exclusion should view the issue as being one which needed to be addressed because of its intrinsic nature, or whether the motivation should reflect the instrumental role which exclusion plays.

> The rights or capabilities based approach used above in defining social exclusion carries with it a focus on the intrinsic problems associated with social exclusion. If social exclusion is a violation of rights or capabilities, it immediately implies that a society that tolerates social exclusion is intrinsically deficient if it fails to grant basic rights or capabilities to its citizens, in this case to its children….

> At the same time, there are several types of instrumental reasons why the treatment of children should receive close scrutiny …. [5]
>
> It is important to point out that the intrinsic and instrumental reasons to be concerned about social exclusion have a very different moral standing. While the intrinsic arguments against social exclusion rise and fall with the acceptance of their philosophical basis (such as a capability-based or other rights-based approach), the instrumental considerations rise and fall with the veracity of the linkages postulated, which is largely an empirical question. This has important implications for a research agenda on social exclusion. A research agenda focused on testing the linkages between exclusion and other desirable welfare criteria implicitly accepts the instrumental approach; one that accepts the intrinsic arguments, such as the rights or capabilities approach suggested above can immediately move to policy questions related to social exclusion. (Evans et al 2001, 5–6)

In terms of the application of this to inclusion in ECEC this can be characterised by the extent to which inclusion is seen as being a policy to be pursued to maximise outcomes, or an ideology which should be implemented as a moral imperative. While in many senses both of these approaches have a high degree of congruity, although not full concordance, in terms of the policies seen as appropriate for implementation, the difference in their conceptualisation remains stark, and permeates the literature which has been examined in this review.

This has particular relevance to the evidence base which this review has sought to consider. This was encapsulated in the title of a 2003 paper by Kavale and Mostert 'River of Ideology, Islands of Evidence', a paper which argues that "a significant portion of the full inclusion movement appears permeated by radicalism, rejecting the empirical in favor of the nonepistemic and postmodern" (p. 191).[6] An alternative statement is though provided by Haug (2014): "What we have to bear in mind, though, is that inclusion as a normative idea is not dependent upon the results of effect studies, a parallel to democracy" (p. 285).[7]

This moral/ideological/normative value is described by Mitchell as:

> Morally, there is a strong argument for valuing diversity, arising from the doctrine of human rights, which aims at identifying the fundamental prerequisites for each human being to lead a minimally good life and to enjoy the full rights of citizenship. It rests

[5] The paper details a number of instrumental reasons for addressing social exclusion. These include the risk of children growing up to be socially excluded adults, "empirical relations to other social problems that threaten the stability and prosperity of society at large such as crime, violence, social pathologies, societal divisions, racism, xenophobia, etc", and the risk that "socially excluded children will pose a threat to the future wellbeing of society as they may become a social and economic burden to society or, worse, generate considerable social disruptions if they have little stake in the existing order" (Evans et al 2001, 5).

[6] Reflecting the very strong divides in the literature on these issues, Allan dismisses these comments as being "the baying demand for evidence that inclusion works … that can be heard in the US from the special educators, assiduously protecting their interests and refusing to acknowledge the ideological nature of their own position" (2012, 110).

[7] Shaddock et al, in their Review of Special Education in the ACT report the state of debate as "lined up on both sides of these passionate debates are esteemed researchers, thinkers, advocates, parents, students and ex-students, and a wide variety of stakeholders who, if they refer to evidence at all, sometimes base their opposing views on almost the same body of evidence" (2009, 41-42).

> upon belief in the existence of a truly universal moral community comprising all human beings. (2015, 2)

It can be argued that each of these positions contains some importance for policy and practice of inclusion in ECEC in Australia. While the normative, and moral aspect of inclusion can be seen as a clear aspiration and as an underlying principle to guide the balance of policies, the importance of an actual understanding of the impacts of policies, and the collection of information which allows this to be objectively measured, and which seeks to identify the actual links between practices and outcomes, is critical to guide policy development and implementation.

In looking at these questions from the perspective of how they might inform the adoption of best practice in Australia, the general approach which has been adopted here is that best practice is that which generates the best outcomes, as seen in measured outcomes such as academic performance and social interactions which are seen as critical outputs of ECEC. It is though recognised that if the alternative conceptualisations which see best practice in terms of processes which accord with a conceptualisation of what inclusion should be – that is seeing best inclusive practice as being that which is consistent with concepts which define inclusion in terms such as "valuing diversity" or "a set of principles which ensures that the student with a disability is viewed as a valued and needed member of the community" (see Florian 2014, 287), a different set of best practices may emerge.

More generally it is noted that addressing this question cannot be avoided. This can be seen in the context of the 2016 Senate Committee inquiry into issues of access and attainment for students with disability.[8] A specific issue addressed was the role of mainstream inclusion relative to special schools. The committee addressed this from the instrumental approach:

> One of the most prominent debates regarding the education of students with disabilities is the question of which sort of education produces the best outcomes for students: inclusion in 'mainstream' schools or classes or via special-purposes schools (Australia.Senate 2016, 63)

Yet at the same time it also considered the question of decisions that were made as to which type of school children should attend. The committee noted that it had received strong claims from both sides of the debate on this subject before concluding it deferred to a parental rights position:

> The choice of which school to enrol a child in is one of the main decisions parents have to make, and the committee notes that different families will have different preferences and opinions on what environment will best suit their child, especially if that child has a disability (p. 64)

A contrary position to this can be seen in the 'roadmap for achieving inclusive education in Australia' prepared by the Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education which identifies as a medium term outcome of their proposed reforms:

[8] This Inquiry also highlighted the scant attention to these issues in ECEC. Notwithstanding the Terms of Reference for the Committee including to report on "(i) the early education of children with a disability" (Australia.Senate 2016, 1), there is no mention of ECEC, child care or the role of pre-school education in the report. Similarly the then Department of Education and Training Submission to the Inquiry (DESE 2015) contains no material relating to this term of reference, and no reference to ECEC.

> The rights of students with disability to inclusive education is reflected in education policy and practice, and the myth of parental choice in segregation is debunked (ACIE 2020, 6)

Within the Australian context Turner and Morgan suggest this question can be seen as an evolving process embedded in values and ideas:

> Ideas around inclusion in the early childhood field have evolved steadily over the past few decades, and are continuing to progress. This has occurred in a context of ongoing social change, which has been accompanied by similar changes across a range of social values and ideas. Definitions of inclusion traditionally focussed on readiness for assimilation into a general class (mainstreaming) … and integration in general classes with English language instruction and support for disability … These views have shifted to those incorporating curricular and pedagogic differentiation to support children's senses of belonging. Changing values and ideas about diversity and difference, ability and disability, and social inclusion and exclusion in early childhood have been influential in this shift. (2019, 98)

These issues are also considered, from a slightly different perspective, by O'Brien (2020). In an essay he asks "Has inclusion become a barrier to inclusion?" – and suggests that the very focus on inclusion might run counter to the objectives which inclusionary policies seek. He argues:

> Inclusion as a concept is itself a barrier to inclusion. When we think about being inclusive, we have to start from a point of exclusionary thinking: who is out there that we need to include in here? The concept of inclusion places our first focus on exclusion and the excluded. Thinking about being inclusive places attention onto groups, sub-groups and individuality – but the first focus is not on commonality. That is a barrier to inclusion (p. 308)

> Perhaps then we should talk more about respecting diversity rather than enabling inclusion? … we should consider replacing a focus on inclusion with a focus on respecting and responding to diversities. Here 'diversity' is broken down into a word that highlights multiple ways of being – 'diversities'. It also encompasses differing goals (p. 309)

2.2 Implications for identifying best practice

While there is a strong commitment to the concept of inclusion, the grounds of this commitment, and what is perceived as being 'inclusion', varies. In particular there is a very strong divide between those who pursue it from a rights based perspective, and those who see it in its instrumental role in improving outcomes.

'Best practice' requires taking a normative position on this question. In terms of government ECEC policy there is a need for this to be undertaken with full awareness of the competing approaches, recognising that while in large part many activities and strategies are common to both, there are equally areas of wide divergence.

Two of particular note are:

- The role of evidence based policy. This has quite different interpretations under approaches which are primarily concerned with what outcomes are achieved, relative to those which focus on evidence of compliance of processes and behaviours with a set of principles.
- The issue of identification of individuals and of their differences/needs. This is discussed in subsequent sections, but relates to the extent to which seeking to identify children, whether for funding decisions, program targeting, or for evaluation and research, results in labelling and a focus on diagnosis, and disability or deficits, which in itself is creating difference and exclusion.

3 Inclusion and early childhood education and care

As cited above the Salamanca declaration effectively had two statements concerning the focus of inclusion. These were a broad declaration of inclusion of "all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children , street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups", and a narrower definition of "'special educational needs' … those children and youth whose needs arise from disabilities or learning difficulties" (UNESCO 1994, 6). These differences in focus can be seen as both producing, and reflecting, a tension around what inclusion means, and which children may have additional needs which may need to be taken into account in providing education and care services.

Associated with this is the further duality in the role of ECEC in both providing care and education services to benefit the child, and in caring for children to enable parents to engage in employment and other activities.

3.1 Broad focus

A strong emergent theme across Europe is that the overriding focus of ECEC services should be on outcomes for children, including those at disadvantage, rather than being seen primarily as a mechanism to support workforce participation.[9] This is echoed extensively across the literature including van Belle (2016, 5) and Alexiadou and Altmann (2020, 89) and is presented by Bellour, Bartolo & Kyriazopoulou (2017) as:

> The focus of European education policies has, however, shifted. Initially, they focused on increasing the quantity of childcare and pre-primary places to enable more parents to join the labour market. Now, they focus on the educative and formative effects of ECEC for young children in their development. (p. 20)

In a more coded fashion the OECD report this as:

> Early childhood education and care has experienced a surge of policy attention in OECD countries in recent decades, at the national as well as international level. However, this increasing attention is not the only change; the nature of the public debate has also significantly evolved over this period. Policy makers have recognised that equitable access to quality ECEC can strengthen the foundations of lifelong learning for all children and support the broad educational and social needs of

[9] This overall narrative can be questioned in a number of cases. Addressing developments in Italy and Spain with respect to provision for 3 to 5 year olds, León et al (2019) report that in both countries "the development of pre-primary education came about early, driven by the inheritance of influential pedagogical paradigms and a strong push for equalizing opportunities through public education in a readiness-for-school approach. … What is important is that the universalization of pre-primary schools in Italy and Spain started before the growth of the numbers of mothers in the workforce. Later, when the needs of working mothers/parents eventually became more evident, from the second half of the 1990s onwards, universal pre-primary coverage, either free or very affordable, was already consolidated" (p. 568).

> families, and they have therefore increased the resources allocated to this sector over the last decade. With this trend, governments have taken recent initiatives that aim to enhance the quality of ECEC services and improve the equity of access to ECEC settings. This is in contrast to the public debates of the past, which were limited to quantitative issues, and public spending was mainly concentrated on measures to expand access to affordable ECEC. (2017, 16)

The Council of the European Union in their recent 'Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems' emphasises "the role of early childhood education and care in laying solid foundations for learning at school and throughout life" (para 2), and that "participating in early childhood education and care is beneficial for all children and especially for children in a disadvantaged situation" (para 4).

Further the Council noted that "early childhood education and care provision needs to be part of an integrated child-rights based package of policy measures to improve outcomes for children and break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage" (para 4); and that "participating in early childhood education and care has multiple benefits both for individuals and for society as a whole, from improved educational attainment and labour market outcomes to fewer social and educational interventions and more cohesive and inclusive societies" (para 5).

Reflecting this, the Council recommended that European Member States act to "improve access to high-quality early childhood education and care systems" (C189/8) and identified 5 key strategies to do this. These and some of the selected components of each of the strategies are:

- "ensuring that early childhood education and care services are accessible, affordable and inclusive" including "supporting child development in a consistent way starting as early as possible by using early childhood education and care services"; "analysing and addressing the barriers that families might encounter when accessing and using early childhood education and care services, such as costs, poverty-related barriers, geographical location, inflexible opening hours, barriers related to inadequate provisions for children with special needs, cultural and linguistic barriers, discrimination as well as a lack of information"; "ensuring that all families who want to make use of early childhood education and care services have access to affordable high-quality early childhood education and care", "providing inclusive early childhood education and care services for all children, including children with diverse backgrounds and special educational needs, including disabilities, avoiding segregation and incentivising their participation, regardless of the labour market status of their parents or carers".
- A focus on "the professionalisation of early childhood education and care staff, including leaders"; "raising the status of the early childhood education and care profession by creating high professional standards, offering attractive professional status and career prospects to early childhood education and care educators"; "improving initial education and continuous professional development"; and "providing time for staff for the purpose of professional activities".
- "Enhance the development of early years' curricula in order to follow children's interests, nurture their wellbeing"; "ensuring a balance in the provision of social-emotional and cognitive development, acknowledging the importance of play, contact with nature, the role of music, arts and physical activity"; "promoting further integration of early childhood education and care in

the education continuum and supporting collaboration between early childhood education and care and primary school staff, parents and counselling services for a smooth transition for children to primary school".

- "Promote transparent and coherent monitoring and evaluation of early childhood education and care services at the appropriate levels with a view to policy development and implementation".
- "Aim at ensuring adequate funding and a legal framework for the provision of early childhood education and care services"; "scaling up investment in early childhood education and care with a focus on availability, quality and affordability; promoting better cooperation among services or further integration of them for families and children, most importantly with social and health services as well as schools, at national, regional and local levels" (c189/8-9).

The Council recommendations also drew upon previous statements, in particular the European Commission's (2017) statement "Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture". This stressed, in addition to the critical role of education in preparing the future workforce and related economic benefits, that "provided that it is of good quality and inclusive, education from childhood on lays the groundwork for social cohesion, social mobility and an equitable society …. Education forms the basis for active citizenship and helps prevent populism, xenophobia and violent radicalisation" (p. 3).

This social inclusion role of ECEC is also reflected in a variety of national statements, and reflected in policies such as those adopted in some countries, for example Norway, Denmark, Germany,[10] and the Netherlands which place a specific emphasis on the role of ECEC services in achieving national language competency for those from different linguistic backgrounds.

The intensity of these policies, as well as the degree they also extend into some normative cultural identity, can be seen in recent changes to the Danish Day-Care Act which came into force in July 2019. This introduced a mandatory requirement:

> for children between the 1-2 years, who live in marginalised residential areas, to attend an independent and integrated learning offer consisting of 25 hours a week if they do not already attend an ECEC setting or a regulated home-based provision …
>
> The purpose of the learning offer is to ensure that children's Danish-language competences are strengthened and that they are introduced to Danish traditions, democratic norms and values from an early age. (Eurydice 2020)

The Danish approach is also discussed in Hodes (2020) who argues that "the structure of Denmark's universal child care system facilitates the socialization of citizens by ensuring that all children are imbued with the norms and values of Danish culture". She further articulates these norms as "democracy, equality and trust", suggesting that these were strongly linked to the nature of the Danish welfare state, and an importance of the collective. She reports, however, a tension around the concept of equality – which focused on sameness – and the extent to which this de-emphasises difference.

[10] "Sprach-Kitas: Weil Sprache der Schlüssel zur Welt ist" (Early-Years Language Learning) is a national program which provides funding to services to employ an additional, specially qualified language-intervention professional for 19.5 hours a week to support German language skills for children with special needs related to language development for periods of up to 4 years. https://www.froebel-gruppe.de/en/education/language-interventions/national-programme-sprach-kitas/

This is addressed, even more explicitly, in the Norwegian Kindergarten Act (2006) which details a responsibility for the sector to reflect certain foundational social values:

> The Kindergarten must be based on fundamental values in the Christian and humanist heritage and tradition, such as respect for human dignity and nature, on intellectual freedom, charity, forgiveness, equality and solidarity, values that also appear in different religions and beliefs and are rooted in human rights. (Section 1)[11]

Notwithstanding these policy pronouncements, it is most probably reasonable to consider that ECEC is still in a transitional phase with respect its role. This position was put, with respect to the state of play in Europe, by Alexiadou and Altmann (2020) as:

> One of the important discussions around early childhood education focuses on a (re) definition of the goals of the sector in different countries. How does a sector originally established as a facilitator to female employment transform to a high quality education and care institution? Should ECE serve primarily as preparation of children for school, and for participation to a democratic society? Should it try to balance "care" with "education", and if so, how? (p. 90)

The question of the role, scope, and focus of ECEC, along with the strong social and political values associated with the concept of social inclusion, are all dimensions which need to be considered in this contested field. This, along with the evolving nature of approaches to inclusion, are described by Wong and Turner (2014) as:

> To promote social inclusion, governments implement broad ranging policies in areas such as welfare, citizenship, rights, democratic participation and education – including early childhood education and care (ECEC). Within education literature, the traditional and dominant use of the term 'inclusion' is in reference to the inclusion of children with disabilities in educational settings. Originating from the disability rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s …, the term 'inclusive education', is particularly evident in special education, and is a position that expounds the moral and legal rights of people with a disability to participate in the range of everyday activities that any other person would expect to experience … however, social inclusion is a contested concept with multiple meanings, assumptions and agendas. Given this diversity it is important to consider how these discourses are productive and constraining in ECEC policy development. (p. 54)

3.2 Scope of inclusion

The expanding scope of inclusion is highlighted in a number of recent OECD documents:

> More recently, however, governments have increasingly seen ECEC as a means to support children's early development and mitigate the effects of inequity. Policy makers are increasingly investing in early childhood programmes to build a strong foundation for cognitive and social-emotional skills, especially for children from disadvantaged or immigrant backgrounds to combat the linguistic and economic

[11] Some exemptions to this prescription are made for private kindergartens and those run by the Norwegian State Church.

> disadvantages that could otherwise hinder their development and integration. (OECD 2020a, 24)
>
> Growing inequity in the economic, social and cultural backgrounds of children in ECEC centres is becoming a challenge in many OECD countries. It is often reported that despite the children of deprived families needing high-quality ECEC the most, these families often have lower interest, lack of knowledge and lack of time to be engaged in ECEC.
>
> Increasing diversity can also be a challenge for getting parents engaged in ECEC services. Often reported barriers include different cultural needs, views or languages.
>
> Uneven parental engagement with different socio-economic backgrounds can result in greater inequity. It is therefore particularly important that real efforts are made to reach out to the most deprived families. Collaboration with parents is especially important in low-income, minority families, where differences in socio-economic background and cultural values about child rearing and education are likely to affect the home learning environment. (OECD 2017, 36)

Defining this scope however in more operational terms, especially with regard to the emphasis and targeting of inclusion in ECEC, reflecting the above issues, remains largely unresolved. While the OECD developed a 3 category system of 'educational needs' which broadly covers the wider scope of these approaches, this classification appears to have limited application in any of their current work or statistical products. The classification – referred to as CNC A-C (Cross National Classification) comprised:

> Category A refers to educational needs of students where there is substantial normative agreement – such as blind and partially sighted, deaf and partially hearing, severe and profound mental handicap and multiple handicaps.
>
> Category B refers to educational needs of students who have difficulties in learning which do not appear to be directly or primarily attributable to factors which would lead to categorisation as A or C.
>
> Category C refers to educational needs of students, which are considered to arise primarily from socio-economic, cultural and/or linguistic factors (OECD 2001, 178)

A recent OECD working paper (Brussino 2020) highlights the diversity of national approaches, in terms of their definitions of students with 'Special Education Needs'. This is illustrated below in Table 1:

Table 1: National approaches to the definition of Special Education Needs within the education system, selected countries

Austria	The Compulsory Schooling Act stipulates that pupils have special educational needs (SEN) when, as a consequence of physical or mental disabilities, they cannot follow teaching in a regular class at compulsory school without additional support measures. Special educational needs must be in a causal connection with an identified physical or mental disability of the pupil. Insufficient school performance or insufficient command of German without the identifying feature of disabilities therefore does not establish special educational needs.
Canada	Overall, students with emotional, behavioural, intellectual, language, speech or hearing, or physical disorders are eligible for SEN. Some provinces include gifted students and students performing far beyond their grade level in the categorisation of students with SEN.
Denmark	Individuals with severe physical and/or intellectual special needs are identified as students with SEN. Special education needs and other types of special education assistance shall be given to students whose development requires special consideration/support.
Finland	Students have special needs when their possibilities for learning, development and growth diminish due to disability, sickness or decreased function. Students at risk or in need of psychological/social support have the right to receive learning support. Students with minor learning/adjustment difficulties are eligible to receive part-time special education along with mainstream education.
France	There is no established definition and/or categorisation of students with SEN. According to Law 102/2005, "a disability is constituted by any limit on activity or restriction on the participation in social life endured by a person in his or her environment due to a substantial, durable or permanent alteration of one or several physical, sensory, mental, cognitive, psychic functions, to a multiple disability or to a disabling health problem".
Germany	Legal definitions and eligibility criteria for SEN are rather broad at the federal level because of different laws and regulations existing across German states. Overall, the area of responsibility of special needs education refers to SEN within the area of disabilities. Students with difficulties due to specific handicaps, in need of additional teaching support because of problematic situations and/or with temporary learning impairments receive support through measures within the mainstream education system.

Ireland	The EPSEN Act identifies special education needs as a "restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition". SEN can arise from four spheres of disability, namely physical, sensory, learning, mental health disability, or from any other condition affecting the student's schooling in a way that creates different results to those for a student without that condition. A student can have a disability without having SEN, requiring additional support in school.
Italy	Special education needs are diversified in three clusters: disabilities, specific learning impairments and other special education needs (which include also strong linguistic and/or cultural needs).
Netherlands	Four main clusters of students are eligible for special education. These are: 1) students with blindness or visual impairments, 2) students with deafness, hearing impairments or speech-development disorders, 3) students with motor disabilities, long-term illness or mental disabilities, 4) children with mental or behavioural disorders.
New Zealand	SEN include sensory difficulties, learning/communication delays, social and/or emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, and giftedness.
Norway	Students who do not benefit or are unable to benefit satisfactorily from ordinary teaching
Spain	Five clusters of SEN: I) students with physical, intellectual, sensorial disabilities/serious behavioural disorders; II) high-ability students; III) late entries into the Spanish education system; IV) students with specific learning impairments; and V) students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorders.
Sweden	There is no legal definition of SEN. Sweden puts emphasis on education for all without categorising students with SEN into defined clusters. Support should be given to students with difficulties in completing their education successfully
United Kingdom[12]	Students are eligible for SEN support if they have a learning difficulty requiring special education provision and if they have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of their peers. The Education Act also affirms that a student cannot be considered as having a learning difficulty based on the single fact that the language of teaching is not the same as the one spoken at home.

[12] (a) The formal definition of SEN in England is: "A child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her … A child of compulsory school age or a young person has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she: has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions … A child under compulsory school age has special educational needs if he or she is likely to fall within the definition …. above when they reach compulsory

United States	Students must be between 3 and 21 years old, their education performance must be negatively affected by a condition leading to a disability/impairment, and need to receive SEN assistance within the least restrictive environment.

Source: Brussino (2020, 82-92)

This table suggests that the formal definitions of Special Education Needs across most of these countries remains firmly within a disability framework. There are though some exceptions, these include:

- The identification of gifted children in a number of countries, including Canada, New Zealand and Spain.
- The explicit exclusion of non-speaking of the native language in Austria and the UK, in contrast to a recognition of this in Italy.
- Changes in some countries, including Finland, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom to move away from disability and focus a definition related to education needs alone.
- While some countries, such as the Netherlands, seek to link behavioural issues to 'behavioural disorders', others, such as New Zealand, refer to behavioural difficulties.

In considering these classifications, and looking at national policies and aspirations more widely, it would appear that a number of countries are effectively maintaining two streams of inclusion: firstly a disability type focus in terms of definition of children with Special Education Needs; and then a broader set of policies around social inclusion. A further limitation with these classifications may relate to their application to the formal education sector rather than ECEC. In addressing inclusion within the ECEC environment, implicit in most social inclusion strategies, is the belief that early intervention can play a significant role in providing a support and buffering role to children who are at risk of developing educational specific needs, rather than actually having such a need which is immediately identifiable.

The scope of definitions also seem to have a high degree of path dependency, echoing firstly some traditional areas of disability, and then the expansion of these, along with the introduction of concepts such as social exclusion and deprivation and disadvantage. This approach to definition can lead to a failure to fully account for certain aspects of exclusion. One such dimension is highlighted in Liang and Cohrssen (2020) who identify questions of inclusion with regard to children of LGBTIQ parented families, an issue also addressed by Miller(2016, 176–178). Liang and Cohrssen report:

> some LGBTIQ-parented families report that EC educators recognise and value the biological parent of a child more than the same-sex partner …. Same-sex parents may be marginalised by school activities such as the celebration of Mother's Day and Father's Day … Parental experiences of insensitivity to the needs of LGBTIQ-parented families in the context of school may affect children's psychosocial adjustment (p. 47)

school age or would do so if special educational provision was not made for them". (Department of Education (UK) 2015)

> Taking a different approach, some LGBTIQ parents respond to concerns regarding the inclusion of their children in ECEC programmes by enrolling their children in services reputed to be more inclusive … however many parents are unable to respond in this manner, highlighting the importance of all early learning programmes enacting high-quality inclusion practices (pp. 48–49)

This finding also identifies some other aspects of the meaning of inclusion. Most definitions of inclusion are child-based, this perspective also raises the importance of parental exclusion, as well as highlighting an important aspect of access, that of 'service shopping' and the relationship between diversity in service offering, and diversity of demand, relative to universal approaches.[13]

The needs of children with trauma, a category which is only specifically identified in a small number of the definitions in Table 1 also illustrates this problem. Dinehart et al 2013 specifically address the role of the sector with respect to children who experience maltreatment or other trauma noting that "Children who experience maltreatment or exposure to violence are more likely than their nonexposed counterparts to experience poor developmental and academic outcomes, high rates of high school dropout, criminal involvement, incarceration, and various mental health issues including depression, psychiatric disorders, and substance dependency (p. 284). They suggest that there is some evidence to suggest "that a positive ECE experience can serve as a protective factor—functioning to ameliorate the risk faced by children in environmentally challenging circumstances [and] ECE settings may also function to monitor children's safety and well-being. Teachers and other ECE staff may provide an additional set of eyes and ears that monitor the safety and well-being of a child who may be at-risk for child maltreatment and/or reoccurrence of maltreatment" (p. 285). While the authors survey a substantial body of literature they conclude by noting "Yet, the extent to which quality ECE experiences are present and influence the development of children who experience maltreatment remains unclear" (p. 288) and call for more intensive research into the literature.

Musgrave and Levy (2020) address another group, children with chronic health conditions (CHCs). After reviewing various policy documents they report that "it is becoming increasingly apparent that children's health and in particular the effects of CHCs, remain underexplored with regard to inclusive practice for young children" (p. 161). Drawing on the literature, both qualitative and quantitative, data collections they undertook with service directors and parents, and observational studies, they suggest that even when very good practice occurred, for some children some, often subtle, exclusion occurs because of the nature of their conditions. They conclude with a view that "inclusion, in its full sense, may not be possible for some children with CHCs. The well-being and safety of children must always remain a priority; however, it is important that we consider the implications of compromised inclusion" (p. 172).

In Australia, as cited earlier, the position continues to evolve:

> Traditionally, inclusive education in the mainstream early years classroom focussed on catering for children with special needs, such as physical impairment or autism, and for

[13] This latter question can be seen as being particularly relevant to the ECEC sector given the relatively small size of services when, for example, compared with schools. In this review no specific literature addressing this question was identified.

> children considered ‘at risk’ or ‘disadvantaged’ in relation to issues such as socio-economic circumstances or geographical isolation … research extends this notion of inclusive education to include many more considerations, such as the social, political, cultural, English as a second language, trauma-related and economic backgrounds of educational stakeholders. (Turner and Morgan 2019, 93)

3.3 Best practice in the context of evolving roles and focus

There are two strong emergent themes from analysis of developments in the role of ECEC and the concept of inclusion which have specific impacts on understanding and policy making in the ECEC sector, in particular with respect to inclusion.

- The transition of a focus on ECEC as being primarily concerned with enabling the workforce participation of parents, to a recognition of it playing an important role in child development and in education. Within this particular element is the potential role and effectiveness of early intervention, and hence the question of ensuring participation by those who face disadvantage.
- A transition of inclusion from a heritage with a focus on special needs associated with disability, to special needs relating to child development, education, and social integration –at the individual and societal level.

While in both cases best practice can be defined as being associated with the ‘transition to’ goals, it needs though to be informed by the history of its development, and by awareness of the values associated with these destinations.

4 Best practice in processes and pedagogy

This section is concerned with the first of the three analytical approaches used to consider best practice. While using the terminology of 'pedagogy' it is recognised that within ECEC both education and care are integral elements. The capacity of the review to consider detailed aspects of pedagogy is limited both by its overall broad focus, and as cited in a number of cases, the absence of evidence on what works. An exception to this is a discussion of the Response to Intervention approach which also serves to illustrate some key questions around what inclusion means. Additionally the section, as a review, rather than as primary research, draws substantially on previous studies which have sought to define the essential components of effective ECEC services, in particular with regard to inclusion.[14]

Much of the literature places a particularly strong emphasis on the link between quality of practices and outcomes, especially for children at disadvantage[15].

> There is consistent evidence that there is a link between the quality of pre-school and the persistence of educational outcomes; studies have shown both that good quality preschool has long lasting effects on cognitive performance later in life … and that good quality ECEC has more persistent effects compared to poor quality … specifically good process quality of ECEC provision (i.e. quality of the curriculum, pedagogical practices and a safe socio-emotional environment) is a predictor for the persistence of positive outcomes. These effects of good quality are specifically true for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. (van Belle 2016, 6)

This statement draws upon previous research, including Anders et al (2011) which was focused on identifying the influence of child, family, home factors and pre-school education on the identification of special educational needs later in their school career at age 10. This study reported:

> Strategies for supporting groups of children at greater risk of developing SEN during their school career should therefore target factors affecting children's development before they begin primary schooling. Over the last decade or more inclusive education has been a major policy initiative designed to improve the educational opportunities of children with SEN and disabilities. Results on the effectiveness of this approach are heterogeneous … The results of the present study suggest that a range of preventive strategies that support children's development in the early years may improve 'school readiness' and therefore reduce the number of children who may be at risk of

[14] It is also noted that the focus here on the 'what' is limited primarily because of the interest in what is most important for inclusion. Issues of nutrition, physically safe environments, and health are all parts of the broader literature on high quality ECEC and child outcomes.

[15] That ECEC has such a role is not new. Ager and Cinnirella (2020) report on analysis of the impact of the extension of the Kindergarten movement in the US at the end of the nineteenth century. This expansion is reported as being "in particular, aimed at targeting poor and immigrant children and their mothers since the unfavorable living conditions in the urban slums made them one of the most disadvantaged groups in the American society" (p, 43). The study concludes that in addition to having an impact on reducing the high level of fertility in this population, increasing the English language capacity of the children and reducing child labour "that children exposed to kindergarten education stayed longer in school and worked in higher paid and more prestigious occupations as adults" (p. 43).

> developing SEN in later years. A new contribution to knowledge made in this paper concerns the important continuing effect of preschool quality[16] as a factor that not only improves children's subsequent attainment up to age 10 years in primary school but that also has a specific role in reducing the likelihood of later SEN identification. Quality of preschool thus appears to have both a general and specific differential effect on later cognitive development. (pp. 437-438)

OECD (2020b) reports on the '2018 Starting Strong Teaching and Learning International Survey' a study which provides rich information on the settings where children under age 3 spend their time. It notes however that:

> Despite growing interest from policy makers on how to use ECEC for the benefit of children, there is little system-level information to help policy makers or education leaders to do so with any level of confidence. The relationship between children's development and structural aspects of ECEC provision, such as group size, has been found to be weak. Even factors such as teachers' qualifications do not always show a clear relationship with children's outcomes …[17] While process quality is undoubtedly key, there is little evidence about what forms of participation, provision and pedagogical approaches work best for different groups of children. (p. 24)

The state of uncertainty about effective policies reflected in this finding in many ways echoed the findings of a decade earlier by the OECD in a research brief concerned with ECEC and social disadvantage:

> ECEC is often seen as a vehicle to give children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds a "head start" when commencing compulsory education. Early childhood educators come across increasingly complex social environments and encounter a multiplicity of family backgrounds and experiences. These factors create imperatives to adopt new pedagogies and organisational practices to accommodate this pluralism … In line with the issues of integration and prevention of social inequality highlighted by politicians and professionals, current and emerging content for continuing professional development include: intercultural approaches, approaches to second languages, working with children with special needs, working with children at risk and special focus on language acquisition … However, little is known yet about the effectiveness of these approaches. (Makowiecki 2011, 5)

[16] Quality was measured using an environment rating scale which uses observation of the care environment and interactions with children as well as a number of items collected by interview and from service records (Sylva et al 2006, 80).

[17] This references Shuey and Kankaraš (2018) an earlier OECD working paper which sought to "synthesise existing research on early learning" to assist in the OECD's International Early Learning and Child Well-Being Study, "providing an in-depth document on the research base for the study" (p. 11). The author's report that the analysis presented "highlights the power of early learning to predict individuals' well-being in childhood and beyond, as well as the promise of early learning as a focus of policy attention" (p. 11).

4.1.1 Response to Intervention

One specific approach which is frequently proposed in the literature as a means of improving inclusion outcomes is that of 'Response to Intervention' (RTI),[18, 19] In Australia this approach has been identified in submissions to the Senate Inquiry into education for students with a disability (Australia.Senate 2016, 68, and AASE 2015, 3), and has had application in education systems including in Queensland (Deloitte 2017, xviii & 46) and in Victoria (Department of Education and Training (Vic) 2020).

Across the literature there is some debate however about this approach and its relationship with inclusion. In some cases the critiques are cautionary, questioning issues around its effectiveness or the specific requirements for it to be appropriately implemented, while in others the critique is far more fundamental, suggesting rather than a tool for inclusion this policy potentially involves inappropriate labelling, a form of segregation and exclusion.

Albritton, Truscott and Terry (2018) argue that the approach has potential in early childhood settings, but that implementation would "require early childhood practitioners to develop new skills in assessment, intervention, and data-based decision making" (p. 401) to be successfully implemented. Shaddock et al (2009, 86) cite a study by Madelaine and Wheldall reporting that "There is an enormous amount of support for RTI in the literature but, while it makes very good conceptual sense, there is relatively little scientific evidence about its effectiveness as yet in comparison to other models of identification and remediation."

Grosche and Volpe (2013) consider that the approach has merit as an instrument for inclusion, albeit with some reservations about the need for further research and recognition of risks. These they identify as including the extent to which the higher tiers of the approach may involve pulling out children from education with their peers, and the extent to which the focus on achievement is appropriate.

In contrast the use of RTI has been challenged in some of the literature as being counter to inclusion. Ferri (2012) raises a number of issues including: the extent to which it is modelled on treatment, diagnosis, and the achievement of outcomes; as well as the degree to which it is focused on standardisation; and that the tiered approach which is adopted involves labelling. She also notes that "most often in descriptions of RTI [it] involves removing students from the general education classroom for 'specialised' or 'intensive' instruction, rather than requiring the classroom teacher to implement differentiated instruction, universal design for learning or other inclusive practices" (p. 871). Waitoller and King Thorius (2015) detail a series of critiques – and argue this approach:

> [and related] policies and practices have 'hopscotched' their way through inclusive education reform, skipping over a core tenet of the inclusive education movement: the radical transformation of school cultures to debunk all *isms* (such as ableism, racism, ethnocentrism, sexism) that inform dominant ways of being, thinking and doing in

[18] Response to Intervention is one of a range of specific pedagogical strategies. It is addressed here as it is a strategy which has some currency in Australia and the literature. More generally it is considered that the issues raised in consideration of the model, including the balance of evidence, and the conceptual challenges raised in the relationship between this type of intervention and some conceptions of inclusion, are instructive with a wider application.

[19] Moore 2009 identifies in addition an "early childhood counterpart, the 'recognition and response' model" (2009, 22).

schools, and thus create schools that recognise and value all student differences". (p. 24)

In part this debate raises broader questions about the exact meaning of inclusion (or the form of inclusion which is being pursued) and the extent to which any form of diagnosis and differential treatment (especially where this is not undertaken in any way separate to others) are exclusionary, or are rather effective tools to enable children to maximise their development outcomes – and future participation. This issue is also raised in Brussino (2020) who, in this OECD working paper, firstly typifies education systems as being:

- One-track approach: There are only a few specialised structures for students with SEN as mainstreaming is the most common practice. In mainstream schools, programmes are adapted to address individual students' SEN and supported by a diversity of services.
- Two-track approach: There is a high share of specialised structures, with two rather distinct education systems for students with and without SEN.
- Three-track approach: The system is a mix of the previous two, with a variety of approaches to inclusion. There could be specialised structures, specialised classrooms and mainstream classrooms. (p. 30)

But then goes on to report:

> When considering approaches to education provision, it is important to underline that national education policies as well as the humanitarian and development education sectors have increasingly promoted a twin-track approach to special education needs. This entails ensuring that mainstream education approaches are inclusive of all students (included students with SEN) while also making sure that specific needs of students with SEN are targeted and met, such as through specialised teaching strategies (p. 30)

4.1.2 Staff skills, education and professional development

As noted above one of the recurrent themes in proposed strategies to boost inclusive practices is increased professional development of staff, either in their initial training or in ongoing professional development.[20] (Deloitte (2017), Weglarz-Ward (2019), and Blackburn (2016, 244))

A 2011 'Research Brief' produced by the OECD reports:

> a general consensus, supported by research, that well-educated, well-trained professionals are the key factor in providing high-quality ECEC with the most favourable cognitive and social outcomes for children. Research shows that the

[20] There are also many dimensions to Professional Development which make reference to adopting it as a strategy less than clear or transparent. This is illustrated in Slot, Romijn and Wyslowska (2017) who present an "Inventory and analysis of professional development and models related to inclusiveness" covering both school and early childhood care and education. In this 81 interventions in 10 countries are presented. The authors report:"It appeared that interventions for professionals working in ECEC provisions and in NGO's focused mainly on knowledge and skills, whereas interventions for professionals working in primary and secondary education more often included a focus on attitudes as well" (p. 6). In addition other material here notes the differences in the mode of delivery.

> behaviour of those who work in ECEC matters and that this is related to their education and training. The qualifications, education and training of ECEC staff are, therefore, an important policy issue. (Makowiecki 2011, 1)

However it also points to considerable uncertainties:

> Studies that have addressed the question of whether higher staff qualifications lead to better pedagogical practice have yielded mixed results. There are various studies showing that, generally, a higher level of education is associated with higher pedagogic quality in ECEC settings …However, the general conclusion that higher education of ECEC staff leads to higher pedagogical quality and, therefore, to better child outcomes is not supported by all studies. …Research also points out that it is not necessary that all staff have high general levels of education. Highly qualified staff can have a positive influence on those who work with them and who do not have the same high qualifications. (p. 3)

Identified in the report was a potentially important role for ongoing professional development:

> Ongoing education and training are also important. Research shows that in order for staff to maintain their professional quality, they need to engage in ongoing professional development … Ongoing professional development has the potential to fill in the knowledge and skills that staff may be lacking or require updating due to changes in particular knowledge fields. This is especially crucial in ECEC where new programmes are being developed continuously. The body of research on what works is growing, the discussions on quality in ECEC are ongoing, and the focus has changed to a developmental perspective. (p. 4)

It however concludes that much remains unknown, including the question of how the concept of quality of ECEC should be measured (critical to understanding how this is impacted on by education and training of staff), the content of training, the effectiveness of the level of education and of different in service training strategies, the specific training needs of managerial staff in the ECEC sector, and the relationship between training and diversity.

Mintz et al (2020) present the results of a longitudinal study conducted in Ireland on changes in attitudes and perceptions of knowledge and self-efficacy relating to inclusion amongst teachers in Ireland, looking at their transition from pre-service to first year of teaching. They report “the main finding was that, for the sample, there was a considerable drop in attitude, self-efficacy and perceived knowledge in relation to inclusion, from the end of the pre-service to the end of the novice teacher year” (p. 9). They conclude:

> The results of this study indicate that reality shock in relation to effectively including children with diverse needs is both real and significant. Taking the OECD data in to account, this study, in line with international trends, indicates that current approaches to induction for inclusion are not yet sufficient to properly assist beginning teachers in dealing with this shock. Our results, indicating the extent of reality shock for novice teachers in relation to inclusion, throw into stark relief the lack of current understanding about what delivery methods and content beginning teachers would find effective and useful in induction programmes in relation to the effective inclusion of children with diverse needs in mainstream classrooms. This study highlights,

> therefore, the real need for further research on what constitutes effective support in this area for beginning teachers. (p. 10)

Some research points to positive outcomes from professional development interventions. Egert, Fukkink and Eckhardt (2018) present a meta-analysis of in-service PD courses for early childhood teachers. This uses measures of service quality ratings and child outcomes as benchmarks for assessing impact. From an initial set of 235 references 42 were found to be suitable for analysis. They report "that in-service PD improves the quality of ECEC… [and] that PD of ECEC staff enhances pedagogical quality, which is a key mechanism to accelerate developmental outcomes in young children" (p. 421). Further in examining the effect size, they report "in-service programs have important effects on classroom quality ratings. In addition, the small effects on developmental outcomes in the cognitive and socioemotional domain in early childhood may result in meaningful financial returns for society in the long-term" (p. 423). With regard to what is involved in effective programs they conclude:

> Training intensity should be related to the scope of the program and we suggest that a duration of more than 45 hours should be scheduled to produce significant improvement of global quality. Furthermore, the format of PD delivery seems to matter: PD with coaching seems effective in enhancing classroom quality. (p. 426)

A very positive evaluation arises from the NSW Fostering Effective Early Learning (FEEL) study of the Leadership for Learning PD program (Siraj et al 2018). This study used a randomised control trial to assess the effectiveness of the program, which involved two full-day intensive face to face sessions, followed by 5 half day sessions, and a concurrent online support program. The evaluation reports "that there was an overall effect of the PD on curricular and interactional quality – for all scales and subscales", with the effects identified being quite large. While the timescale of the study precluded a full analysis, the evaluation reports that "even in this narrow time frame … there were discernible improvements in children's development for three (of four) child cognitive outcomes", and that "there were discernible benefits for aspects of children's socio-emotional development. Children in the intervention group showed a reduction in internalising problems (peer and emotional problems) relative to the control group" (p. 39). The study did not however specifically address the issue of inclusion, although it is noted that the content of the training "also emphasised pedagogies and practices known to support the learning and development of children of indigenous descent, children with additional needs and those living in homes situated in areas of disadvantage" (p. 14).

Peleman et al (2018) present the results of a systematic review of the literature on the role of continuous professional development and its relationship with ECEC quality. This encompassed both qualitative and quantitative studies. This presented its conclusions as:

> In the light of the analysis of research findings synthesised so far, it can be concluded that CPD interventions that are integrated in the ECEC centre's practice with a feedback component are the most effective in terms of lasting impact on practitioners' learning, development and the quality of their practices. Long-term CPD interventions that are integrated in practice, such as pedagogical guidance and coaching in reflection groups, produce positive impacts in very different contexts. … The reviewed studies also indicated that workplace-based CPD had a wider effect on collegiality, team work and inter-professional collaboration … critical success factors …First, CPD provision must be embedded in a coherent pedagogical framework or curriculum that build

> upon research and address local needs. Secondly, CPD initiatives should be grounded in an active involvement of practitioners in the transformative process for the improvement of educational practices within ECEC settings. Third, CPD needs to be focused on practitioners learning in practice, in dialogue with colleagues and parents and, in order to maximise the effectiveness of CPD practice, a mentor or coach should be available during ECEC staff childfree hours.

Brunsek et al (2020) present a very extensive systematic review, and meta-analysis, of research on the role of professional development in ECEC, and on children's outcomes. This concluded:

> This integration of evidence supports the growing consensus that PD opportunities matter … .This review integrated findings across multiple PD content areas, allowing us to identify which programs have the strongest associations with child outcomes. Specifically, our findings indicate that stronger associations were revealed for programs that focused on children's expressive vocabulary as well as their social and emotional functioning. These are key areas of development for preschool children. Further, while many of the PD programs focused on children's skill development, a number of programs that revealed stronger associations with child outcomes included activities designed to improve the quality of educator's language use, emotional support and behavior management strategies. Additionally, the inclusion of a coaching component appeared to be an important component of effective PD programs. (p. 244)

Gebbie et al (2012) report a small-scale study of an in-service training program for pre-school teachers in a US state in the Pyramid Model for Promoting Social-Emotional Competence[21] as a strategy for dealing with challenging behaviours. Looking at what was effective and valued by the participants they conclude that "social supports from co-workers with similar experiences are a critical factor for increasing teacher efficacy" (p. 45), and suggest online learning communities as a mechanism which may be effective.

Jensen and Iannone (2018) consider the role of continuing professional development (CPD) in ECEC. They report, on the current state of play: "the significant trends in innovation in CPD link research to practice, promote reflection and critical reflection in practice within reflexive CPD that strengthens and broadens the reach of innovation, make use of communities of practice as a source and driver of collaborative learning and co-creation and target ECEC professionals' competences in relation to

[21] The Pyramid Model is a tiered approach to building social behaviour competencies. It involves three levels of activity, a universal promotion of high quality environments and nurturing and responsive relationships, a second level of more targeted interventions including explicit instruction and support, especially in self-regulation, and a third level of individualised intensive interventions. Hemmeter et al (2016) report on a randomised control trial of this model concluding "Children in intervention teachers' classrooms were rated as having better social skills and fewer challenging behaviors relative to children in control teachers' classrooms. Exploratory analyses showed that children at elevated risk for behavior disorders in intervention teachers' classrooms had improvements in their observed social interaction skills relative to similar children in control teachers' classrooms" (p. 133). More generally with regard to effective PD they report "Teachers who participated in the intervention were universally positive about the PD they received and the outcomes that resulted from their implementation of the Pyramid Model practices. … Teachers felt coaching was essential to their implementation of the Pyramid Model. In particular, they valued the support and feedback, creation of action plans, hands-on assistance, and positive supportive relationship" (p. 142).

vulnerable populations and social inequality" (p. 30). However, consistent with some of the analysis above they conclude:

> Based on the results and our current knowledge gaps, there are several implications that can open up opportunities to further contribute to innovating CPD in ECEC. To begin with, the notion of impact and effectiveness of CPD is still largely mysterious. There is a current lack of research and findings that shed light on which specific elements of CPD, for example, content, processes and embeddedness, that influence ECEC quality, educators' effectiveness and child outcomes, despite there being reports of overall positive …. Even where research has identified certain approaches as effective … no evidence is provided on their effectiveness in relation to one and only a few studies examine communities of practice in relation to impact. The impact of changes in content or mode of delivery of CPD is still rather unknown. The growing integration of communities of practice and networks as strategic CPD complementarities highlights the fact that the largely informal aspects of CPD, horizontal in nature and collaborative, attract practitioners—simultaneously indicating what they find useful and effective. Nevertheless, evidence on effectiveness is still missing. (p. 31)

4.2 Checklists of best practice

Although, as noted above by the OECD, and in a range of other literature, it is reasonable to conclude that there is considerable uncertainty about what works best, the literature abounds with proposed strategies, very frequently in the form of checklists of best practice. A number of these are presented below, followed by a discussion of some of the common elements.

In reviewing these lists it is noted that the scope varies, with three dimensions important. The first is the extent to which they are ECEC specific, or relate to education more generally. The second is the degree to which they are inclusion specific, or are more general. (While this may be seen as straying beyond an inclusion focus, a review of these lists suggest that the principles as well as having bearing on ECEC overall have particular force for inclusion.) The third is that a number of the lists include items which go beyond pedagogy and education and care activity, to also encompass dimensions such as funding and coordination. Here the full lists have been reproduced, as it was considered important to maintain the integrity of the proposals.

At the same time though caution needs to be maintained. Nilholm (2020) observes: "Lists of such factors are very common in the literature concerning inclusive education, yet research is needed in order to validate the importance of different factors, their internal relations, and how they are played out in concrete circumstances" (p. 7).

4.2.1 Anderson and Boyle – the impediments

However, before considering the 'positive' lists, Anderson and Boyle (2015) provide some insight from the literature into this question from a negative perspective – what they see, in the context of the Australian education system, as the "barriers to inclusion"

- Defining IE [Inclusive Education] – the term itself has yet to be definitively defined …, which has led to confusion and angst among policy makers and educators alike …

- Attitude of educators – the attitudes of educators have a direct correlation with the success (or not) of IE … [research] argues that the importance of having a positive attitude towards IE outweighs possession of the knowledge and skills for its effective implementation.
- While there is evidence to suggest that early years pre-service teachers hold a positive attitude towards IE, attitudes become less favourable once they enter the profession …
- Resourcing – plentiful and high-quality resourcing has been linked to positive educator attitude towards IE … In Australia, there are inconsistent and complex procedures for both the identification of and provision of support for students with additional needs across the eight educational jurisdictions …
- Evaluation processes – there is a lack of process and reliable data for the evaluation of current IE strategies and practices ….
- Exclusive practices – evidence suggests that exclusive practices, in the form of educational segregation and disciplinary action, are on the increase…. [research] contends that this is due to these practices becoming 'part of the order of things' …
- Teacher education – 'teachers are seen as needing better preparation for inclusive education' …, and while some universities now offer units in IE … further research is needed to ensure that universities continue to grow and improve their courses …
- Categorisation and labelling – despite evidence of their negative impact on students … both categorisation and labelling of students are on the increase [research] argues that the current reliance on categorisation and labelling to allocate resources is placing undue pressures on medical professionals to diagnose. As a result, 'labels proliferate and some children receive several'.[22] (pp. 16–17)

4.2.2 OECD 2020 – Quality ECEC for children under 3

The OECD (2020b) in reporting on the 2018 'Starting Strong Teaching and Learning International Survey' identified 10 'policy pointers' for improved quality early childhood education and care for children aged under 3. These were:

[22] A counterpoint to the question of labelling is made by Shaddock et al (2007) who note "From a legal perspective [in the context of the Disability Discrimination Act] however … it may be unwise for education systems to avoid the term 'learning disability' because it then may be argued that the system does not acknowledge the possibility of disability being the cause of the reading difficulty" (p. 46).

More broadly it raises the question about identification. This has several dimensions: firstly that 'identification' does have an important role in determining child centred responses in the context of diversity; secondly identity plays a key role in recognising what is important to children. For example, the importance of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity for children with this heritage, along with the value and role of other cultural identities.

1. “Ensure equitable access to quality early childhood education and care”. In the context of the findings of their study a particular focus was on access in rural areas.
2. “Promote family engagement in early childhood education and care”. This was seen as a critical element of quality care, however the study noted across the countries studied this was inconsistently part of training, and was identified by some staff as being a high priority for development needs.
3. “Give attention to the costs of high-quality early childhood education and care”. This was elaborated in the text as: “The central importance of responsive interactions for high-quality ECEC means that staff need to be able to give adequate individualised attention to all children. Therefore, staff in ECEC settings for children under age 3 need to be able to interact with children as part of small groups, even more so than at other levels of education. These smaller groups imply higher costs per child due to the number of staff required. The exact costs and the extent to which they are shared between public and private entities vary across countries and across ECEC settings within countries, but strong investment in the ECEC workforce and appropriate group sizes is necessary to ensure high-quality ECEC for children under age 3” (p. 24).
4. “Ensure staff initial training reflects the unique needs of children in this age group”. As noted this study addressed the ECEC needs of children under 3 years, and the study reported some diversity in the extent to which training specifically covered the needs of children in this age group.
5. “Review the working hours and the allocation of time across tasks in home-based settings”. A key element of the study were responses by educators, these highlighted very long hours of work undertaken by some of those providing home-based care. Specifically the report noted “Policy makers can review the working hours of staff in home-based settings with a view to providing flexibility to families, but also to protect staff against too long working hours. Regulated working hours can include time for tasks to be performed without children. Furthermore, developing networks of home-based providers can enable these staff to find time for tasks to be performed without children and to participate in peer-learning activities” (p. 27).
6. “Use monitoring to support process quality and quality improvement in all settings”. A key issue identified was “that monitoring must address both structural and process aspects of quality in addition to administrative and funding aspects. For process quality, monitoring needs to include staff’s interactions with children, their ability to adapt practices to individual children’s needs and interests, and support for parent/guardian engagement, with the objective to help staff improve their practices” (p. 28).

The remaining 4 ‘policy pointers’ were specifically directed at staff training and development. As well as reflecting variations across the countries studied, the focus on this aspect reflected a finding that “fewer than one-third of staff are satisfied with their salaries and most do not feel society values their work”. The study suggested that “Increased public investment can target staff salaries and the quality of education and training for staff to ensure that staff can work as professionals and to raise the status of the profession” (p. 32), before detailing the ‘pointers’:

7. “Ensure that all staff have opportunities and possibilities to develop their competencies throughout their careers”.

8. "Provide comprehensive training opportunities, including working with diverse families/children with special needs, and encouraging all forms of learning".

9. "Create options for career progression and ensure salaries are aligned with staff's education, skills and responsibilities".

10. "Investigate how to address some sources of work stress" (derived from pp. 20–23).

4.2.3 Forlin 2013 – Inclusive Education

Forlin et al (2013) prepared, for the then Australian Department of Education, a review of the "research and evidence-based literature regarding outcomes of inclusive education for students with disability". The review considered the breadth of definitions of inclusion, concluding "Attempts to define what inclusive education is are problematic" (p. 10), with this also impacting on measurement: "like conceptualisations of inclusive education, efforts to measure inclusion are complicated by differing perspectives and a lack of agreed viewpoints and criteria" (p. 12) and the scope of inclusion. In addition they noted that, while they were constrained by their terms of reference which was focused on disability, inclusion should not be seen simply as a disability issue.

From the literature review, and a review of practice across a number of countries, the paper identifies as key points emerging from international best practice:

> Good practice involves consideration of a wide range of aspects including: clear policy and guidelines for implementation; supportive and effective leadership; positive teacher attitudes; ownership, and acceptance; trained teachers, education assistants, and other personnel; involvement of parents in decision making; engagement of learners; flexible curriculum responding to individual need; a plan for ongoing teacher development; and the nurturing of communities of lead practice.
>
> At a whole school level the cultures, policies, practices, and ethos of a school need to reflect an inclusive philosophy that seeks to identify and eliminate barriers to learning and to provide access for all students. (p. 17)

In detailing these factors they argue that "successful implementation of policy reform and effective practice in inclusive education requires major changes in educational provision for all students" and that "policies must be localised and contextually appropriate while continuing to respond to a range of governmental, political and educational agendas that drive educational outcomes" (p. 15). Reflecting this last point they state "Australia should exercise caution in the wholesale adoption of any policies or practices from elsewhere without due consideration of context and the complexity of the jurisdictional educational systems that exist within its states and territories" (p. 36).

In conclusion they identify 10 points for moving forward:

- Collaboration across government departments, schools, family, para-professionals, education systems, and community is essential to advocate for inclusive education and to build the infrastructure necessary to support it.
- Close liaison across all jurisdictions is needed to ensure federal support via Commonwealth funding for inclusion considers the diversity of need both inter and intra state to enable equitable allocation of funding and resources to support students with disability.

- School systems would benefit from increasing the skills of teachers and principals/ leaders through consistent and effective training in inclusive education supported by appropriate policies.
- School systems would benefit from nurturing and developing teachers through specific mentoring programs designed to share the knowledge and skills needed to provide quality educational access for all students.
- High-quality initial pre-service training for teachers with practical, context-relevant input, and opportunities for extensive collaboration with highly effective practitioners is critical. Ongoing review and monitoring of this is important.
- A process for the monitoring of the implementation of the Disability Standards for Education in regards to students with disability at all levels (state, system, school, class) would ensure greater accountability.
- A shared approach across all service providers is important to proactively establish procedures for reducing the gap between high and low performing students and those who are marginalised due to disability.
- A process for consistently measuring and reporting student outcomes across jurisdictions and systems would ensure that data are available to record progress in academic and social domains.
- The wider role of special schools in supporting inclusive whole school practices could be reevaluated as more work is needed to ensure the best use of this invaluable resource.
- Care should be taken when implementing inclusion policies or practices from other countries with due consideration to Australia's diverse existing educational systems. (p. 40)

4.2.4 Vandenbroeck and Lazzari 2014 – Inclusive ECEC

Vandenbroeck and Lazzari (2014) draw both on the literature to develop a framework of analysis and then utilise "research findings from studies describing successful practices implemented within EU Member States within the last 10 years" (p. 330) to develop principles of best practice. The studies chosen were those "studies providing a thick description of outstanding programmes, which received research validation, that were informed by relevant theoretical background and that provided a punctual account of the context in which practices took shape and developed" (p. 330).

From their analysis they propose a "framework for the implementation of structural conditions promoting successful inclusive practices" comprising:

Policy level

(1) Public funding: direct public funding of provision (supply side financing) seems to be more efficient than funding parents (demand financing). The provision of public services for all and the streaming of additional funding toward disadvantaged families seems to be the most effective strategy.

(2) Integrating education and care systems: Where education and care services are integrated under one administrative department, they tend to have higher access, especially for the youngest children.

(3) Entitlement: Policies that accept that ECEC is an entitlement for all children yield better results than targeted policies (note that this does not exclude geographic priorities).

(4) Policies that regulate parental fees according to income may more easily avoid financial barriers, than voucher systems for the poorest.

(5) Quality monitoring: Centralised systems regulation and monitoring of the structural quality of ECEC settings can prevent children from disadvantaged backgrounds being more often found in poor quality services. It would be helpful also if policymakers would underwrite more research on this issue.

Provision level

(6) Democratic decision-making: pedagogical policies should reflect diverse standpoints about care, education and the upbringing of young children by engaging with families and local communities.

(7) Enrolment priority criteria need to be scrutinised carefully for their effects on different populations.

(8) Outreach: ECEC providers should actively engage with those marginalised groups that tend to be less visible within the local community.

(9) Flexible opening hours for those parents who work in difficult conditions.

(10) A diverse workforce: a workforce reflecting ethnic and cultural minorities gives a welcome message to minority communities. It also helps to broaden the understanding of the team in respecting diversity.

(11) Inter-agency cooperation: integrated centres that cooperate across sectoral and institutional borders (e.g. education, health, housing, adult education) yield better results both in the short-term – by addressing the complex needs of children and families living in difficult conditions – and in the long-term, by contributing to the regeneration of local communities.

Parental level

(12) Parental involvement: Parents should be listened to, meaning that staff has paid time and is supported to do so.

(13) Accessible and meaningful information, including multilingual information that deals with the concrete questions of diverse parents. (pp. 332–33)

4.2.5 Turner and Morgan 2019 – Inclusion and diversity in early childhood education

This listing, focused on the questions of inclusion and diversity in ECEC, is presented as part of a textbook developed to promote inclusive educational practice. Reflecting this it has a strong pedagogical element to it:

- Reflection on the image of the child - competent and capable of actively constructing their own learning.
- Getting to know the child – focussing on their abilities, from conversation with the child, and their family, from observation and from other documentation.
- Inclusive environments - thoughtfully designed environments that support intentional, structured interactions to scaffold children's growth and learning.
- Cultural competence – raising cultural awareness, building understanding, being respectful and open to different cultural perspectives.
- Intentional teaching – that the educator understands why they are doing what they are doing (the intentional act) and what strategy is required for the teachable moment, including recognising that their behaviour becomes a role model for students as to what is appropriate behaviour.
- Having high expectations of students – so that they can all reach their potential.
- Involving families including in helping families support and guide their child's learning and development in positive and effective ways.
- Empowering children -- enabling child agency and empowering them to engage confidently with their own learning and development.
- Adopting play-based pedagogy as a tool for inclusion and diversity (pp. 108–127).

4.2.6 Kyriazopoulou et al 2017 – Inclusive Early Childhood Education

Kyriazopoulou et al (2017) is a report from a three year project undertaken by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education which "aimed to identify, analyse and subsequently promote the main characteristics of quality inclusive early childhood education (IECE) for children from three years of age to the start of primary education" (p. 14). The recommendations of the project were:

> *To ensure that children's active participation and learning in IECE becomes a main goal of IECE provisions, policy-makers should:*
>
> 1. Support local IECE providers to reach out pro-actively to children and families and to listen to their voices.
> 2. Create the conditions for IECE settings to secure not only children's attendance, but also their engagement once they are there.
>
> *To ensure that children's active participation and learning in IECE becomes a main goal and process of IECE provisions, policy-makers should:*
>
> 3. Ensure that a holistic national curriculum sets as its primary goal and standard that all children are enabled to belong, be engaged and learn, both independently and with peers.
> 4. Ensure that assessment of children also accounts for the level of child participation in learning and social activities and of social interaction with adults and peers and for any support needed for this to take place.

To ensure that IECE settings have the capacity to welcome and involve all children, policy-makers should:

5. Ensure that initial and continuous education for teachers and support staff allow them to develop the competences necessary for welcoming and engaging all children in the IECE daily activities.
6. Ensure that practitioners are prepared to understand the cultural backgrounds of children and families as a factor for enabling their active participation in IECE.
7. Create the conditions for leaders of IECE settings to adopt an inclusive approach, to have the competence to create a welcoming, caring ethos and to enable collaborative responsibility for the benefit of each child's engagement.
8. Prioritise the development and use of tools for improving the inclusiveness of the IECE physical and social environment, as exemplified in the Self-Reflection Tool.

To ensure that IECE settings have the capacity to meet all children's additional needs, policy-makers should:

9. Ensure that the local community provides the expertise and resources to ensure that every child is able to attend, be part of the peer group and participate actively in the learning and social activities.
10. Promote collaboration among all sectors and disciplines, together with practitioners, families and local communities, to enhance the quality of all children's belongingness, engagement and learning.

For quality assurance to really centre on ensuring quality service to children in IECE, policy-makers should:

11. Ensure that statistical information collection includes an account of the number of children who are denied entitlement to quality IECE and of the types of barriers that prevent them from accessing it.
12. Ensure that service evaluations account for how far all children have opportunities for active participation, independent, self-initiated and social play and other activities.
13. Ensure the development of inclusion quality indicators for early childhood education by using, among other resources, the IECE project's Ecosystem Model and Self-Reflection Tool.

To ensure that policy-making impacts on the quality of IECE practice, policy-makers in different sectors and at different local, regional and national levels should:

14. Collaborate among themselves and with service providers to guarantee the quality and inclusiveness of IECE services through a shared understanding of inclusive quality issues, as exemplified in the Ecosystem Model of IECE. (pp. 48–52)

4.2.7 O'Connor et al 2015 – inclusive education for children with additional health and developmental needs

While primarily focused on principles relating to the funding of educational support for children and young people with additional health and developmental needs [AHDN], with a particular focus on Autism Spectrum Disorders, and encompassing the education system has a whole, the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (O'Connor et al 2015) proposed an approach with 9 guiding principles and a set of complementary strategies for implementation. The report argues:

> While empirical evidence is limited, research on approaches that best support children and young people with AHDN have highlighted a number of key principles that should be considered to develop an effective funding approach:
>
> - Focus support on the individual learning needs of students rather than just their diagnosis.
> - Load supports in the early years of primary and high school to reduce the likelihood of lasting learning disparities.
> - Ensure funding approaches are flexible to respond to children and young people's changing needs over time.
> - Establish effective partnerships between schools and families to achieve the best outcomes.
> - Provide more intensive supports to students from disadvantaged backgrounds who have AHDN.
> - Provide multidisciplinary supports to align with evidence-based approaches to intervention.
> - Use existing resources to complement and enhance funding approaches (e.g. Student Support Service, school nurses and visiting teachers).
> - Distribute funds according to the number/proportion of children with AHDN enrolled in particular schools.
> - Wherever possible, reduce incentives for undesirable behaviour (e.g. inflation of diagnoses for funding eligibility). (p. ix)

Complementing these the authors argue that "the proposed approach is contingent on the existence of a sustained, qualified and highly motivated teacher workforce " (p. 29), and call for enhanced monitoring and accountability, to build a better evidence base for interventions, and make interventions evidence based, and invest in evaluation and research (p. 30).

4.2.8 Mitchell – the elements of inclusive education

Mitchell (2008), as cited in Nilholm and Göransson (2017), presents, as part of a definition of inclusion, an approach which can be seen as reflecting what he sees as being the key strategies of best practice:

> Although the central feature of inclusive education is the placement of learners with special educational needs in age-appropriate regular classrooms in the learner's

neighbourhood school, it goes far beyond this. …I use the following 'formula' to describe what is involved:

Inclusive education = V + P + 5As + S + R + L: where: V = Vision; P = Placement; 5As = Adapted Curriculum, Adapted Assessment, Adapted Teaching, Acceptance, Access, S = Support; R = Resources; L = Leadership.(Mitchell 2008, 29)

4.2.9 Archambault et al 2020 – Access

A somewhat narrower frame is proposed in this study which was based on a literature review of papers on access[23] and then deriving a framework for access which draws upon established frameworks in the health sphere. The rationale for the project was evidence in the literature concerning the extent to which disadvantaged children are underrepresented in quality ECEC. The full model consists of both key elements of a policy to be implemented on the supply side, along with responses and necessary pre-conditions on the supply side. It is the first of these which is relevant here. This comprises 5 elements:

- Approachability – Information; Outreach; Diversity in languages; Use of technologies.
- Acceptability: Flexibility; Involving Parents: Cultural sensitivity.
- Availability and accommodation: Proximity; Sufficient number of spots; Equitable waiting list; Equitable access included in quality education.
- Affordability: Public funding and managing; Affordable; Free for families on social assistance or new migrants.
- Appropriateness: Quality; Tailored to needs; Partnerships and integrated services. (p. 347)

4.3 What might the elements of best practice be?

The literature while abounding with strategies and approaches, is somewhat weaker when it comes to substantive evidence on best practice. A number of researchers and others have sought to derive, from their understanding, lists of what they see as effective strategies. These provide a useful resource, and while they can by synthesised in a number of ways, it is considered that there are six important domains that emerge:

- Promoting access – for policies of inclusion to be successful strategies to promote and facilitate access are critical.
- Staff competencies and professional development – It is recognised that staff competencies (underpinned by sufficient resourcing) are critical to quality ECEC and inclusion in this. While

[23] Access is also considered in O'Connor et al (2020). This reports on the impact of the Australian government changes to boost preschool attendance through analysis of data from the Australian Early Development Census. The authors conclude: "This study suggests that concurrent to a policy of universal preschool access, preschool attendance rates have increased. From this observational data, we cannot definitively attribute the causes for the trends in preschool attendance that we have observed … Results also suggest that despite an overall trend of increased preschool attendance, inequities in preschool attendance for children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families remains a major challenge" (pp. 97–98).

there is much unknown about these, and how they are developed, PD appears to be important, in particular involving peer support.

- Partnerships with families – inclusion of children in ECEC services is not sufficient, rather there is a need for the inclusion of families, both directly, and as partners in children's development.
- External collaboration and partnerships – for many children who are vulnerable to exclusion ECEC cannot fulfil all the roles required to address the child's needs. There is a need for collaboration and partnership with those who provide these services.[24]
- A child centred approach – which focuses on abilities, recognises agency, and sets expectations.
- Effective monitoring and evaluation – this has many dimensions – knowing who is being included and who is not, understanding the extent to which children are achieving progress, and evaluating what works and what does not.

[24] The issue of inter-professional collaboration was considered by Fukkink and van Verseveld (2020). In this they report on their studies of a number of Dutch pilot studies which sought to build better collaborative links between ECEC services, and the wider environment of supports and pathways, for the children they were serving. They report that collaboration was seen as not just boosting team capacity and performance, but that those "with close links between staff contributed to professionals' perception of inclusive ECEC" (p. 369). They emphasise that from their research the evidence was that building such networks did however take long term investment.

5 Legal

Inclusion in ECEC operates within a broader national legal framework regarding inclusion, and in particular limiting discriminatory conduct, especially with respect to race, ethnic background and disability. In addressing this question Foreman (2015) in a paper prepared for the Victorian Department of Education and Training identifies this framework as one of the drivers, talking of there being "at least three principal drivers of inclusive practice: social justice principles, legislative requirements, and research findings or evidence" (p. 4).

This section considers the framework, firstly in terms of the main instruments in Australia, followed by the English and United States approaches, focusing on both the framework and the issues which arise. It then considers questions of best practice relating to the balance of legislative and other strategies in achieving inclusion, followed by an examination of some aspects of exclusion, including the role of disciplinary actions such as suspensions and expulsions.

5.1 Australia

Key elements of the Australian legislative framework which relate to varying degrees to ECEC services include:

5.1.1 Education and Care Services National Law

All approved child care providers must comply with the Education and Care Services National Law (National Law). This is consistent national law legislated by all states. The key objectives of the legislation concern the health, safety and wellbeing of children attending these services. There is an underlying focus on "continuous improvement in the provision of quality education and care services" including the "educational and developmental outcomes for children" (Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 (Vic), Schedule Section 3(2)). In addressing the guiding principles of the quality framework enshrined in the legislation, it emphasises "that the principles of equity, inclusion and diversity underlie this Law" (Section 3(3)). The Ministerial Council has the power to establish regulations on the "requirements and standards of inclusion policies" (Section 301).

More generally the regulations under this Act establish the National Quality Standard that, in addition to having inclusion as a guiding principle, identifies a range of aspects of inclusive behaviour. These include programs that enhance "each child's learning and development" (1.1) and "each child's health and physical activity" (2.1). The standard also addresses an inclusive physical environment (3.1.1, 3.2.1, 3.2.2) and the promotion of collaborative partnerships with families and communities. It notes that "Effective partnerships support children's access, inclusion and participation in the program" (6.2.2) (ACECQA 2018a).

State and territory government regulatory authorities are responsible for licensing and approving child care providers and services, quality assessments, monitoring compliance and investigating complaints.

5.1.2 Racial discrimination

Section 13 of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) makes it unlawful for a person who supplies goods or services to the public, or a section of the public, to either refuse to provide these services, or provide them on less favourable conditions, "by reason of the race, colour or national or ethnic origin" of the person seeking to access the service.

5.1.3 Disability discrimination

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) (Section 24) makes it is unlawful for a provider of a good or service to discriminate on the grounds of disability. This is constrained by Section 29A, which provides that it is not unlawful "to discriminate against another person on the ground of a disability of the other person if avoiding the discrimination would impose an unjustifiable hardship on the discriminator".

More specifically in the education sector this legislation is underpinned by the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Ruddock 2005). However, while these standards apply to "preschools, including kindergartens" (S1.5 Note 1(a)), the clause continues "(but not child-care providers)". The Department of Education, Skills and Employment in a discussion paper for the 2020 review of the standards (DESE 2020) reports that while both the 2010 and 2015 reviews of the standards "recommended considering extending the application of the Standards to child care providers" (p. 2), this had not occurred.

5.1.4 Other legislation

These legislative provisions supporting inclusion are however only one part of the legislative framework which may have a bearing on inclusion. Shaddock et al (2007) notes this as "the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classes raises issues about the interplay of different legislation, e.g. the Occupational Health and Safety legislation and the Disability Discrimination Act, particularly around challenging behaviour" (p. 83). Little other literature was found discussing the issue of the balance of legislative rights and responsibilities in the context of inclusion in Australia.

5.2 England

Blackburn (2016) explains the legal and regulatory framework for inclusion in England as:

> Currently in England, the rights of young children (aged birth to 5) with developmental delays and disabilities are embodied within The Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years … and Part 3 of the Children and Families Act … both of which relate to provision for children with SEND that have been informed by successive EI [early intervention] reports. The Children and Families Act and CoP [Code of Practice) are cornerstones of recent SEND reforms, the aspiration for which was the equal participation of children, young people and their parents in decisions being made about local services, and a focus on improving education and outcomes for children and young people. The Code (section 5.1) states that all children are entitled to an education that enables them to achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes.

> Early childhood providers must have regard for the revised CoP and ensure that they also comply with associated duties in the: Equality Act …; Early Years Foundation Stage …; and Working Together to Safeguard Children. (p. 241)

The English SEND code of practice "Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years, Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities" (Department of Education (UK) 2015), referred to above, is an extensive, 291 page, document. It states that "All early years providers are required to have arrangements in place to identify and support children with SEN or disabilities and to promote equality of opportunity for children in their care" (p. 81). It further details a range of specific actions that need to be taken, including an obligation on health bodies to identify whether children have, or are at risk of developing a SEN, and to report this to the child's parents and to the local authority. Following on from this there are linkages to specialist services.

At age 3 more formal processes are in place, including a requirement for early years practitioners to:

> review progress and provide parents with a short written summary of their child's development, focusing in particular on communication and language, physical development and personal, social and emotional development. ... If there are significant emerging concerns (or identified SEN or disability) practitioners should develop a targeted plan to support the child, involving other professionals. (p. 83)

While the more specific 'Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage' (Department of Education (UK) 2017) again refers to these assessment processes, there is no substantive discussion of inclusion, and in relation to special education needs the document simply states:

> Providers must have arrangements in place to support children with SEN or disabilities. Maintained schools, maintained nursery schools and all providers who are funded by the local authority to deliver early education places must have regard to the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice… (p. 31)

Three issues arise with respect to this framework. The first is the extent to which it actually constrains discriminatory activity. The second is the extent to which it leads to adversarial and legalistic resolution. The third is the extent to which actual inclusion has been achieved. The first two of these were addressed by the House of Commons Education Committee 2019 (special education needs and disabilities) in their review. Regarding the first they report:

> We have found a general lack of accountability within the system. We do not think that the current approach to accountability is sufficient – the absence of a rigorous inspection regime at the beginning set the tone of a hands-off approach. This has been perpetuated by the fact that those required, or enabled, to 'police' the system have been limited in part by an apparent unwillingness to grapple with unlawful practice, while others are limited by the narrowness of their remit. (p. 3)

With respect to the second the report contains some discussion of the dispute resolution process. It reports that in 2018/19 the number of appeals to the first level tribunal (which was responsible for the initial hearing of cases) had increased by 26 per cent, and that the tribunal had to postpone 77 per cent of its listed hearings. It also noted that 89 per cent of cases were resolved in favour of the appellant. It also reports that a second stream of resolution through the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman had seen a 150 per cent increase in complaints about the EHCPs

[Educational Health and Care Plans] – with 87 per cent being upheld (p. 41). This led them to conclude:

> Navigating the SEND system should not be a bureaucratic nightmare, difficult to navigate and requiring significant levels of legal knowledge and personal resilience … Those without significant personal or social capital therefore face significant disadvantage. For some, Parliament might as well not have bothered to legislate. (p. 19)

Finally it is noted that, despite the focus on inclusion, at least in the formal school sector, there is evidence of growing segregation. "The number of pupils in state-funded special schools has increased by 6,400 (5.3%) to 128,100, continuing a trend seen since 2006. The number of pupils in non-maintained special schools has also increased, by 100 (3.2%) to just under 3,800" (Department of Education (UK) 2020). Further examination of this data indicates that 44.7 per cent of students with an EHC plan attend a special school or a Pupil Referral Unit, as do 11.4 per cent of those with SEN support but without a plan. Overall, taking account of all identified SEN recipients, 35.8 per cent attend such separate education services.

5.3 US

The US also has a strong legal framework. In a joint, 2015, Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children With Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs by the US Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Education the key components of this are detailed as:

> Part C of the IDEA [Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act] requires that appropriate early intervention services are made available to all eligible infants and toddlers with disabilities in natural environments, including the home, and community settings in which children without disabilities participate, to the maximum extent appropriate, factoring in each child's routines, needs, and outcomes".
>
> …under Part B of the IDEA, special education and related services are to be made available to all children with disabilities ages three through 21, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the least restrictive environment (LRE) … and presumes that the first placement option considered for each child with a disability is the regular classroom the child would attend if he or she did not have a disability. … Each LEA [local education agency] must ensure that a free appropriate public education (FAPE) is provided in the LRE to every child with a disability in its jurisdiction regardless of whether the LEA operates public general early childhood programs.
>
> In addition, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability. Title II of the ADA prohibits discrimination by public entities, regardless of receipt of Federal funds, and protects children with disabilities from unlawful discrimination in early childhood programs, activities and services operated by state or local governments, including public school districts. … In addition, Title III of the ADA prohibits discrimination in places of public accommodation, such as private schools, private child care programs, or private preschools; regardless of whether an entity receives federal funds. Section 504 prohibits discrimination by public or private entities that receive federal financial assistance. (US DHHS & DE 2015, 8-9)

Costanzo and Magnuson (2019) present analysis on the use of child care in the US, using household survey data.[25] They report that children with an identified disability participate more strongly in formal centre based care, rather than relying upon either informal care or parental care alone. Specifically the analysis finds "children with a disability are 50% more likely to be in center-based care compared with parental care, and 25% less likely to be in informal care compared with center-based care" (p. 219)[26]. They however find this pattern is not consistent across the income distribution:

> The results of our analysis suggest that policy supports may not be reaching the most economically disadvantaged families. The fact that higher-income families with children with disabilities are more likely to use center-based care compared to informal care but that this difference in care arrangements is not found for lower-income families—and the magnitude of the association is smaller—likely reflects differences in privilege (p. 220).

Potentially reflecting this outcomes for lower income households, or treating the question in absolute rather than relative terms, Novoa (2020) reports that not only do parents with a child with a disability report having greater difficulty in finding care but that "despite civil rights protections enshrined in laws such as the IDEA and the ADA, children with disabilities often fail to receive the services to which they are entitled" (p. 12).

A second dimension to this legislative approach is the extent to which, similar to the UK, this leads to what may be considered to be excessive, inequitable, or inefficient litigation and related action. Shipley (2002) presents some of the case law relating the child care centres and the ADA and Section 504. Marsh (2019) reviews trends in special education in the US and England, with a focus on the number of children identified as having special education needs under the two policies as well as trends in process complaints in the US, and tribunal appeals in England. The research suggests there were large regional disparities in the proportion of children identified as having additional needs, concluding "while there may be good reasons for some variations, the large differences suggest that policy makers have interpreted guidance from their national governments into the workings of the various education acts in very diverse ways" (p. 235). With regard to complaints and appeals he reports:

> The findings also show significant variations in dispute resolution complaints in both countries. The highly litigious states of New York, California, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania together with the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico account for 80% of all DPCs. In England, the top five LAs for Tribunal appeals are all from London, which also seems to be suggestive of local factors such as the availability of legal advice and well-organized parental support groups. (p. 236)

An alternative perspective on the value of legislative provisions in the US is provided by the California Department of Education. In a publication promoting inclusion, citing both the ADA and specific state legislation, it concludes:

[25] While the detailed analysis used pooled data from 1995 to 2012, the broad findings are reflected in the data for 2012 alone.

[26] In the analysis they recognised that while there was a possibility that one reason for this apparent result was that centre based services were more likely to identify a disability, their analysis concluded that while this may be the case for some of the diagnosed disabilities, more factors than this were at play.

> The Americans with Disabilities Act and California's Unruh Civil Rights Act … make it illegal for a child care provider to refuse to serve a child solely on the basis of a disability. There is, however, a significant difference between providers who enroll children with disabilities or other special needs because it is the law and providers who reach out and welcome all children into their care. (Department of Education (California) 2009, 12)

5.4 The role of legal rights

The literature shows a diverse approach to the role of legal rights, relative to other instruments, in achieving inclusion. Before addressing this, recent studies find that notwithstanding current legislation in the school sector in Australia access is inhibited in a way which would suggest discrimination.

- Iacono et al (2019) in a recent review of the literature, including a particular focus on government reports, analysis by advocacy organisations, and associated documents, report "a clear gap between policy and legislative intentions and practices in schools" (p. 264). Specific issues identified included exclusion through 'gate keeping' and other restrictive practices, low expectations, lack of reasonable adjustments, inappropriate use of education support staff, and a failure to consider parents and their concerns.
- Some aspects of this were also considered by the Senate Education and Employment References Committee inquiry on education access for students with disability. In considering the education system as a whole, reports: "While for all students, full-time enrolment is both the legal obligation and the norm, many parents found that, for students with disability, this obligation was not met" (Australia.Senate 2016, 25).

In some cases the literature suggests it is a matter of education and communication.

For example Jenkin et al (2018) in discussing options for Victoria, recommends that action be taken to "ensure that the rollout of the new funding model (and all associated guidance and tools) raises school staff and parent awareness of schools' legal and policy obligations to make reasonable adjustments, and how these obligations are to be fulfilled in the context of the new funding model" (p. 51).

This was also addressed in the Deloitte (2017) Review of education for students with disability in Queensland state schools. This included:

> Recommendation 4-1: Legislative and policy awareness
>
> - The Department should revise existing policies to ensure alignment with legislative obligations and, in particular, that the imperative to improve outcomes for students with disability is adequately reflected. This recommendation can be implemented immediately.
> - The Department should ensure legislative requirements are translated into accessible guidelines. The support available for principals to navigate this area – including access to inclusion coaches and training – should be promoted widely and expanded if necessary. (p. 62)

This recommendation was however qualified by noting "The Department should be mindful of not emphasising legal obligations without commensurate support and guidance" and that "Improving awareness of legislation is unlikely to have an impact in its own right. Awareness of and compliance … would need to be supported by cultural change, improved understanding of disability and how changes in practice can be implemented" (p. 62).

A lesser role for legal enforcement is echoed in a number of other studies and reports. These tend, in particular to place much greater emphasis on the role of educators.

The Irish National Disability Authority report on the 'lessons from research and international practice' relating to inclusion in ECEC and conclude "it is the practice of inclusion (with appropriate support) which has been found to reduce barriers rather than any legal instrument. (National Disability Authority (Ireland) 2011, 56) and before detailing the following learning:

> Legal instruments alone will not ensure access to mainstream preschool service for young children with disabilities. In Ireland. Instruments such as a code of practice or the adoption of an agreed set of inclusion indicators would bring clarity to roles and responsibilities in relation to inclusion in ECCE settings. However, training and capacity building for ECCE staff is important in enabling these settings to fully embrace inclusion. (p. 83)

This position is again repeated in the report of the first year of operation of the new Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) program in Ireland: "International experience and research evidence suggest that building capacity and providing training to Early Learning and Care practitioners is more likely to break down barriers to the inclusion of children with disabilities than legislation or other legal instruments" (Department of Children and Youth Affairs (Ireland) 2019, 19)

A meta-analysis of research into teachers' attitudes to inclusion led van Steen and Wilson (2020) to declare:

> The move towards inclusive education has gained momentum in the past few decades. For example, educational legislations which mandate inclusion are now in effect across the world … Despite such legalisation, it is classroom teachers who determine the success of inclusion. (p. 2)

This is echoed in Purdue (2009) who reports that "despite these inclusive and non-discriminatory laws and policies, literature suggests that teachers, management and others in some early childhood settings discriminate against children with disabilities and seem to readily exclude them" (p. 133). Reviewing some positive outcomes she noted that in contrast "A facilitator of inclusion, then, is one in which centres not only have written policy statements in place to remind teachers and managers of their legal obligations to include and teach all children, but also has teachers and others who can put those policies into practice. Early childhood settings may have written documentation reflecting inclusive policies, but these have little bite unless they are acted on" (pp. 137-138).

Shaddock (2012) raises a different perspective on the question of the role of the law and enforcement, which is particularly pertinent in the light of the experiences of the UK and US with appeals and review. He argues:

> In regard to legal accountability and compliance with the Disability Standards for Education, there is a strong argument for complementing the complaints-based

approach with a routine monitoring of compliance, preferably by an external authority such as the State's/Territory's Auditors General. Research shows the very positive effects on a student's learning of good relationships between the home and school and such relationships can be compromised when it is left to parents to 'take-on' their school or system over their compliance with the Disability Standards. (p. 22)

5.5 Exclusion

While legislation has potentially played a role in promoting access, offset against this are exclusions through the suspension and expulsion of children with special needs or other vulnerability from services. This is considered here, firstly with respect to the extent to which this is an issue, and secondly with regard to policies addressing the issue.

5.5.1 Incidence of exclusion

The most cited quantitative material on this in the literature are Gilliam (2005) and Gilliam and Shahar (2006), with these studies being used as a source for many of the statements of this being a problem, although the ongoing existence of such behaviour is confirmed in research such as Conners Edge et al (2018) which is discussed further below, along with it being identified in a number of more qualitative studies and reflected in policy documents.

Gilliam and Shahar (2006), from a survey of preschool teachers in Massachusetts, reported that: "during a 12-month period, 39% of teachers reported expelling at least one child, and 15% reported suspending. The preschool expulsion rate was 27.42 per 1000 enrollees, more than 34 times the Massachusetts K-12 rate and more than 13 times the national K-12 rate" (p. 228). It found that "larger classes, higher proportion of 3-year-olds in the class, and elevated teacher job stress predicted increased likelihood of expulsion" (p. 228).

In Australia a more recent insight is available from the June 2019 survey of parents using child care services undertaken by Orima. Data from this survey (Orima Research 2019) indicates that an estimated 1.3 per cent of parents reported that they had to change the child care service they were using because of such an exclusion. Exclusion was much more frequent (5.0 per cent) for those parents whose 'reference child' was identified as having additional needs. It was also elevated (4.0 per cent) for those parents where, while the reference child was not identified as having additional needs, another of their children was.

While only limited data is available on these forms of exclusion in ECEC services, much more is available relating to the education system, including the experience of young children in Australia. Baker (2019b) reported that more than 600 kindergarten children had been suspended in New South Wales schools in 2018, over double the number in 2014. In Queensland it was reported that more than 1500 prep children, aged 5 years, had been suspended in 2019 (Lynch 2020). Turning more generally to expulsions in the education system, in NSW, Baker (2019a) reports that "students with a disability make up 20 per cent of the school population but more than 40 per cent of those suspended".

While these data point to somewhat of an escalation of the incidence of such suspensions, it is noted that the Senate inquiry into education of children with disability, which reported in 2016, included a recommendation that "the government work with states and territories to establish a process for the collection and publication of information about levels of access and attainment for

students with disability. This should include information about: … (e) suspension and expulsion rates" (Australia.Senate 2016, 71)

5.5.2 Practices and policies to respond

The 2015 US Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs identified the need for policies to counter expulsions and suspensions. It noted that "A lack of program capacity to manage challenging behavior or social-emotional developmental delays may be barriers to inclusion and may contribute to expulsions and suspensions" (US DHHS & DE 2015, 17), before proposing:

> As such, all early childhood programs should have access to specialists who can build capacity in working with young children, with an emphasis on fostering social-emotional and behavioral health. States should implement early childhood mental health consultation (ECMHC) models or age appropriate positive behavior intervention and supports (PBIS) frameworks. Practices like ECMHC and PBIS, both of which generally consist of staff capacity building paired with external specialized support, have been shown to reduce and prevent expulsion and suspension in early learning and school settings. (p. 17)

Martin, Bosk and Bailey (2008) undertook in depth qualitative research into teachers' attitudes with respect to expulsions of children in child care and preschool. From this they report finding a pattern as to how these occur, and identify some strategies to respond. With regard to the 'patterns' they report:

> Analysis of our data suggests the path to expulsion has several regular steps. First, teachers attempt to identify triggers for challenging behaviours, but for children who are ultimately expelled they cannot find triggers, and this makes teachers' work difficult and frustrating. Second, expulsion is more likely when teachers and parents do not have a shared understanding of the challenging behaviours. In these cases, teachers experience parents as being uncooperative in working to address behavioural issues. Third, outside interventions recommended by specialists were sometimes helpful in changing challenging behaviours. However, if parents did not follow through or if recommendations for changes in the classroom were not feasible, expulsion was more likely. Fourth, childcare providers' work is exhausting. Teachers become discouraged when they cannot find ways to intervene in challenging behaviour, often leading them to connect lack of progress with a poor family environment. Implicit bias may play a role in these assessments. Fifth, programmes often impose an ultimatum that functions as a mechanism for removing the child and family in a short period of time. Ultimatums that require improved behaviour or an action on the part of the family in a specified time frame never led to the prevention of expulsion. Finally, while teachers reported feeling both a combination of relief and regret after expulsion, we found their self-efficacy was challenged, leaving them to feel demoralised. (p. 95)

From their analysis and the literature they cite a number of policies which may be effective in breaking these pathways and reducing expulsions. They contextualise this as:

> preschool and childcare expulsion is an adult action, informed by adults' biases, practices, and relationships and situated within an ecological context full of structural

> constraints. Furthermore, these data suggest that expulsion is a process that unfolds over time allowing for intervention at multiple points. Policy and practice should take these aspects of expulsion into account. (p. 96)

Specifically they identify the potential of Early Childhood Mental Health Consultations (EHMC) and EHMC support teachers as an instrument for breaking the pattern noting that these can "provide information on developmentally appropriate expectations, the role that trauma plays in challenging behaviour, non-punitive behavioural management and the effective engagement of parents" (pp. 95-96).

Dinehart et al (2013), in a study which focused on children in ECEC who experienced maltreatment drew upon their own research and the literature to suggest that: "reducing rates of expulsion and supporting children in a quality system of care is said to require: (a) promotion of age-appropriate social and emotional development, (b) prevention of mental health issues for both children and their families, and (c) intervention with young children facing mental health concerns (p. 287).

Conners Edge et al (2018) report on the initial phase of a program being implemented in the Arkansas ECEC sector. Their research reports that "42.9% of directors had suspended or expelled one or more children in the previous year. Permanent expulsions were less common, with only 9% reporting expelling a child in the past year" (p. 327). Of note in this initial evaluation was, reflecting the above finding of Dinehart et al, the identification of an association between expulsions and children who had experienced traumatic events. The policy they were evaluating sought to implement change in six areas: Establishing fair policies, including through altering standards and mandating changes; Ensuring a highly skilled workforce – through training materials and opportunities; Increasing access to specialised support – through the *BehaviourHelp* system; Seeking to promote family partnerships; Promoting the use of developmental and behavioural screening; and Setting goals and tracking data (p. 321).

5.6 The legal framework – developing best practice

The literature would suggest on balance that there is a strong case for robust legal underpinning to inclusion. At the same time care needs to be given to the way in which this is enforced. Specifically systems which appear to rely heavily upon individual parents to seek enforcement through appeal rights and similar mechanisms, not only involve a heavy operational burden, but appear to favour those in the community who can pursue such processes. In this regard some external monitoring and enforcement, underpinned by clear and authoritative communication of the underlying legislative responsibilities upon providers, appears to be an alternative strategy. Within the Australian framework the exclusion of child care services from the Disability Standards for Education appears to be an anomaly.

At the same time the literature suggests that to be truly effective these mechanisms also need to be underpinned by actions and processes to increase the commitment of those involved in provision to the principles of inclusion. Much of the literature points to a critical role for the attitudes of educators and providers.

A second major limitation of the legislative pathway to access, is the role of expulsions and suspensions. Clear policies and strong practical support appear to be important mechanisms. As well as playing a central role around enhancing commitment to inclusion, PD makes a large contribution to both strengthening the capacity of educators to deal with difficult behaviours, and understand,

and manage the processes of escalation of issues which often lead to suspension. Understanding trauma may be significant in this. There may also be, in this process, a need to more clearly articulate the intersections of different legal responsibilities, including those with respect to Occupational Health and Safety.

Underlying these processes is a need for improved information – on problems of access, and on the incidence and circumstances of expulsions and suspensions. This information is critical to both monitor the extent to which participation in ECEC may be constrained, and for the development of practical responses. From an inclusion perspective it is essential that this data also provide information on child characteristics, including whether they are vulnerable or have additional needs.

6 Funding

The Salamanca statement firmly identified the importance of funding in achieving inclusion:

> The development of inclusive schools as the most effective means for achieving education for all must be recognized as a key government policy and accorded a privileged place on the nation's development agenda. It is only in this way that adequate resources can be obtained. Changes in policies and priorities cannot be effective unless adequate resource requirements are met. … The distribution of resources to schools should take realistic account of the differences in expenditure required to provide appropriate education for all children, bearing in mind their needs and circumstances. (UNESCO 1994, 41)

6.1 Introduction

However, while there is strong agreement on the need for, and importance of resources for successful inclusive practice in ECEC, this issue is not well developed in the literature. There appear to be a number of reasons for this:

- A key area of focus on inclusion in ECEC is the importance of the provision of high quality ECEC services, with inclusive practices being an implicit element of high quality.[27] Hence the focus is on the funding requirements of the ECEC sector overall to enable it to deliver high quality services.
- The primary focus of almost all of the literature on the costs of inclusion relate to the costs of inclusion in the education system. This focus in turn means that the specific circumstances of the ECEC sector in providing both education and care services, and the potential costs of inclusion with respect to care is poorly developed.[28]
  - Additionally, within this, the focus tends be specifically on the costs associated with children with disability, with very little regard for those who may face exclusion or disadvantage on other grounds.

[27] This is made explicit for example in Odom et al's (2011) depiction of a "growing realization that the definition of quality must reflect the need to customize early care and education practices to ensure that every child—those with learning or behavior difficulties, identified disabilities, and from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds—can reach his or her full potential" (p. 349).

[28] While there is a significant literature on the 'education/care dichotomy' in ECEC, including Hayes 2007, Van Laere, Peeters and Vandenbroeck 2012, Sims 2014, Rentzou 2020,and Nolan 2020, the utility of most of this is relatively limited for this review. This is because the focus of most of this addresses the extent to which policies which see the under threes as needing care, ignore the important educational aspects of care. Underlying this also is the divide, in many countries, between infant care and ECEC which involves dual systems and differentiated workforces. As such very little attention is given to addressing the question of the workload involved with providing personal care, or the extent to which these needs vary across children including the impacts of additional needs including disability. While it can be suggested that some insight into relative care needs can be garnered from the age specific minimum staff to children ratios which are adopted in most countries which provide higher staffing ratios where the care of infants is involved, again the literature is limited in relating this to the tasks actually involved.

  - The focus on education system funding may also be driven in the interest of much analysis on the relative costs of 'special education' facilities, compared with provision in inclusive facilities.

- The massive diversity of different funding systems, frequently involving, to very much varying degrees, different tiers of government, and multiple responsible agencies, as well as varying requirements for user payments, makes much of the literature very specific to the circumstances in which any analysis is undertaken

6.2 European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

A major recent analysis of the funding of inclusive education in the school sector has been undertaken by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. This was a project undertaken over a number of years with key outputs being a 'Background Information Report' published in 2016, which drew upon the literature and the findings and policy statements of national and supra-national bodies; a 'Synthesis Report' in 2018 which included six country case studies; and a final 2018 'Summary Report' in which they identify a 'Framework of Policy Issues, Factors and Drivers'. Although focused on inclusion in the education system, its analysis and findings can be considered as having some relevance to these questions in ECEC.

6.2.1 Background Information Report

In addressing the question of financing this background paper noted that "the question of financing inclusive education struggles to establish itself as a major recurring study topic, as it raises controversial points and can lead to ineffective comparisons" (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2016, 13).[29]

It stressed however the case for attention to the subject in broad terms:

> There is a need for a satisfactory overview of the financing of inclusive education. Education can be effective and equitable without knowledge of the actual sums spent. However, obtaining this information, together with measures of outcomes, would help in understanding the degree to which this is true. (p. 17)[30]

The paper, in addition to highlighting a central question for resolution, also picks up the issue of the relationship between inclusion and high quality care:

> Therefore, some of the main challenges in funding inclusive education lie in the ability to transform resource allocation into learning outcomes and to try to identify the most cost-effective interventions to improve learning according to different learners' needs in inclusive systems … More specifically, 'quality learning' could be identified as the main aim for all learners and, in certain cases, it could be put into practice by re-thinking resource allocation. (p. 19)

[29] One specific issue raised in the paper was that "the lack of quantitative and qualitative data raises questions about the cost of inclusive education compared to special education" (p. 17). This is a strong finding in the light of the body of literature which asserts a disproportionate cost for lower outcomes in the special education sector.

[30] It can though be argued that the need for understanding goes well beyond this broad question to being an integral element of the assessment of specific components and strategies and in determining what represents the most cost-effective strategy to adopt.

While the paper presents some analysis of models for funding – in particular the input (funding related to the number of identified children with needs); throughput (funding related to the actual activities undertaken); and outcome (on student outcomes) models[31], the actual discussion of these is limited by the extent actual approaches using these methods are closely linked, and sensitive, to the structure of national systems and features such as multiple levels of government involvement and different degrees of decentralisation. Nevertheless it notes a range of limitations with the different approaches before reporting: "the different funding models (input, output and throughput), which produce different strategic behaviours, but cannot be understood or judged outside of the context in which they are implemented. [and concluding that] …All in all, there is no perfect model as each one has its pros and cons" (p. 30). While broadly supporting decentralisation of financing, the paper cautions: "decentralised financing methods can only be an option if the entire funding system has checks and balances. It is acknowledged that it can only help to implement inclusive education if it is centrally monitored and if all actors are prepared and aware" (p. 44).

The final conclusion of the paper reflects, not only the limited specific evidence base for consideration of best practice arrangements, but also the extent to which literature and debate across the whole of the inclusion space is highly polarised, with this impinging upon the 'evidence base':

> In order to trigger a change towards more effective resourcing of inclusive education, it would be useful to have data on financial allocation and expenditure to reflect on how schools, systems and countries themselves can change their systems, the path that has been followed and how efficient and sustainable it has turned out to be. Suspected negative findings on the financing of inclusive education, or the perceived struggle for systems to put theory into practice, with society and governments striving for inclusion in education but yielding few results, and powerful stakeholders who use their influence, do not serve as conclusive evidence. It is difficult to establish whether efforts have been sufficient or if the trend can be changed. However, all of these issues show how much can still be done and the abundance of room for improvement. (p. 45)

6.2.2 Project Synthesis Report

This second report (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2018a) sought to "support the development of a Policy Guidance Framework by highlighting decisive levers for reducing disparity in education through efficient, cost effective and equitable funding mechanisms" (p. 7). Central to considerations was the construction of approaches which would be effective in "providing incentives for a school-development approach that supports schools' social responsibility towards inclusive education" (p. 8). More specifically, the report identified 'three critical factors' for effective resourcing:

[31] It is noted that this model has a number of other conceptualisations. O'Connor et al (2015) describe it in terms of "Input funding (demand-driven, categorical) – Allocating individual funding based on child or young person's diagnosis and/or severity of need; Throughput funding (base funding) – Allocating grants to schools/districts. Amount of funding can be made proportionate to need, e.g. by using census data. Appropriate for children and young people with mild-moderate needs (estimated 16-18% of the population); and Output funding –Allocating funds based on achievement scores. For instance, schools with achievement scores in the lowest 10% may receive additional funding. Additional funding based on improved student learning outcomes. (p. 11–12). See also Mitchell (2015, 126–130) and Brussino (2020, 49–52).

- A political commitment to the right to education for all learners. Key drivers may be connected with countries' financial commitment, with their commitment to excellence for all and with investment in developing support measures for learners.
- Resourcing mechanisms that embed inclusive education in local contexts within a community-based approach. Key drivers may involve embedding inclusive education as a key task and area of responsibility at all decision-making levels. This may also be achieved by promoting schools' social responsibility towards inclusive education.
- Resourcing mechanisms that promote a school-development approach. This may be achieved by moving from a needs-based approach to a whole-school approach, and through resourcing mechanisms that encourage the development of inclusive learning communities. (pp. 8–9)

The overall rationale for the proposed approach is reflected in the more detailed discussion in the report. Key elements of this include:

> According to participating countries, an extended understanding of educational needs promoting excellence for all is another key driver supporting political commitment to inclusive education. Recent reforms embedded inclusive education policies in an agenda aiming to increase school systems' ability to meet all learners' right to education, rather than focusing specifically on disability issues. (p. 21)
>
> However, embedding inclusive education issues in general funding may not appropriately cover the costs of support staff needed to address the range of a pupil's learning needs. Therefore, participating countries allocate extra funding to schools for providing adapted teaching and intensified support to learners experiencing difficulties in coping with school demands and who are at risk of failure. These resources are allocated to schools, without requiring the learners to be officially labelled by a multi-disciplinary team. Schools are expected to give learners the same opportunities as their peers in learning and achievement. Needs identification and the support provided to learners are the schools' responsibility. These additional resources may include specific programmes dedicated to groups of learners at risk of failure, as well as to schools located in deprived areas or in areas at risk of social and economic disadvantage. They may also involve activation of pedagogic and didactic measures, such as temporary/mobile groups for specific subjects, personalised pedagogic and didactic measures or remedial education. (pp. 28-29)
>
> The provision of incentives for a school-development approach supporting schools' social responsibility towards inclusive education is another key resourcing issue ensuring high-quality systems for inclusive education. When resourcing moves from a needs-based approach to a whole-school approach that combines performance and equity, it leads schools to assume responsibility for developing innovative forms of teaching dealing with everyday equity, teaching and learning challenges. It is an incentive for improving commitment and performance at school level and for reducing costs that are not quality-related. (p. 58)

6.2.3 Summary report

The third, summary report, (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2018b) is a short report aimed at policy and decision makers. The report identifies 4 core cross-sectoral issues and within each a number of 'critical resourcing factors' and then key drivers of these. At the issues and resourcing factors level the key elements of this are:

Ensuring learners are effectively included in appropriate educational opportunities

- A political commitment to the right to education for all learners.
- Embedding inclusive education in local contexts within a community-based approach.
- Promoting a school-development approach.

Promoting a school-development approach to inclusive education

- Providing incentives for a supportive learning environment.
- Promoting school autonomy.
- Embedding inclusive education in supportive quality assurance mechanisms at school level.

Providing innovative and flexible learning environments

- Enabling capacity-building strategies.
- Enabling special settings to act as a resource for mainstream settings.
- Embedding inclusive education in professional development.

Ensuring transparent and accountable systems of inclusive education

- Network governance strategies promoting integrated systems for inclusive education.
- Moving from procedural control mechanisms to accountable systems for inclusive education.
- Embedding inclusive education policies in a quality assurance system. (pp. 10–13)

6.3 What resources are needed

Central to the question of best practice with regard to financing are questions around the actual level of resources needed. This is considered here, firstly in terms of a question as to whether inclusion in ECEC requires additional resources, relative to ECEC in general, and secondly if it does, then what level of resources may be required.

6.3.1 The need for additional support

As has been noted elsewhere, one line of argument is that there are no additional needs to support inclusion besides what is required to enable the provision of high quality childcare.[32] Offset against

[32] In this regard it can be argued that if the 'high quality care' was funded to the point where it had excess resources for its immediate needs it would be able to absorb any additional costs which might arise if a child with particular needs sought to apply. As discussed in the text the weakness of this conceptualisation is the

this are a number of studies which indicate that such a need exists. Johnstone et al (2019) cite some of the pre-existing literature to establish a broad framework of a need for additional resourcing:

> … inclusive education is an approach to transforming systems so that they will be responsive to all children. [Researchers] also note, however, that inclusive education is particularly concerned with the participation and success of students who have been marginalized and historically excluded from mainstream systems[and] that such an approach focuses on equality of opportunity through the provision of equitable systems; that is, some marginalized children need more (resources, time, attention, etc.) in order to have the same opportunities and chances of success as those who have historically benefited from education systems. (p. 342)

This issue of some children requiring additional resources to achieve the same outcomes is placed within Sen's Capability Framework[33] by Felder (2018) as:

> This view takes it that freedom is incomplete if the social resources for its realisation are left out of consideration. This is exactly what the conversion problem addresses: Disabled people, like other disadvantaged groups in society, need more resources in order to get the same results and hence, to be free. (p. 66)

The need for additional support was also identified, in terms of the education needs of children with a disability, by Shaddock (2012). In this he also commented on the potential funding approach which could be used to respond:

> there is now more support for an approach that provides base funding for each student and supplementary assistance that recognises what additional support a student needs in order to learn. For example, the Review of Funding for Schooling chaired by David Gonski … recommends base funding with loadings for socio-economic status, Indigenous background, school size, school location, English proficiency and disability. This is definitely a good start. (p. 19)

Other researchers have relied on comparisons with the level of resourcing in some services to illustrate what they see as the need for a higher level of provision.

Citing the research she undertook in her PhD, Blackburn (2016) reports on the level of resources in special provision in ECEC services in the UK and the factors which have given rise to a need for this, as:

> The [staff to student] ratio in special education was 1:2 or 1:3. This was necessary to support children's care and hygiene needs and was in all cases led by a qualified teacher with a postgraduate qualification and in most cases additional postexperience training (i.e., in-service training) in augmentative and assistive communication methods as well as intensive interaction. Intensive interaction is an approach to teaching the prespeech fundamentals of communication (such as giving attention to

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uneven distribution of children who may have additional needs across services, leaving some under and some over resourced.

The alternative basis for this argument is that providing additional education and care services to children with higher needs does not involve any additional demands on services and their staff, the balance of material considered here suggests this is not the case.

[33] See, for example, Sen (1992, 85–87).

> another person, sharing attention, taking turns, sharing eye contact) to children and adults who have severe learning difficulties and/or autism, and who are still at an early stage of communication development. (p. 243)

While providing somewhat less detail, Lundqvist, Westling and Siljehag (2016) reported on their study of Swedish pre-schools, in which they compared comprehensive and specialised services. They note:

> The resources were not as good in the comprehensive preschool units as in the specialised preschool units … The comprehensive units had fewer staff members per child, fewer teachers per child and larger groups of children in the units. There was also variation in the resources between the comprehensive preschools. Date [a pseudonym for one of the services] had the most generous resources. The staff in the comprehensive units also voiced feelings of inadequacy more often than the staff in the specialised units. One opinion expressed was that it was not always easy to support the less able children when all the other children in the group were to be supervised, cared for and educated all at the same time. (p. 132)

6.4 The magnitude of support

Most of the literature on the relative costs of provision associated with inclusion concerns the school education system. This is quite extensive and goes back some decades. Some of the key references to this are in Gray (2019). While ECEC specific material is limited some insight can be obtained from looking at the approaches adopted in the school and preschool sectors in Australia. With regard to the school system the issue of loadings for students with disability is considered in the recent National School Resourcing Board (2019) report of December 2019. Support for the preschool sector in contrast varies significantly across Australia. Here the initial consideration is on the findings of the Board.

Support needs in the Australian school system

Specifically the National School Resourcing Board report concluded that relative to a Base cost of $11,343 (the Schooling Resource Standard) for a student in primary school there should be additional loadings of:

- $4,764 (42.0 per cent) for 'Supplementary' – this is defined as support for circumstances where "Students receive adjustments that are supplementary to the strategies and resources available for all students in the school. The adjustments occur for particular activities at specific times throughout the week".
- $16,561 ((146.0 per cent) for 'Substantial' – defined as "Students have more substantial support needs, and receive essential adjustments and considerable adult assistance. Adjustments to the usual educational program occur at most times on most days".
- $35,390 (312.0%) for 'Extensive' – defines as "Students have very high support needs and are provided with extensive targeted measures and sustained levels of intensive support.

Adjustments to the usual educational program occur at all time. (Derived from National School Resourcing Board (2019)[34]

Additionally, as well as specific loadings for school location (regional and remote), and size, there are also loadings within the system for:

- Socio-educational disadvantage with an average value of $942 in 2018.
- Indigenous students. This is allocated on the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders at the school with the rate of supplementation under this loading being determined by the proportion of students at the school who are Indigenous. The rate of the loading ranges from 20 per cent of the SRS when there is just one Indigenous student, to 120 per cent if all students were.
- Low English language proficiency. This is a loading of 10 per cent of the SRS for students with parents from a language background other than English, and whose parents had only a low level of educational achievement.

In making their recommendations on the loadings the review largely endorse the current structure and magnitude of provision noting: "the evidence gathered by the Board is not definitive enough to recommend specific changes to the loading settings at this time" (p. vi). It went on to call for the development of a more substantive data base over a two year period as an Education Council priority.

Support for inclusion in preschools

As shown in Table 2 the structure of preschool in Australia varies. Two archetypical approaches exist. In South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, the Northern Territory, and Australian Capital Territory preschool is effectively delivered through the education system – in government schools and private schools and to a much lesser degree through a mix of providers – essentially a schools based preschool system. In contrast, in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, the school sector plays a relatively minor role with preschool delivered through the Centre Based Day Care sector being the main form of provision – along with some 20-30 per cent which is delivered through community based preschool services.

Associated with these differences are large differences in fee structures, with preschool being free in some locations and charged in others. Associated with this is the extent to which funding is provided to support service activities, or as an offset to parent charges.

[34] Dupree and Augenblick (2006) in a report for the New Jersey Department of Education provide a range of estimates based on various size schools indicate that, relative to the base cost which varied from $7,863 to $10,057 per student, the additional cost of a student with mild additional needs was between $1,203 and $4,487, a child with a moderate need $10,974 to $16,495, and for a child with severe needs $30,657 to $69,840. The additional cost for a preschool disabled child varied between $19,261 and $27,437 (p. 11).

Table 2: Provision of Preschool in Australia by sector and state, 2019

	NSW	Vic.	Qld	SA	WA	Tas.	NT	ACT	Aust.
	Composition of preschool education delivery (%)								
Government school	4.1	10.7	1.9	46.1	54.7	49.6	61.5	37.2	15.9
Private school	1.8	2.6	3.1	3.2	19.8	14.8	2.9	2.6	4.5
Community	22.0	31.2	23.1	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	19.9
Other	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Mixed provider type	6.4	9.3	4.1	18.7	19.7	12.9	22.4	24.4	9.6
Within CBDC	65.7	46.1	67.8	31.4	5.7	22.7	13.1	35.9	50.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics: Preschool Education, Australia, 2019.

These differences in structure have quite large implications for the form of support for inclusion. In large part the states, which deliver preschool through the education system, use their more general education inclusion models to provide support in preschool, including the loadings approach discussed above under the National approach. In these systems the focus on inclusion as a policy is largely directed at children with disabilities, while the broader social inclusion is supported through mechanisms such as loadings for low SES locations. A number of the states also have at least an element of special education. South Australia, for example, in addition to broad support within their preschools, have specific locations with identified inclusive preschools which have a disability focus and specialised teachers, and special education in areas of speech and language, including deafness and visual disabilities. Tasmania, while not providing direct funding to services, has four Early Childhood Intervention Services which provide for a more integrated approach to the provision of support to families with children with a disability or developmental delay from birth to school entry. This role includes providing support to the kindergartens which these children may attend. Additionally there are initiatives such as the Working Together Pilot, which is currently being ramped up (Rockliff 2019), and is aimed at providing up to 400 hours of early education to high needs, mainly disadvantaged, three year olds, along with family support. The education component of this is largely being delivered through existing ECEC services. The state also has specific support for gifted children (Department of Education (Tasmania) 2020). Western Australia, in addition to having formula based support in state schools, provides financial support for kindergarten education offered by non-government schools. This ranges from $2,497 per student in high fee schools to $6,600 for remote, sole provider, Aboriginal community schools. (WA Department of Education 2019). The level of formula based funding is derived through the 'Student Centred Funding Model'. This encompasses a per student rate, school based loadings based on size and location, and student based loadings responding to Aboriginality, disability (the major component), educational adjustment – which responds to educational underachievement, children without English as their first language, and social disadvantage (Nous Group and CIRES 2018).

Systems in other states tend to be more complex. In NSW, as shown in the table, most preschool education is provided in Centre Based Day Care. The funding of this differentiates between 'equity enrolments' – based upon the SEIFA of the location and children from Aboriginal families, and 'non-equity' funding. It has a 50 per cent loading for the equity group. NSW support for inclusion in community preschools has two elements. The first is a traditional individualised disability component provided through the grants based Disability and Inclusion Program, and secondly

support for broader social inclusion, along with a loading for disability, through the Start Strong initiative. The Disability and Inclusion Program has four components: 'higher learning supports needs funding'; funding for minor capital works to facilitate inclusion; sector capacity building – support for services to enhance their capacity to be inclusive – and identify their barriers to inclusion; and up to 20 scholarships per year for community preschool staff to undertake specialist education. The major element is the 'high learning supports needs funding which is focused on individual children, and requires them to have a formal diagnosis, or development assessment, and involves the development and implementation of an Individual Learning Plan for the child, with funding available for this process, and for additional staff to provide direct support for the child (NSW Government 2020a). Start Strong funding has several elements. These encompass a formula basis, with a 50 per cent loading for services in the most disadvantaged SEIFA locations relative to those in the most advantaged, and additional 'equity funding', loadings and subsidies. Under equity funding, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from low income (Health Care Card/Pensioner Concession Card) families, and children with disability and additional needs, are all eligible for the top SEIFA rate of the formula based component, regardless of their location. This also applies for the third, or above, multiple order child. There are additional regional location loadings (20-30 per cent of the base rate depending on location), and for children with English language needs (10 per cent of base rate). However a substantial amount of the Start Strong funding is not provided as support for services' activities, but rather provided on a conditional pass through basis, which requires an identified proportion of it is to be used to offset fees charged (NSW Government 2020b).

The primary inclusion intervention in Victoria is through the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Program. This has two foci: children with disability; and children with complex medical needs, described as "children with complex medical needs, who do not have a disability" (Department of Education and Training (Victoria) 2016, 4). The program is based on a service's need for support to enable it to include an identified child, with an assessed, or under continuing assessment, identified disability, or developmental delay. Funding is available for specialist consultancies and training, additional staffing (but not as one-on-one aides), and minor building modifications. Assessment of applications is through a devolved network of 12 auspicing community service organisations. In addition Preschool Field Officers have a role in providing support to kindergartens in providing inclusive programs, and the state supports specialist Early Start and Best Start, including Aboriginal Best Start projects.

The base funding provided by the Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme (QKFS) is $2969 for Kindergartens and $1,753 for Long Day Care Services. Remote areas have a 50 per cent loading, and Kindergartens operating in the lower two quintiles of SEIFA locations receive loadings of 45 per cent and 20 per cent, while LDC services in the bottom quintile receive a 20 per cent loading. There are some restrictions on how these funds can be applied. Additional subsidies are provided through QKFS Plus Kindy Support for low income (Health Care Card holders) children, Indigenous children, and higher order multiple birth children, but these are required to be passed through as offsets to fees charged. Specific inclusion support is provided through the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Scheme (KISS), which is operationalised through the 'Central Governing Bodies'. These are 5 provider organisations, with each kindergarten in the state being required to be a member of one (Queensland Government 2019). This devolution occurred in 2019 and replaced the former Disability Inclusion Support for Queensland Kindergartens which provided three tiers of support ($2,000 to $8,000) for children with a diagnosed or suspected disability. The state also operates

complementary early childhood development programs and services to support children aged 0 to 5 years with significant educational support needs arising from a diagnosed or suspected disability. A disability is defined as including autism spectrum disorder, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, physical impairment, speech-language impairment and vision impairment (Queensland Government 2020).

In considering these different state approaches, and more broadly the nature and role of preschool education in Australia, the Smith Family has recently reported on the first stage of a research program into access to preschool by disadvantaged children, as finding that "children with disability and those impacted by trauma are regularly excluded, either prior to access, or after enrolment" (The Smith Family 2019, 8), and that:

- The Australian evidence base … is lacking. Information about current initiatives and their evaluations is not strategically utilised across the nation to foster innovation and evidence based policy development.
- Australian research with families from disadvantaged backgrounds regarding their participation in preschool is limited. (p. 7)

6.5 Some challenging areas

While there are a number of areas of contention, and uncertainty, around funding systems, three specific issues which frequently emerge are: the extent to which input models, those based upon having levels of funding responsive to the level of needs, are in conflict with the broader goals of inclusion in terms of not labelling children, and whether they tend to lead to mislabelling; secondly is whether under these models, the resources should be attached to the individual or the service; and thirdly, the use of funding to employ aides attached to individual children.

6.5.1 Input models – labelling and perverse incentives

With respect to input models, also variously referred to as 'bounty' models, or in the case of the Netherlands where the funding is portable with the child as the 'backpack model', Meijer and Watkins (2019) report European research, in the school sector which:

> suggests that increased spending may be an indication of: 'schools' need to label learners as having SEN that require additional support … This interpretation is supported by the fact that many European countries indicate that the increased spending on the education of learners in need of support is coupled with a rise in the number of learners identified as having SEN … One interpretation of this fact is that modes of funding in countries may firstly 'incentivise' the labelling of learners as a means of attracting additional funding. (p. 711)

This is similarly echoed by Banks, Frawley and McCoy (2015):

> This model is thought to hamper inclusive practices in that they encourage labelling and can promote, and even reward, the segregation of students with SEN…
>
> Some also argue that where students are individually assessed, the true purpose of assessment can become thwarted into a process described by some commentators as 'diagnosis for dollars' and 'bounty hunting' … Despite its criticisms, a number of

> countries have taken steps to return to input funding models to ensure that student needs are met. (p. 928)

Johnstone et al (2019) while echoing the above points about the input approach, also note however that other forms of funding are not immune to distortionary conduct:

> Input (per-capita) models allow for funding to follow children, but as they are currently used in Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland they may also be vulnerable to overidentification of children with SEN…. However, throughput models may also be susceptible to municipality-level corruption and may minimize the agency of teachers who are on the front lines of educating children with SEN. (p. 353)

Phair and Davis (2015) undertook a small qualitative study of the impact of the 2013 English extension of funding to two-year old children. This involved the extension of access to children identified as being at risk including "low-income families, children with additional needs, or those who are more likely to experience economic disadvantage, for example, children looked after by the local authority" (p. 1464). In their report they noted that the question of identification was integral to the capacity of services to respond:

> The funding is allocated to children who are socially deprived; if the staff are not aware of how the child is deprived, they cannot work to provide better outcomes for the family: having a knowledge of why the funding is in place is the first step to identifying the needs of the family. (p. 1473)

The issue of identification was also addressed by Forlin et al (2013) in the context of a wider discussion of the possible application of the Finnish model, which placed much less reliance upon formal identification, to Australia. Specifically they note the importance of labelling in providing a workable solution for the targeting of assistance to those schools who had children in need of support. They argued:

> Currently, there seems little support for the reduction of directed funding for students with disability in Australia. Due to the existing disparities already noted … a bounty approach type model would seem pertinent in order to ensure equitable access to education for disadvantaged groups. Australia should, therefore, exercise caution in the indiscriminate embracing of any inclusion policies or practices from other countries without due consideration of the application of these to the context of the diverse existing educational systems. (p. 39)

Of note also in this quote are the reservations held by the researchers concerning simplistic adoption of overseas practices, even if they may be seen as being good practice or effective in their national context, given the diverse contexts in which national education and education funding systems operate.

A second dimension to these questions is whether, if an input model is to be used, should it be based upon individual identification, or drawn more generally from population data (if this is available). There did not appear to be any substantial discussion of this, although it is noted that in some cases it is a question answered directly through the methodology. For example the 'back pack' approach necessarily involves individual identification.

6.5.2 Service or Individual

The second challenging question concerns the extent to which any additional resources, if in response to the identified needs of one child, or a specified group of children, should be used specifically for that child (and indeed if so should this be with input from the child, or the child's parents), or be used by the service to maximise their inclusionary activities.

On this one the balance of practice and in the literature is towards the flexible use of the resources at the service level. This was clearly the finding of the research underlying the Irish National Disability Authority Briefing Paper 'Inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream early childhood care and education –The lessons from research and international practice' which reported:

> The National Disability Authority advises that the following core approach to the Early Childhood Care and Education be carefully considered by the Department of Health, and by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs … Supports for inclusion should not be attached to the individual child with a disability but should be directed at the whole ECCE setting. (2011, 3)

Similarly Schreyer and Oberhuemer (2017), report that in the Netherlands: "since 2014, financial resources for children with special educational needs are no longer reserved for individual children, as was the case previously; instead they are distributed to the relevant settings over a regional funding pool" (p. 5), with Halfron and Friendly (2013) reporting that in Sweden "funding for inclusive child care is intended to support the centre as a whole and not to provide a worker allocated to a specific child" (p. 54).

Notwithstanding these positions, there is some contention around this approach, in particular from some parents. The NSW Parliament Education Committee, in their report on the Education of students with a disability or special needs noted this in reporting that:

> some stakeholders raised the concern that targeted funding received to support individual students was being used flexibly, to support students not in receipt of targeted funding, or diverted for other purposes … Parents expressed concern that using targeted funding in this way could have a negative effect on the educational outcomes of the student who was eligible for targeted funding … Parents commented that there was a lack of consultation regarding the use of funding. (Legislative Council NSW 2017, 82–83)

This theme is also seen in the Victorian research by Jenkin et al (2018). This indicated that "while eligibility for PSD [Program for Students with Disabilities] funds attaches to an individual student, the disbursement of those funds does not. Schools have significant discretion in how to use PSD funding" (p. 44). It then reported that

> Interviews with parents of children in receipt of PSD funding revealed considerable dissatisfaction with this arrangement. Several parents expressed frustration that the funds their child had secured for the school would not be used in the specific way that they wanted: … These parents also expressed a mixture of either concern that their child's needs might not be fully addressed through the employment of a shared aide, and/or confusion as to why the funds secured by their child would be distributed to support other children. (pp. 45–46)

6.5.3 Aides

A somewhat related issue is that of aides attached to, or responsible for, a single student.[35] This was addressed by the Irish National Disability Authority, with a finding that "the focus of support has shifted from placing one adult to support an individual child to supporting a whole setting to include a child" (2011, 4).

The subject was also addressed by Iacono et al (2019), who, under the heading "Inappropriate use of education support staff" report:

> In a review of the literature and Australian practices, Punch (2015) noted that Education Support staff often make curriculum adjustments. Further, while the presence of these staff can reduce harassment and bullying, their constant close proximity can have the added consequence of stigmatizing and isolating students with disability … making them more vulnerable when the staff member is not present … the recent UN General Comment No. 4. on the CRPD (2016), having Education Support staff directly attached to a student did not constitute inclusion.[36] Further evidence of inappropriate reliance on these staff comes from reports that students are sent home if the staff member is not present, or can attend school only part-time because of insufficient funding for full-time Education Support staff. (p. 269)

A more contested position is reported by Landor and Perepa (2017) who discuss the role of learning support assistants (LSA) in the UK, with particular reference to students with Asperger syndrome.

> In a systematic review of support staff in mainstream schools, Alborz et al., (2009) concluded that LSAs needed to find a balance between encouraging learning and participation, and the possible impact of their presence on the pupils' social interaction in the classroom (p. 132) …[from study observations] It seems then that LSAs in this study were practising what Alborz … suggested about the importance of being a general helper rather than being attached to the child and were aware that this can improve social inclusion and prevent stigmatising, but this view was not held by all members of the staff in this setting.(p. 138)

[35] Punch (2015) presents a very extensive literature review of the use of aides. The report's conclusion was "It is apparent from the literature that reliance on the use of integration aides to support students with disabilities in general education settings has several serious unintended consequences for the academic, social, and independence outcomes of these students. It is also clear from the examples in the literature that individual schools can improve the ways in which they use integration aides, reduce their reliance on aides, and increase the quality and extent of teacher instructional time with students with disabilities" (p. 37).

[36] Iancono et al attribute this to Poed, Colognon and Jackson (2017). This paper states that students attending "with direct attachment of a teacher aide classified as 'integration', not inclusion (paragraph 11)." This would appear to be a form of interpretation, including around the nature of the role played by an aide. The relevant sections of paragraph 11 appear to be "Integration is a process of placing persons with disabilities in existing mainstream educational institutions, as long as the former can adjust to the standardized requirements of such institutions … Placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without accompanying structural changes to, for example, organisation, curriculum and teaching and learning strategies, does not constitute inclusion" (UN 2016).

6.6 Principles for funding

As with section 4 the literature on financing also includes some checklists to seek to define best practice. Meijer and Watkins (2019) in their writings about the project detailed in Section 6.2. conclude:

> Building on the European Agency's previous activities, recent work examining effective financing policies systems … has led to the identification of four cross-sectoral issues for developing inclusive education systems:
>
> - There is a need to ensure finance strategies promote and lead to educational inclusion, not exclusion
> - There is a need to ensure funding mechanisms support school teams to take responsibility for meeting all learners' needs
> - Effective funding mechanisms are an incentive to inclusive education when they promote capacity building that empowers stakeholders to develop innovative and flexible mainstream learning environments for all learners
> - Effective funding and resourcing systems are clearly linked to regulatory frameworks focusing on overall system governance, accountability and improvement. (p. 717)

Drawing upon the literature, Mitchell (2015) proposes a set of principles for the funding of special needs education. While these relate to the school sector they in large part have applicability to ECEC as well:

1. The funding of education and special education is extraordinarily complex.
2. In efforts to resolve funding issues, the starting point should not be with how to fund special education, but rather with how to fund general education.
3. There is no single, 'best' funding model. Every model has strengths and weaknesses, incentives and disincentives, and positive and negative outcomes that may affect different students differentially, so a combination of funding models seems desirable.
4. From an economic efficiency viewpoint, it is best to allocate resources where they will do the most good, for example, to early identification and intensive education for students who struggle with learning, and in ways that support system or school policy, for example, improvements of students functioning in the lowest quartile.
5. Resources should be allocated in ways that are coherent with, and promote, system policy, for example, towards greater inclusivity, lifting the performance of all students and particularly those functioning in the bottom quartile and improving equity. There are sound pedagogical and financial rationales for using resources to further integrate special and regular education.
6. Funding should be flexible enough to meet the needs of children who experience complex needs.

7. Undue perverse incentives and disincentives should be avoided.
8. Resources should be directed to approaches for which there is evidence of effectiveness in improving students' learning outcomes.
9. Arrangements to ensure accountability, including the monitoring of the use of resources and outcomes for children, should be included.
10. Funding should be transparent and equitable, with individual schools clear about the resources available to them.
11. Funding should be allocated in ways that give schools the flexibility, within appropriate accountability frameworks, to implement practices that work for them and assist teachers to meet the learning needs of SWSEN [Students with Special Education Needs] in the context of accountability for a quality education for every student. (pp. 136-137)

6.7 Approaches to financing

Three key themes can be drawn from the literature on the financing of inclusion:

- Literature on the financing of inclusion in ECEC is sparse. While some insights can be derived from the education literature, this has some limitations and does not address the substantial care role ECEC services. Additionally it is noted that most ECEC services do not have the scale of educational institutions, and their organisational structures tend to be simpler.
- While there is debate on the best funding approaches, it would appear that the input model has particular merit for consideration.
  - A key consideration here concerns the uneven distribution of children with additional needs across services (and across locations), and the small size of services which means they can be disproportionately impacted by even a small number of children with special needs.
  - However more generally there appears to be agreement that there is no single best way in which to provide resources for inclusion, but rather each has some disadvantages.
- Where additional funds are provided, the balance of studies suggested that best practice is leaving the decision making on application of these resources to the service. It is noted however that parental expectations around this need to be addressed.

7 Meta-analyses and literature reviews of inclusion-related literature

This section summarises some of the key research studies that have sought to bring together research on inclusion, in particular as it relates to early childhood education and care. In doing so the boundaries of these spheres have been treated flexibly. A limitation of the inclusion literature to the ECEC sector alone is very restricting, and potentially misses many of the broader learnings about inclusion in education and child development. Similarly while most of the literature considered here relates to the inclusion of children with disability, some concern broader questions of inclusion of children at disadvantage. This is more consistent with the approaches to inclusion now more generally being adopted.

The literature has been grouped into three sets. The first are studies primarily concerned with academic and similar reviews of the literature, with a particular focus on the impact of inclusion. On the whole these are papers which have been subject to peer review. The second are a smaller set of studies focused on the state of practice and policies. The third are papers which, while conceptually similar to a number in the first category, have been prepared from a specific standpoint, usually as advocacy documents for inclusion. While these, very frequently, cite from the same set of literature as has been used in the more academic reviews, this is generally done in a non-critical way, and without attention to the nature of the study and constraints identified by authors, or in some cases the balance of results. Rather the approach appears to reflect a focus more on those aspects of studies which are seen as being more positive to the perspective of the author, and the findings are frequently generalised beyond the scope of the specific study. This approach tends to ignore the specificity of much of the research and the nuances of particular findings. It should though be noted that this grouping is not entirely clean, but it has been maintained to assist working through the material.

In some cases the literature has been cited in earlier sections, and there may be some overlaps in material.

7.1 Reviews of the academic literature – general

A *Critical Review of the Early Childhood Literature* was undertaken by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (**Warren et al 2016**). This was focused on "studies that examine the benefits of preschool for three-year-old children, particularly children from disadvantaged backgrounds and Indigenous children" with a focal interest on the extent to which these interventions provided developmental benefits. While the review considered a breadth of the literature, it was primarily concerned with the evaluation findings of a number of specific interventions. The seven studies they chose to examine all had highly robust evaluation methodologies involving longitudinal cohort studies, randomised control trials and natural experiments. The studies involved both universal and targeted programs in a range of European settings and the United States.

The key finding of the review was that "The international evidence examined in this review was consistent in suggesting that providing high quality three-year-old preschool has long-term benefits … [studies] show meaningful benefits of preschool with many extending into adolescence and/or adulthood …the strongest evidence coming from programs targeted at the most vulnerable". (p. 45)

From their review the researchers make a number of recommendations central to the question of inclusion:

- The evidence is clear that disadvantaged children have the most to gain from high quality ECEC programs, and disadvantaged children (including those from low SES, CALD, and Indigenous families) would therefore benefit from the provision of high quality three year-old preschool. Preschool programs need to be of the highest quality when they are targeted to disadvantaged children to achieve the desired long-term benefits….
- Programs should have a reasonable dosage of at least 20-30 hours per week across school terms. (pp. 52-53)

Göransson and Nilholm (2014) focus on two issues in the literature on inclusion over the period 2004–2012. The first was the definition of inclusion, the second was a set of research studies and the extent to which these were methodologically robust, comprehensive, and whether or not they found that interventions created more inclusive approaches. With regard to the first they report finding some 4 major conceptualisations of inclusion in the literature they studied:

> (A) Placement definition – inclusion as placement of pupils with disabilities/in need of special support in general education classrooms
>
> (B) Specified individualised definition – inclusion as meeting the social/academic needs of pupils with disabilities/pupils in need of special support
>
> (C) General individualised definition – inclusion as meeting the social/academic needs of all pupils
>
> (D) Community definition – inclusion as creation of communities with specific characteristics (which could vary between proposals) (p. 268)

In addressing the second issue the authors initially provide their assessment of some of the previous major studies of the literature in the field, in particular Dyson, Howes and Roberts (2002) and Artiles et al (2006). In the case of the first they conclude that while the analysis and descriptions were worthwhile "the conclusions [of positive inclusion outcomes] are not warranted by the data" (p. 271), while the second was challenged more on methodological grounds and described as having a "problem of lack of clarity with regard to defining what studies count as studies of inclusive education and, thus, how conclusions about inclusive education are arrived at" (p. 272). In the same journal Dyson, the lead author of the first of these studies, responded to Göransson and Nilholm indicating "we had serious doubts as to how robust the evidence actually was to support such a suggestion [of factors underpinning inclusion]. At the time, we concluded that the problem was that inclusive education was a relatively young field that had not yet developed a robust empirical evidence base", and that "It is worrying, therefore, that over a decade later, Görannson and Nilholm should reach similarly depressing conclusions about the field – and, indeed, should find our own assessment of the research evidence to be, if anything, a little over-generous" (Dyson 2014, 281).

They then undertake a review of the literature using four criteria related to methodology and scope, scanning an initial 1,087 articles of which just 20 met any of the criteria, but even then "we had difficulty finding methodologically sound studies that answered to our criteria. In fact, we did not find any" (Göransson and Nilholm 2014, 273). Of particular note was that very few considered both social and academic outcomes or utilise a full population, or representative sample selection of the pupils affected. More so only 2 of the studies found the education environment being more inclusive as a result of the policy/practice change (pp. 274-275).

They conclude "It should be obvious that we are not comfortable with the status of the field. There is a definite need for clarity regarding what is meant by inclusive education … We also found a scarcity of research that succeeds in establishing factors and/ or interventions that increase levels of inclusion in schools and/or classrooms in relation to a specified definition of inclusion" (pp. 276-277).

The sparsity of research literature in some fields is highlighted not just in some of the above but in a number of other studies. For example **Westerveld et al (2016)** sought to examine the literature on literacy skills of preschool children with ASD and found only three studies. While these provided some insights more broadly, they report the situation as "highlighting the current lack of research regarding emergent literacy development in children with ASD" (p. 45). In identifying a strong case for greater attention to be given to initiatives to support literacy in early intervention for this group, they conclude: "Research into emergent literacy is … vital to provide an empirical basis to formulate early detection and intervention strategies to improve literacy in children with ASD to support their participation in education, and ultimately facilitate improved long-term outcomes" (p. 46). This was also the case with **Crawford et al (2014)** who examined supporting inclusive play for children with disability in ECEC, where from an initial 2,672 articles they identified 9 for review.

Lindsay (2007) presents a review of the literature between 2000 and 2005 with a focus on the extent to which inclusion of children with special education needs (SEN) in the education system – from preschool to the end of compulsory education, was effective over a range of child outcomes. He notes that while 1,373 papers were identified with respect to the 'effectiveness' of inclusive education, only 14 studies met the criteria of being quantitative, rigorous, and comparative, that is identifying the outcomes of inclusion in mainstream classes relative to special classes or other approaches and of the comparative outcomes of children with SEN and typically developing children. He describes the balance of the literature as "Other papers presented qualitative studies of inclusive practice, some using non-comparative case study methods but others reporting descriptions of practice, which may include respondents' judgments" (p. 8). The studies he considered focused on a range of outcomes including academic performance, social relationships, language, self-concept and behaviour. The findings were summarised as "The evidence from this review does not provide a clear endorsement for the positive effects of inclusion. There is a lack of evidence from appropriate studies and, where evidence does exist, the balance was only marginally positive" (p. 2).

In his review he also makes some reflective comments on the studies. With respect to the two pre-school studies which were in his set of studies, Rafferty, Piscitelli and Boettcher (2003) and Buysse, Goldman, and Skinner (2002), he identified some characteristics of the studies which raise some

questions about the extent to which they robustly identified generalizable outcomes, or whether the results were in part reflective of the specific environments and child characteristics.[37]

While **Forness (2005)** does not address inclusive ECEC in any substantive way in his consideration of the education system, he provides a substantive analysis of issues associated with evidence-based practice with respect to special education for children with emotional or behavioural disorders. In doing so he draws extensively on the literature and reviews its relevance and findings in the context of evidence-based practice. In part he is motivated by the broader debate on the role of special education, a sector with which he identifies. In approaching the question of evidence-based policy he notes the critiques of this approach: "Postmodernist critics in particular tend to view disability primarily as society's failure to accept individual … Such [special education] intervention is not in accord with their vision of social justice; and thus, research suggesting that certain special education interventions can be effective is considered inconsequential, since limitations of any disability are deemed to be overcome primarily through acceptance and inclusion" (p. 311).

Three key issues identified in the paper relate to "(1) the nature of acceptable evidence; (2) the sustainability of evidence-based practice; (3) the overlap of learning disabilities and emotional or behavioral disorders" (p. 311), and more generally, notwithstanding his positioning within the special education sector, he argues a need for a more general recognition of mental health issues and treatments across the education system.

Rose et al (2010) focus on a narrow set of literature: Irish literature on special and inclusive education between 2000 and 2009. The literature is considered relative to policy, provision, experience and outcomes. With respect to policy they note that across the education sector as a whole, while legislation and broad policy has moved towards strong support for inclusion, actual practice has been less consistent. The paper also notes that even when parents have been able to gain access to mainstream education for their children they continue to face challenges with the education system including communication and attitudinal barriers. Provision encompassed a number of themes including teacher education and the role of para-professionals. With respect to the latter group it is noted that in Ireland the issues identified were somewhat different to those in

[37] Specifically he noted that Rafferty, Piscitelli and Boettcher (2003), which is often cited in the literature as providing evidence of the gains from inclusion, was undertaken in "a US preschool setting, where between 53% and 75% of the children in the inclusion classes had disabilities and all children in segregated classes had disabilities. The former contained 12 to 18 children, 1 special education teacher and 1 early childhood teacher; the latter contained 6 children, 1 special education teacher and 1 aide. The children in the inclusive classes had higher levels of functioning at pre-test but using a covariance model the study found an interaction between settings and degree of disability. Type of setting had no differential impact on children with low levels of disability in terms of either language ability or social competence, but children with severe disabilities in inclusive settings had greater gains than those in segregated classes. The very high proportion of children with disabilities raises questions about whether these classes can be considered inclusive."

Buysse, Goldman, and Skinner (2002) is a US study which is frequently used as evidence of the social outcomes of inclusion. The analysis was questioned over the extent to which there may have been an interaction effect. The study comprised 333 pre-school children (120 with disabilities and 213 who were typically developing (TD)) attending one of two forms of inclusive early childhood programmes: specialized settings which had a majority of children with disabilities, and child care settings where the opposite was the case. Disability covered a wide range of problems including deafness, autistic spectrum disorder and mental retardation. Children with a disability in the child care setting were found to have had more playmates and were more likely to have a TD friend than those in specialized settings. Lindsay notes that this could be due to the differences in availability of TD children in each setting.

other countries as the 'special needs assistant' role was focused on care needs, rather than as having a pedagogical role (although this focus is also criticised in some of the literature which argues for an enhanced role, underpinned by increased training and prestige, and the use of resource teachers. At the same time they cite some issues on the scope of the approach, in particular the extent "that inclusion has in the past been largely regarded as a SEN issue, but a rapidly changing demographic within Ireland in terms of ethnicity and religion, partly emanating from increased immigration bringing children from unfamiliar cultures and with new languages to the country, demands a reappraisal of the ability of schools to meet a widening range of needs" (p. 365). With regard to experience they note that "Once pupils do gain mainstream access they often make good social progress but confront obstacles in respect of assuring appropriate academic … Most pupils report a positive attitude from teachers towards them as individuals but perceive that this is often not backed up by teaching that is wholly suited to their individual needs" (p. 368).

Their finding on outcomes was that: "The literature review reveals that little research has been conducted into the outcomes of SEN interventions or inclusive school provision in Ireland. Where outcomes are reported they are more likely to be discussed in relation to pupils' social performance than their academic attainment" (p. 368).

The focus in **Dinehart et al (2013)** was on the role of ECEC for children who experience maltreatment. In this they provide an extensive review of the literature on the benefits of "high-quality early care and education (ECE) on the developmental and early academic outcomes of young children" and on "the psychological, social, and behavioral consequences of child maltreatment", but report "few studies that examine the ECE experiences of children in the child welfare system" (pp. 283-284).

Foreman (2015) is a paper prepared for the Victorian Department of Education and Training, updating an earlier paper he co-authored with Arthur-Kelly in 2008, on the legal and evidence bases for inclusion, in particular with regard to the education system. It does not specifically address the ECEC sector. It contains a review of the role of international and national human rights declarations, and of legislation in Australia and overseas. This latter is broadly described as: "Most of the legislation and policy decisions referred to above have arisen from a social justice and equity perspective … This perspective sees segregation on the basis of human characteristics as inherently wrong" (p. 13). But the paper further notes: "However, the implementation of disability service policy and legislation has been inconsistent, and some segregated services for people with a disability continue in Australia" (p. 13).

The second part of the paper is a review of the literature. This is structured around three themes: attitudinal studies; social interaction outcomes; and academic outcomes. The paper presents some 54 specific findings from the literature grouped under 8 headings. These and a selection of the key points from the specific findings were:

- *Social outcomes for students with a disability*: Mixed findings, while some positive, risks of isolation and bullying, and mixed preferences of students with a disability, requires effective teacher and parent strategies.
- *Outcomes for skill acquisition for students with a disability*: Generally neutral to positive (relative to special education – mainly due to more academic focus), specific teaching strategies important.

- *Impact on students without disabilities*: In general neutral, potentially some social benefits.
- *Impact on parents*: Parents of children with a disability do need to expend substantial effort to support, and are concerned about loss of individual support (severe disability), other parents can have negative attitudes.
- *Impact on teachers*: Initial reluctance overcome with confidence, experience and PD. Training and support important, reluctance around behavioural concern.
- *Role of teachers*: Teacher attitude a major factor, need to enhance training including pre-service.
- *Role of principals*: Generally support, concerns about logistics of planning.
- *Other factors*: "Factors such as program standards, financial support and teacher education impact on the success of inclusion" (p. 28). Limit on number of children with disability to population proportion, evaluate using multiple sources.

The paper concludes with a discussion of a need for a more comprehensive research agenda and cites Forlin et al (2013), Cologon (2014) and Shaddock, Smyth King, and Giorcelli (2007) as "useful steps in the right direction and should serve as a national stimulus to ongoing progress" (p. 31).

Lauchlan and Greig (2015) focus on whether there is a need to maintain special schools as part of the English education system or whether a 'universalist' approach to inclusion is appropriate. Their paper does not address specific ECEC issues. Their paper draws on both some meta-analyses of research and the citation of a range of more specific studies.

From a child perspective (encompassing preferences, experiences and outcomes) they conclude that "overall it would seem that evidence about the effectiveness of inclusion is largely inconclusive; certainly, further systematic research is needed" (p. 76). With regard to the actual implementation of inclusion they note: "It would appear obvious that teachers need resources and support if they are to cater for the learning needs of all children … However… it is crucial that sufficient consideration is given to how such resources are to be allocated, along with a specific action plan on what to do with them once they have been acquired" (p. 79).

On balance they conclude: "It appears likely that special schools will be needed in England for some time to come. It appears equally likely that discussions – often polarised and driven by fixed beliefs – about the efficacy of inclusive provision will continue in parallel" (p. 80).

Palla (2019) undertakes a meta-analysis of Scandinavian research on special education from 2006 to 2014 focusing on the methodological approaches. The analysis encompasses 31 studies of which 18 were thesis, primarily at the doctoral level. She finds that most of the research was qualitative, and primarily obtained the perspectives of mainstream teachers in these services, although at times including special educators and parents. Most of the research focused on various social/cultural theories.

Cumming (2017) addresses the question of the wellbeing of early childhood educators. This review sought to identify the extent to which more recent research addressed issues identified by Hall-Kenyon et al in their 2014 literature review on the same subject and which had concluded that the field was very fragmented. The study utlised 30 studies. In contrast to Hall-Kenyon she found that the research was less concentrated on the US but that the research again was quite fragmented –

with for example 49 measures of wellbeing used in the 20 studies which involved quantitative analysis, but only one of these measures were used in more than one study. She concludes by arguing for a need for future research to be based on "approaches to supporting educators' well-being that are informed by critical thinking about interests and politics, about the deep interconnections of educators, children, families and regulatory regimes in early childhood education and care context, and that acknowledge the necessity of acting at systemic, group and individual levels in respectful, ethical ways" (p. 592).

Gilmour (2018) is more of a popular review article than a literature review, although drawing upon much of her recent work including Gilmour (2017), Gilmour, Fuchs and Wehby (2019), and Gilmour and Henry (2020). The publication does not cite references for most of her points, although some specific findings from some recent studies are used as illustrations. Notwithstanding this, the clarity of her narrative makes the document a useful contribution, although it concentrates simply on inclusion in the education system without reference to ECEC.

She summarises the state of research as: "Unfortunately, research has yielded only weak evidence that inclusion confers benefits on SWDs [students with disability]. Studies that report better academic and behavioral outcomes for SWDs who are taught in a general-education setting suffer from methodological flaws … Further, studies of inclusion seem to assume that SWDs are educated in a vacuum; that is, they fail to examine the experiences of non-disabled classmates" (p. 9). While she reports that much recent work finds that students with disability "educated in general-education settings have better outcomes", she considers that much of this research ignores selection effects and cites alternative studies. The balance of the article considers what might be considered as externalities of inclusion – the impact on other students and on teachers. Here she notes that there is some evidence of potentially negative impacts on peers from inclusion of children with emotional and behavioural disorders, as well as an association between teacher turnover and the proportion of children with such disorders.

The tenuous nature of much of the research can also be seen in **Kalambouka et al (2007)** who sought to undertake analysis of the impact of inclusion on education. From an initial 7,137 articles identified in screening they found just 26 which addressed this criteria. Of these they ranked just 4 as being 'high' on their scale of trustworthiness – a concept they defined as the soundness of the study taking account of internal methodological coherence, 18 as being 'medium' and 4 as 'low' (notwithstanding that many more were excluded in the initial reductions because of inadequate methodology).

They report the findings of these studies, taking into account these rankings along with weighting for appropriateness and relevance, as regards the impact of inclusion for students with special education needs as detailed in table 3.

Table 3: Kalambouka et al (2005) study findings with respect to the impact of inclusive education on academic and social outcomes by study weighting, number of studies

Overall weight	Impact identified in study:			
	Positive	Neutral	Mixed	Negative
	Academic outcomes			
High	0	1	0	
Medium	3	7	2	2
Low	1	6		
	Social outcomes			
High	0	1	0	0
Medium	2	5	1	4
Low	3	1	1	0

Note: Total number of studies in each area does not add to the total number of studies as some only covered some outcomes.

Van Mieghem et al (2018) present a meta-review of research on inclusive education.[38] In addition to seeking to identify what can be learnt from the literature they had two other goals, firstly to more systematically consider what themes have been examined in previous reviews, and secondly to identify research gaps. Their analysis finds four substantive themes concerning implementation of inclusive education, these along with some of the findings are:

- "attitudes towards IE": "in general the attitudes of teachers towards IE are rather negative, in contrast with the attitudes of parents and peers …Teachers, however, play a key role in the implementation of IE, so it is vital to positively influence their attitudes. Positive attitudes of teachers, parents and typically developing students are related to their knowledge of disabilities and their experience of IE … Teachers, parents and typically developing students are less positive towards children with behavioural problems and severe cognitive impairment, compared with children with physical disabilities and sensory impairments" (p. 684).
- "teachers' professional development fostering IE": "found to be more effective if it focusses on specific student needs or disabilities, rather than on IE in general …Training programmes considering specific teachers' concerns and their teaching context are the most helpful in encouraging change in teachers' practice" (p. 684).
- "practices enhancing IE": Co-teaching is found to be an effective instrumental and pedagogical model for handling diversity from which students with and without SEN can benefit … Teaching assistants … clear role clarification for teaching assistants is vital for success … Peers provide a profound foundation for mutual support … [also] 'peer-mediated interventions'" (p. 682).
- "participation of students with SEN": "In general, students are open to friendships with SEN peers, but barriers (e.g. 'caretaking' roles) should be considered …Mixed classes with a minority of SEN students and a larger number of typically developing peers, fosters positive … within the selected reviews, there were remarkably few results reported on the academic participation of students compared to their social participation" (p. 685).

With regard to the third objective of the paper – that of gaps, these authors report:

[38] The focus of this was on inclusive education in schools and the authors omitted two studies relating to pre-school.

> Regarding the input of the model, three research gaps are identified. Firstly, it is remarkable that the attitudes of SEN students and school leaders towards IE were not reported in the selected articles …. In addition, the role of school leaders within the implementation process of IE should not be underestimated …. Secondly, teachers' professional development is only considered within training programmes ….Thirdly, financial resources and accommodated infrastructure for implementing IE were not explored in the selected reviews …
>
> Regarding the outcome, it is noteworthy that the topic of academic participation is only mentioned in two studies, whereas social participation is mentioned in eight. Furthermore, only some aspects of participation for SEN students was mentioned, whereas the participation of all students in IE should be considered (p. 686)

7.2 Reviews of the state of practice and policy

Bellour, Bartolo and Kyriazopoulou (2017) undertook a review for the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. Focused on children in the pre-primary group (aged 3 years and over), this was directed at a range of specific goals including establishing a better understanding of the children at risk and those with special education needs, in particular with respect to their participation in education and the resources allocated. As has been noted above, the emphasis on 'educational contexts' reflects the focus in Europe on the educational role of ECEC. While reviewing much of the literature, the paper also had an explicit normative perspective to 'identify and analyse the factors that enable quality and effective pre-primary programmes for all children in inclusive early years settings'.

Drawing on the EU Quality Framework the paper identifies at risk children in terms of "Children can be at risk of disadvantage because of their individual circumstances or because they, or their families belong to a group which is disadvantaged in society. These children may include those with disabilities …" (p. 11), although further noting that not all children with disabilities have special education needs, but that more generally "there are children with special needs, but without the characteristics defined in the policy or Education Act. This results in lower expectations for children or lack of resources". Amongst the groups of children at risk identified in the study are those who are socially disadvantaged, those of second language backgrounds, children with mental health issues, those who faced abuse and neglect, and children from specific ethnic groups.

The style of the literature review is primarily concerned with the thematic presentation of the literature, including both research findings, and statements of policy, rather than a synthesis of the material. One theme which did permeate the review was the need for additional research. With respect to actual practice the review notes "Recent developments have demonstrated the need for further analysis of the conditions that, once implemented, result in effective programmes" (p. 27); and "It has been underlined, however, that there is a great need for further research. Very few studies are available to inform policy-makers about effective ECEC procedures" (p. 28). The review only has a very short conclusion which emphasises the tentativeness of the current state of understanding and the need for ongoing work. "Working groups within the EU, OECD and UNESCO have developed pointers towards promoting, improving and sustaining quality ECE/IECE services. They all, however, indicate the need for further understanding of the policies that can serve to enhance ECE/IECE structures, processes and outcomes" (p. 72).

A companion piece to this report is **Schuman (2017)** *EU Policy on and Practices in EU Member States Regarding Inclusive Education in Early-Years Settings*. This provides a more detailed review of the range of policy statements, and principles adopted across the countries of the EU as well as details of recommendations from a range of reviews and studies. The paper notes the close relationship between diversity and inclusion and the extent to which diversity and inequality are increasingly seen as part of the inclusion agenda, although noting that the paper itself focuses on young children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Two of the specific dimensions of general ECEC provision considered are those of quality and the training and remuneration of workers.

Maciver et al (2019) is a literature review of the psychosocial and environmental factors associated with the participation of children aged 4 to 12 years in school. The study initially scanned 1,828 papers and reduced this down to 72 papers which met the criteria they had established with respect to relevance and rigour. The paper concludes: "Specifically, the findings show mechanisms in three clusters focusing on identity, competence and the child's experience of mind and body. The context (environment) is conceptualized in terms of adults, peers, the schools' structures and routines and spaces/objects" (p. 13). Across these they report that "No single factor fully explains variance in participation" (p. 14).

They suggest that these findings tend to support the ecological approach to inclusion, but note also the role of "individually tailored coaching and mentoring", although emphasising that "change will not be effective if it is only targeted at the child" (p. 15). They strongly identify the importance of teachers' knowledge and confidence to enhancing participation, as part of the important contextual elements, but note the tensions which exist when "schools and teachers tend to be rated on achievement, rather than participation" (p. 15).

Odom, Buysse and Soukakou (2011) seek to provide an overview of 25 years of US experience in the inclusion of young children with disabilities. A particular focus was on the extent to which specific intervention was required. They conclude that: "common agreement exists that specialized instruction focusing on the individual needs of children in inclusive settings is important. That is, a high-quality early childhood education setting itself may provide benefits, but it alone is not sufficient to address the individual learning needs of children with disabilities". They cite a range of literature related to the potential role of the 'Response to Intervention' (RTI) approach[39] as a strategy. More generally they identify what they characterise as "Research synthesis points on early childhood inclusion":

[39] The use of RTI is challenged in some of the literature as being counter to inclusion. Ferri (2012) raises a number of issues including: the extent to which it is modelled on treatment, diagnosis, and the achievement of outcomes; as well as the degree to which it is focused on standardisation; and that the tiered approach which is adopted involves labelling. She also notes that "most often in descriptions of RTI [it] involves removing students from the general education classroom for 'specialised' or 'intensive' instruction, rather than requiring the classroom teacher to implement differentiated instruction, universal design for learning or other inclusive practices" (p. 871). Grosche and Volpe (2013) consider that the approach has merit as an instrument for inclusion, albeit with some reservations about the need for further research and recognition of risks. These they identify as including the extent to which the higher tiers of the approach may involve pulling out children from education with their peers, and the extent to which the focus on achievement is appropriate. Albritton, Truscott and Terry (2018) argue that the approach has potential in early childhood settings, but that implementation would "require early childhood practitioners to develop new skills in assessment, intervention, and data-based decision making" (p. 401) to be successfully implemented.

1. Inclusion has multiple meanings but is essentially about belonging, participating, and reaching one's full potential in a diverse society.

2. Inclusion takes many different forms.

3. Universal access to inclusive programs is not yet a reality for all children from birth to age 5 with disabilities.

4. A wide variety of factors such as attitudes and beliefs about inclusion, child and adult characteristics, policies, and resources can influence how inclusion is implemented and viewed by families and practitioners.

5. Collaboration is a cornerstone of high-quality inclusion.

6. Specialized instruction, interventions, and supports are key components of high-quality inclusion and essential in reaching desired outcomes for children and their families.

7. Inclusion can benefit children both with and without disabilities.

8. Professional development is likely necessary to ensure that practitioners acquire the knowledge, skills, and ongoing supports needed to implement inclusion effectively.

Long, Roberts and Danechi (2019) in a House of Commons Library Briefing Paper, in addition to detailing the current features of the provision of support for Special Education Needs (SEN) in England, summarise the findings of a range of different reviews of the operation of the system. While the English SEN system applies to children aged from 0-25 years, the focus of most of the material is on the education system. Part of the context of the paper was the announcement of a government review of the five year process of reform of SEN to "to improve the services available to families who need support, equip staff in schools and colleges to respond effectively to their needs as well as ending the 'postcode lottery' they often face" (Department of Education (UK) and Williamson 2019). The review cites a 2019 Parliamentary Education Committee report on these reforms as: "Let down by failures of implementation, the 2014 reforms have resulted in confusion and at times unlawful practice, bureaucratic nightmares, buck-passing and a lack of accountability, strained resources and adversarial experiences, and ultimately dashed the hopes of many" (p. 19). A similar negative evaluation of the current circumstances was provided in a September 2019 National Audit Office report.

The **National Disability Authority of Ireland** published in 2011 a paper which sought to distil the 'lessons from research and international practice' for the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream ECEC. The key focus of the paper were country case studies relating to England, New Zealand, Finland and the US. As with many of the studies one particular focus was on the relative outcomes for children in inclusive compared with those in specialist environments. The conclusion of the paper from the literature was that "it is possible to conclude that the research, conducted over several decades, shows that outcomes for children with disabilities in good quality inclusive pre-school settings, which have access to appropriate supports, are at least as good as those for their peers who attend segregated, specialist settings" (p. 23). The report did though caution "However, one commonly replicated finding in the research literature is that children with disabilities in inclusive early childhood care and education settings engage in less social interaction than typically-developing peers. Children with disabilities are also at a greater risk of peer rejection" (p. 23). The

study found that the researchers had been unable to identify any studies "comparing the costs of disabled and non-disabled children in inclusive settings" (p. 25), although noting on balance that "overall, inclusive preschool places are cheaper, but not significantly so, than segregated placements". It noted that central to positive outcomes for inclusion was the quality of the early education provided and identified four factors which contributed to this: "lower children to adult ratios; class sizes; education level of staff; [and] salaries of staff" (p. 26).

Turning to practice the review emphasises a range of policies and strategies. Some dimensions identified include: the provision of therapy and special education inputs in the care setting, underpinned by inter-agency and interdisciplinary cooperation (noting that this is often difficult to achieve); graduated approaches to both assessment and interventions. From this they draw a 'core approach' comprising:

> All children should as far as possible receive their pre-school education in mainstream early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings.
>
> - Supports for inclusion should not be attached to the individual child with a disability but should be directed at the whole ECCE setting
> - One-to-one support for the whole day or session should be an atypical form of support for small minority of children who will need this intensity of support.
> - Peripatetic, interdisciplinary teams, which include special education expertise, should support pre-schools within a defined catchment area
> - Simple short assessments of needs rather than establishing a diagnosis should be the focus of assessment for additional pre-school support
> - Health (therapy) supports should typically be delivered on-site and focus on supporting ECCE teachers who will be with the child every day. (p. 3)

Punch (2015) prepared an extensive literature review for the Victorian Department of Education and Training on "The use and efficacy of integration aides with students with disabilities in general education settings". While the focus was on the formal school system, a number of dimensions of the literature are more widely relevant. While she found that the "positive effect on student literacy of targeted, research-based interventions by integration aides specifically trained and supported to deliver the intervention" (p. 16), more generally the literature suggested there was a "negative relationship between the amount of integration aide support and the academic outcomes of the students supported" (p. 15). This finding reflected a number of other matters, including the extent to which students tended to interact only with the aide, and not the teacher, and that while they aided the student at staying on-task, their focus tended to be on "task completion and less on engagement in learning"(p. 15). With regard to social integration some of the key points identified were that "Students may be physically and socially segregated from classroom peers while receiving integration aide support, the presence of integration aides can reduce opportunities for students to interact with their peers", as well as stigmatisation.

From her review she made a number of recommendations including to both improve the role of aides and to reduce the reliance upon them as a means of inclusion. With regard to aides she argues for better role definition, improved training and implementation of teacher led instruction and plans, and a lesser emphasis on one-on-one support. To reduce reliance upon aides she argues for

greater use of special education teachers to support and advise teachers and aides; increased use of specialist professionals as team supports, building the capacity of classroom teachers and enhanced school leadership, and participation.

Moore 2009 was a review for the then Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development on inclusive practice with respect to kindergartens. The review provides an extensive overview of the foundations of inclusion and potential approaches to implementation. The study concludes with a set of "conditions needed for universal attendance at pre-schools":

- Efforts to promote the inclusion of children from marginalised families in early childhood services would be enhanced through the development and adoption of a clear policy statement regarding inclusion, including clarification of what inclusion means and what it is intended to achieve. …
- The capacity of early childhood services to effectively meet the needs of all children in a truly inclusive manner is intimately connected with the quality of such services. This strengthens the argument for increasing support for the early childhood system, seeking to promote uniformly high quality services through a range of strategies, including quality assurance, curriculum development, and resource development, as well as funding to improve staff qualifications and staff-child ratios.
- The curriculum frameworks and statements being developed at federal and state levels need to be based on principles and practices of universal inclusion.
- To strengthen the capacity of early childhood services to meet the needs of vulnerable children effectively, three strategies are indicated:
    - The first involves making the inclusion resources identified in this Project widely available.
    - The second involves supporting initiatives to develop early childhood programs based on the principles of universal design for learning.
    - The third involves building a tiered system of universal, secondary and tertiary support services to provide early childhood practitioners with the support and resources they need to meet the needs of children with particular vulnerabilities.
    - To engage and retain vulnerable families, early childhood services need to develop strong partnerships with family support services that have the capacity to provide outreach support to such families. (p. 70)

Shaddock et al 2009 'Disability, Diversity and Tides that Lift All Boats: Review of Special Education in the ACT [Australian Capital Territory]' while also very focused on the specific organisational options for special education in the ACT, also encompasses a review of issues relating to pedagogy and curriculum. Its broad thrust was one of greater emphasis on inclusion and it notes "*overreliance* [emphasis in original] on 'individualised adjustments' is known to be resource intensive and unsustainable, socially marginalising, and less effective educationally than approaches to teaching and learning that take place in, and utilise, the social context of the classroom"(p. 16). However at the same time it summarises its findings as "the report makes clear that the research base is neither complete nor conclusive on many pressing issues. Therefore the sectors and schools should continue

to engage in 'action evaluation' to inform and review their initiatives and programs for students with a disability" (p. 16).

The final chapter, labelled as a post-script, emphasises three key issues:

- "Coherence … the clarity and internal consistency of the vision for students with a disability that is adopted by sectors and schools" (p. 155)
- "capacity …. No one associated with the education of students with a disability … claimed that resources were adequate. Some students are extraordinarily difficult to teach and manage no matter how extensive the resources and expertise" (p. 56)
- "collaboration" (p. 156). This theme was discussed extensively across the report and involved collaboration between the different educational sectors along with other stakeholders. Specifically it notes in its summary "The report identifies deficiencies in the provision of multidisciplinary services for students with a disability and proposes a range of options including urgent attention to the negotiation of service agreements between and among the relevant organisations to improve therapy and mental health provision for students with disabilities in all sectors" (p. 16).

Cook and Odom (2013) discuss how evidence-based practices (EBP) can be implemented in special education with a focus on implementation science. While having a special education focus most of the issues relate more generally to inclusive education. In introducing this theme they note that there is a well identified gap between research and practice, not just in the field of special education but more generally, noting for example that research suggests "that only 7.8% of prevention programs related to substance abuse and school crime used in over 5,800 schools met their standards for an EBP. And, in special education, practitioners have reported using instructional practices shown by research to be ineffective (e.g., learning styles) with similar or greater frequency than some research-based practices" (p. 136).

They identify two important caveats with the body of EBP:

- "EBPs Are Not Guaranteed to Work for Everyone. No practice will work for every single student; this is a reality of education (indeed, for all social sciences) of which special educators are keenly aware. As such, when educational researchers speak of causality, they do so in a probabilistic rather than absolute sense" (p. 137).
- Incomplete and Variable Identification of EBPs. … because of the considerable time and expertise it takes to complete an evidence-based review … many practices have not yet been reviewed. And because of the relative scarcity of high quality, experimental research in the educational literature there is simply not enough high quality research utilizing appropriate designs to meaningfully determine whether a practice is 'evidence based. (p. 137)

They conclude by reporting that:

> The research-to-practice gap underlies what is probably the most vexing caveat related to EBPs: the difficulty in translating research findings to the everyday practices of teachers in typical classrooms. As EBPs in education began to be identified, relatively little attention was given to how to implement them, perhaps under the assumption that school personnel would eagerly and readily apply identified EBPs.(p. 138)

Armstrong (2017) is not so concerned with the content of inclusive education but seeks to position the debates in the context of 'wicked problems'. This concept, frequently cited in discussion of public policy, refers to complex problems in public policy, frequently involving conflicting conceptualisations, goals and effects, with inter-sectoral impacts, and often being seen as irresolvable. He cites a range of aspects of inclusive policy where this concept can be applied:

- "Achieving a curriculum which is fit for purpose in meeting the holistic needs of learners with disability" (p. 230) [and those without], including questions relating to interfaces with future employment and the curriculum implicit in PISA and related testing.
- "The adverse, flow-on effects of neo-liberal educational policies on children or young people with disabilities" (p. 231). This theme which is extensively discussed in the literature – see for example Cumming and Dickson (2013), Hardy and Woodcock (2015), Sherfinski, Slider Weekley and Mathew (2015), Press et al (2018) and Tah (2019) – has several elements which include the question of market pressure for schools to achieve high standards on objective testing, a focus on traditional and core subjects and standardised methodologies.
- "Responding in an effective way to behaviours by students with a disability which warrant adult concern or action and in a manner which avoids educational exclusion". (p. 231)
- "Ensuring that special and inclusive education is a progressive space which adopts ethical and research informed practices." Examples cited include "how to achieve high-quality and differentiated provision which avoids 'dilemmas of difference', that is meets the often unique needs of individuals with disabilities without the 'devaluation' consequences of special education identification … [and] clearly identifying the evidence base for effective practice to meeting the needs of students affected by disability"(p. 231)

He concludes by arguing:

> progressive initiatives to address today's wicked problems in special and inclusive education are unlikely to make headway without addressing the underpinning beliefs and behavioural motivations – as well as political forces – which currently sustain them. Change it seems cannot be unidimensional to succeed in schools but must be adopted across the political, social, cultural, psychological and behavioural dimensions which make up the everyday, routine fabric of complex educational institutions. (p. 233)

Qu (2020) can be seen as examining one dimension of a wicked problem – that of debates around social and medical models of disability and the implications of this for education. Although much of the paper is concerned with a philosophical framing of the issues, it also draws extensively upon the literature. The paper cites the literature identifying weaknesses in each of these approaches – both conceptually and in applied educational practice. In terms of identifying this as a wicked problem the paper notes:

> one consensus is that no one is allegedly against rights, justice, equality, or high-quality education. All (politicians, scholars, medical professionals, school managers, teachers or parents) claim to work towards the best interest of the child, medically, educationally, or socially, in segregated or inclusive provisions. Empirical studies so far also have yet to conclusively show convincing, overwhelming, and generalisable evidence [of] what provisions are best for children with what types of SEND. (p. 2)

While noting that the "wider implications of segregated educational provisions as social institutions are often ignored by the 'medical model – special school' proponents" with these implications including exacerbating social divisions and inequality, and resulting in 'typical developing students' "to think less inclusively about or see their peers identified with SEND as friends, future work colleagues or partners" (p. 2) , the paper also finds limitations with inclusion models "doubts often surround the practicality of inclusive provisions in meeting diverse learner needs ... the language of needs may be neglected in the shadow of the rights discourse … [it can result in] pursuing unrealistic ideals despite the cost of individual needs not being met in practice" (p. 3).

7.3 Reviews – quasi advocacy

Henninger and Gupta (2014) in a book chapter entitled *How do Children Benefit from Inclusion?* draw upon the literature with the intent of enabling readers to "After reading this chapter, you will be able to share with families, staff, and professional development providers the ways in which inclusion supports children with and without disabilities' life trajectories, during preschool and into adolescence and adulthood" (p. 35). With this focus while significant literature has been cited, it appears to have been used to find particular supportive findings, rather than as a more systematic and balanced review.

Notwithstanding the particular view point adopted, the authors do strongly emphasise two preconditions for successful inclusion: the quality of the child care service, and the tailoring of the program and the level of supports. Reflective of this emphasis is one reference to the literature "In the LEAP preschool program mentioned earlier—a program that includes a blend of necessary supports for children (e.g., classroom and curricular adaptations and modifications), evidence-based instructional approaches (e.g., peer-mediated interventions, positive behaviors supports), dynamic learning objectives, and family skills training to reinforce positive behaviors, all within a routinized schedule—children with social and communication delays across sites show "marked developmental progress on intellectual and language measures" in comparison to their counterparts segregated from typically developing peers (p. 40).

Jackson (2008) is a paper *Inclusion or Segregation for Children with an Intellectual Impairment: What does the Research Say* funded by the Australian Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, under the aegis of Queensland Parents for People with a Disability, and focuses on inclusion for children with an intellectual impairment. The specific focus is on the relative outcomes of segregated (special) relative to inclusive education. The author examines a broad spectrum of the literature and draws from this two broad conclusions "While it was apparent from the reviews that much of the research was poorly controlled and anecdotal in nature, the sheer volume of consistent findings allow clear conclusions to be drawn in most areas" and that "no review could be found comparing segregation and inclusion that came out in favour of segregation in over forty years of research" (p. 3).

This was further expanded as "Common findings are that children progress at least as well in inclusive education as in segregated, with a small (but possibly significant) academic benefit from inclusion" (p. 10). While he did not examine actual pedagogy, he does note that the mix of studies covered both good and bad inclusion and special education environments. He also reviewed some material on the use of 'pull-outs' concluding: "Overall, the comparative review literature in this section is small. It can best be summarised by concluding that the pull out or 'resource room' model

has little data to support it for children with an intellectual impairment and some significant contrary evidence from major studies" (p. 11).

Given the timing of this study most of the research drawn upon is from the 1980s and 1990s and there is no specific reference to early childhood education and care.

Cologon 2013 is an issues paper *Inclusion in education towards equality for students with disability* prepared for Children with Disability Australia and funded by the Australian Department of Education. Its objective was "to draw together research findings to develop a clear picture of the implications for improving policy and practice—in order to facilitate greater inclusion for children who experience disability in Australia. The intention of this paper is to provide a firm basis from which to inform research based policy development". The paper covers the whole scope of child inclusion, with a particular focus on the education system.

A central conclusion, from a review of some 170 research papers was "There has been a consistent lack of evidence to suggest any benefit of segregated education over time. By contrast, there is a considerable body of research demonstrating the benefits of inclusive education" (p. 26), although the paper did note a number of gaps in the literature and the need for additional research. The review contains considerable discussion of concepts of inclusion, including critiques of macro exclusion and 'micro exclusion' – for example where children participate in a different curriculum or are at times absent from their classroom to receive specific support services. She adopts a broad human rights approach and an anti-ableist approach, rather "recognising impairment as one of many forms of human diversity, and welcoming and viewing diversity as a resource rather than a problem" (p. 20). At the same time her focus appears to be just on the disability concept of inclusion and does not address the issue of social exclusion. The form of the discussion on outcomes is broad and tends to generalise findings linked to footnote references to studies, with an absence of any discussion of the merit of the study or whether the extent of the generalisation is wholly valid[40]. In terms of social

[40] It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse the depth of support the cited studies provide for the more generalised statements of outcomes cited in the paper. However for example she cites two studies in support of the claim "Children who experience disability who are included into mainstream settings have been found to score higher on achievement tests and perform closer to grade average than children who are in non-inclusive settings" (pp. 24-25). These were Peetsma et al 2001 and Vakil et al 2009.

Peetsma et al is a study of outcomes of children with learning and behavioural difficulties (LBD) and mild mental retardation (MMR) in special and mainstream schools. In terms of findings over the first two years the study reports: "Over the first 2 years the pairs of pupils developed quite differently: some pupils did better in regular education, while others did better in special education. And although children in special education tend to have lower cognitive scores, only one significant difference in cognitive development was found: at-risk pupils in regular education made more progress in mathematics [but not language] than pupils in schools for pupils with LBD" (p. 130). In the case of psychosocial development, pupils' school motivation in regular education appeared to deteriorate more than in schools for pupils with MMR" (p. 130). While the study reports: "Over a 4-year period, pupils' cognitive development (language and mathematics) in regular education was significantly stronger than in both types of special education … [and] On pupils' psychosocial development no significant differences were observed" (pp. 130-131). It should be noted that there was significant attrition in the population. While the study had some 500 paired children at commencement and this fell to some 462 at the end of 2 years at the end of 4 years, depending on the measure, because of changes in the education system, the sample was just 46 to 80 children. Additionally the authors warn "the results concern pupils with rather mild educational problems, so they cannot easily be generalized to pupils with more severe mental and physical handicaps (p. 134).

outcomes she cites findings that "Inclusive education facilitates social development in children who do and do not experience disability", that "inclusion results in a more positive sense of self and self-worth for children who do and do not experience disability" and "Inclusive education supports children in developing increased awareness and acceptance of diversity and understanding of individuality" (p. 24).

With regard to academic outcomes she reports "that children who experience disability who are included into mainstream educational settings demonstrate better academic and vocational outcomes when compared to children who are educated in segregated settings", with benefits also being recorded for children who do not have a disability, along with teachers with "inclusive teachers engage all children in more higher order thinking, questioning and dialogical interactions than non-inclusive teachers" (p. 25). She also reports gains in communication and language, and while research is limited, gains in physical development, as well as benefits for teachers and families.

The balance of the report is concerned with policies to promote inclusion. These include changing attitudes and better teacher education, as well as structural barriers. With respect to teacher education the report details 11 strategies to build more positive attitudes and understanding which have been identified in the literature. Structural barriers identified include the use of categorisation and labelling, including reliance upon diagnosis, inadequate resources and a need to reconsider paraprofessional support, especially the use of untrained aides in providing one-on-one support.

Hehir et al (2016) is a report prepared for the Brazilian children's rights organisation Instituto Alana. While addressing inclusion as a whole, the specific focus is on the inclusion of children with Down syndrome and, on balance, has an orientation to primary education.

In large part the review presents findings without any particular interpretation, although potentially taking a more positive view than is wholly warranted[41], and does not appear to seek to assess the quality of research or its specific relevance. While the author states that the report involved a systematic review of 280 studies of which 85 were considered to "provide relevant scientific

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Vakil et al is a self-described "fictitious scenario which exemplifies the needs and services often encountered in today's early childhood public school setting. This vignette specifically identifies that service provision for children with disabilities must be a collaborative effort" (p. 321), with no actual outcome measurement.

Similarly she states "The more time a child spends within an inclusive setting, the greater the social interaction" (p. 24) with one citation, to Antia et al (2011). This study, of children with impaired hearing, rather concludes: "Clearly, these students did not appear to have social skill difficulties greater than one might find in the general population. In addition, our data show that these positive social outcomes remained stable over 5 years" (p. 500). The study did however express concern that average outcomes need to be more closely reviewed and "However, it is important to examine the issues faced by the approximately 25% of students who showed decreases in social skills" (p. 500). It is also not clear as to wider applicability of these findings.

[41] For example with reference to ECEC he reports Justice et al (2014) as a "A study of 757 three and four year-old students in the Midwestern United States found that the language skills of students with disabilities benefit substantially from having the opportunity to attend preschool with non-disabled students" (p. 14). The actual findings of this study are more subtle with the research finding "the language skills of children with disabilities appear to benefit tremendously from exposure to typically developing peers, who also tend to have stronger language skills in the spring of the school year than they did in the fall" (Justice et al 2014, 1729), but ignores the more general finding that the actual impact was an amplification of the peer effect – both positive and negative "We found that children with disabilities were more strongly influenced by their classmates' language skills than were children without disabilities. Peer effects were particularly strong for children whose classmates had limited language skills: In the classrooms with the lowest fall language scores, children with disabilities scored nearly 10 points lower than typically developing children in the spring" (p. 1728).

evidence" (p. 2), there is no discussion on the actual selection criteria, including what actually constituted 'inclusive education' in particular studies. As with much of the literature, many of the studies involve comparative studies of children in special education institutions and those in mainstream schools.

Specific findings reported were that "Multiple systematic reviews of the scholarly research literature indicate that students with disabilities who were educated in general education classes academically outperformed their peers who had been educated in segregated settings" (p. 13), and that there is "evidence that participating in inclusive settings can yield social and emotional benefits for students with disabilities" (p. 18). The paper devotes some attention then to the factors which can promote inclusive education including teacher attitudes and expectations, and identifies a set of principles for "A coordinated national approach to fostering inclusion" (pp. 22-25.)

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