

2026 PREMIER'S INCLUSIVE TEACHING SCHOLARSHIP

From Framework to Practice

Translating and Implementing Global Practices of Inclusive Education for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Jenny Kennedy, Bulli High School.

Prepared with thanks to Western Sydney University

The Gap I See Every Day

- Students on the autism spectrum still face significant barriers to belonging, participation and learning in Australian schools — despite more than a decade of policy commitment to inclusion.
- As Head Teacher of Special Education, I see the distance daily between what research and policy say inclusion should look like, and what is achievable within current resourcing and training.
- NSW Premiers Scholarship allowed a study tour to learn directly from systems where inclusive practice for autistic students is embedded, sustained, and in some cases measured system-wide.



Did you witness someone being mistreated?

- You have a duty to intervene
- Always stop to listen
- Never ignore such a situation or belittle others' experience

Find out what happened

- Discuss with all parties involved
- Ask for help if necessary

Make sure that things change

- Agree on how you will proceed
- Strengthen the community as a whole

Do not leave anyone alone

- Make sure everyone feels safe and accepted

Helsinki

Research Purpose

- Collect best-practice inclusive strategies and auditing systems such as the Index for Inclusion
- Explore leadership and implementation models
- Align findings with the NSW Inclusive Education Statement
- Support schools through practical, sustainable approaches



WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY

THE STARTING POINT

The Index for Inclusion

The original proposal was framed around the Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow) — a widely cited, structured self-review framework for whole-school inclusive reform.

It organises school improvement around three dimensions: cultures, policies and practices.

The plan: visit schools that had successfully implemented the Index, and interview leading researchers, to understand how it is adapted and sustained internationally.

This became the test at the heart of the whole tour — does the Index actually drive inclusive practice where it's used?

The Index for Inclusion

Index for inclusion

developing learning and participation in schools

Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow

editing and production for CSIE Mark Vaughan



Published by the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE)

The Study Tour

1. Queensland and Victoria	2. New Zealand	3. Finland	4. United Kingdom
• Meetings with leading Australian autism and inclusion researchers	• School visits and interviews across Wellington and Auckland	• School visits • And interview with leading Finnish educational researcher	• School visits in Kent, England, interviews with Inclusion Quality Mark, • And interview with leading Scottish Educational researcher

10

Schools and
specialists visited

20+

academics and
practitioners
interviewed

3

IQM interview and
School visited

Number of schools visited using the Index for Inclusion by name or as a formal audit tool:

- 0 out of 10





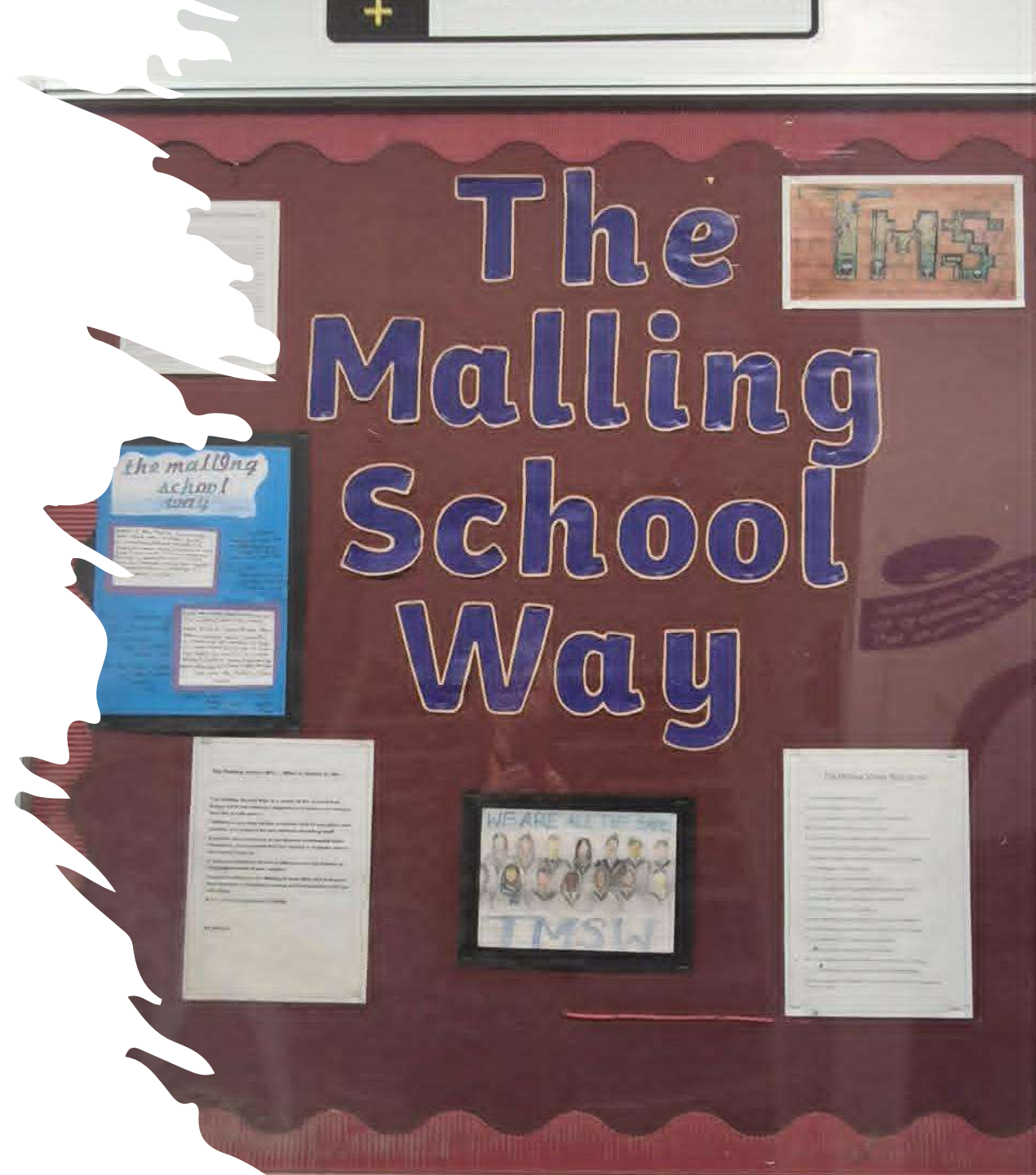
A Key Finding

Successful schools embedded inclusion into culture, systems, and teaching practice

THEME 1

The shift from a Diagnostic Tool to an Everyday Culture

- In England, the Inclusion Quality Mark (IQM) evolved directly out of the Index for Inclusion tradition – but had deliberately moved away from compliance-based auditing.
- IQM utilises learning walks, non-judgmental peer observation, collaborative reflection and “Cluster Away Days” - an opportunity to hear about the context of the school and about its journey towards inclusion.



THEME 1

From a Diagnostic Tool to an Everyday Culture

- The highest-performing schools on this tour shared not a common tool, but a common habit: regular, structured opportunities for staff to examine their own practice together.
- For NSW: schools with strong NCCD and School Excellence Framework data would benefit less from a new audit instrument than from time-tabled, explicitly focused protected time for this kind of peer reflection.



THEME 1

From a Diagnostic Tool to an Everyday Culture

- The highest-performing schools on this tour shared not a common tool, but a common habit: regular, structured opportunities for staff to examine their own practice together.
- For NSW: schools with strong NCCD and School Excellence Framework data would benefit less from a new audit instrument than from time-tabled, explicitly focused protected time for this kind of peer reflection.



THEME 2

Needs-Based, Tiered Support

1

Finland

Kulosaari & Maunula: two tiers — universal group support and individual support, need identified without requiring formal diagnosis first

2

New Zealand

Learning Support Delivery Model: a Universal → Targeted → Individualised structure that moves fluidly with need

3

Kent, UK

SEN Support and EHC Plans follow an Assess → Plan → Do → Review cycle, reviewed at least three times a year

- The common thread: support is a right activated by need, not a benefit unlocked by diagnosis — and it moves fluidly rather than one-way escalation.
- In NSW, resourcing is tied to enrolment location and formal diagnosis — a structural disincentive to inclusion, since special settings automatically attract a larger funding share.

THEME 2

Needs-Based, Tiered Support

1

Finland

Kulosaari & Maunula: two tiers — universal group support and individual support, need identified without requiring formal diagnosis first

2

New Zealand

Learning Support Delivery Model: a Universal → Targeted → Individualised structure that moves fluidly with need

3

Kent, UK

SEN Support and EHC Plans follow an Assess → Plan → Do → Review cycle, reviewed at least three times a year

- The common thread: support is a right activated by need, not a benefit unlocked by diagnosis — and it moves fluidly rather than one-way escalation.
- In NSW, resourcing is tied to enrolment location and formal diagnosis — a structural disincentive to inclusion, since special settings automatically attract a larger funding share.

THEME 3

Teacher preparation that builds belief, not just skills

Professor Lani Florian's inclusive pedagogy reframes a child's difficulty as a professional problem for the teacher to solve through teaching for everybody – not a fixed deficit requiring referral.





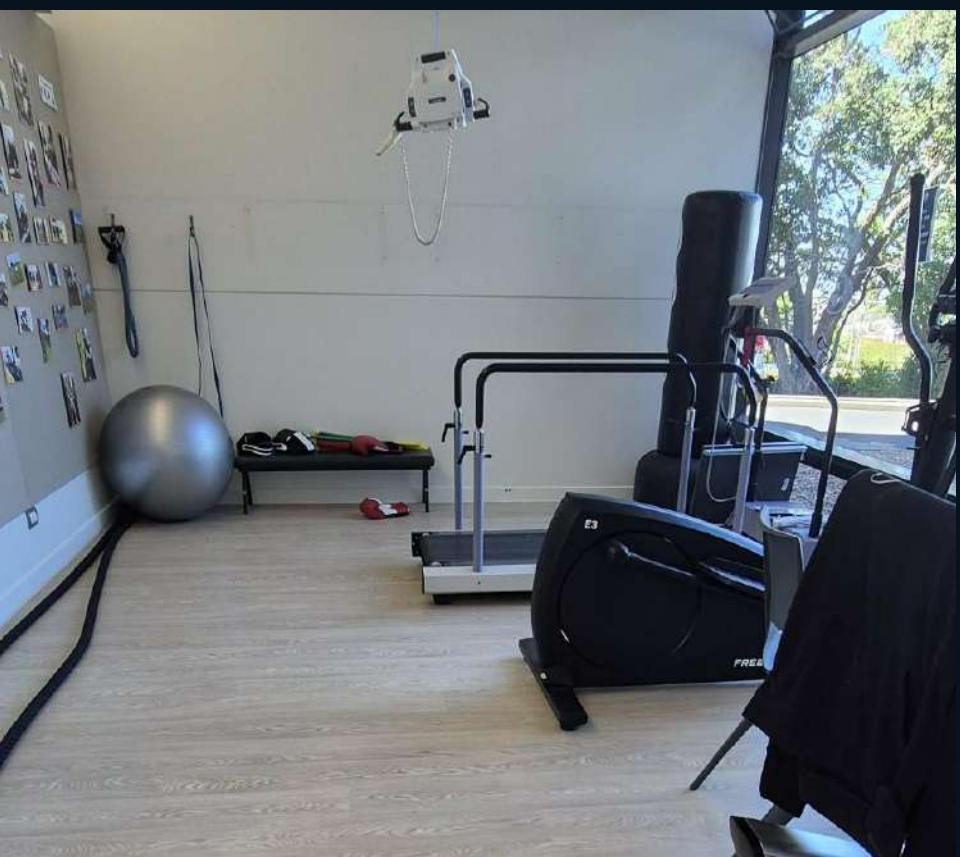
THEME 3

Teacher preparation / Professional Learning

Training in autism,
neurodiversity, regulation,
and UDL

THEME 3

Teacher preparation / Professional Learning



- In the meantime...
- Ongoing and practical staff professional development
- Building teacher capability rather than dependence on withdrawal support



THEME 4

Collaboration and multidisciplinary partnership as infrastructure

- School teachers in New Zealand worked along side allied health professionals inside the classrooms— modelling strategies rather than withdrawing students for isolated therapy.

THEME 4

Collaboration and multidisciplinary partnership as infrastructure



Kent's SEND Strategy is built around joint commissioning between education, health and social care.

Research shows parents, educators and specialists alike identify communication, shared support and sustained engagement as the strongest predictors of effective support

THEME 5

Wellbeing, belonging and student voice as core business

- The use of Kelly Mahler's work on interoception used in schools teaches students to recognise internal body signals — hunger, stress, calm — and link them to self-regulation



Wellbeing, belonging and student voice

Students identify over time how they feel in various parts of their body.



Wellbeing, belonging and student voice

Schools in Kent treat student voice as a structural input: students shape playground design and reward systems through standing feedback channels.



- Another school in Kent promotes unlowered expectations — inclusion means scaffolding access to the same core curriculum, not simplifying it.

THEME 5

Wellbeing, belonging and student voice



Wellbeing, belonging and student voice

- Visual supports and scaffolded learning



THEME 5

Wellbeing, belonging and student voice

Recognise sensory and emotional needs

Shift from behaviour management to regulation support





THEME 6

Physical environment as an enabler of regulation

- The importance of a dedicated regulation space cannot be understated. This school in Kent places theirs in a central location, available to all students — not tucked away within support classes.

THEME 6

Physical environment as an enabler of regulation

- Use calm spaces and predictable routines



Physical environment as an enabler of regulation

THEME 6



THEME 6

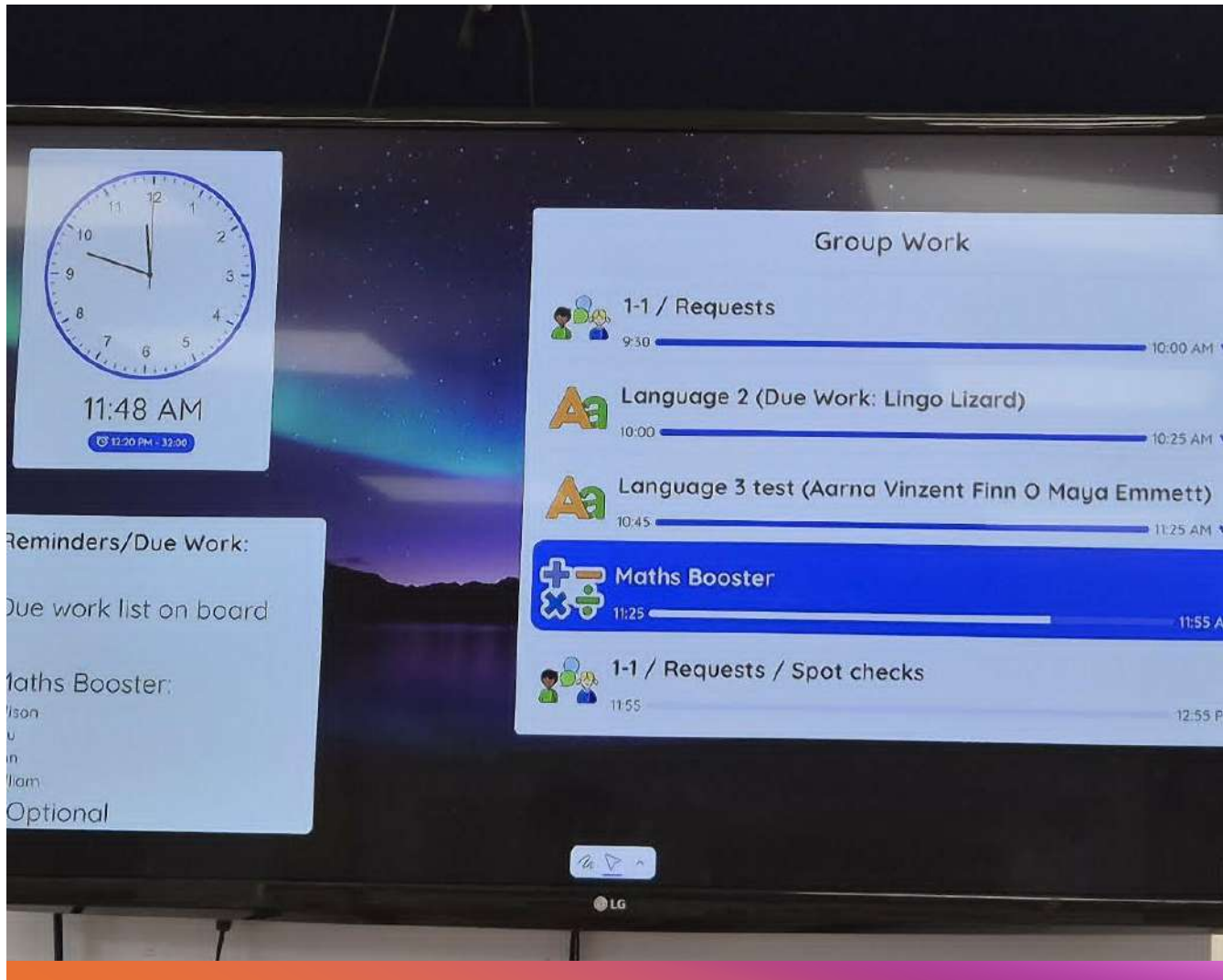
Physical environment as an enabler of regulation



THEME 7

Flexibility and strengths-based pathways

- A Wellington School's Montessori stream gives students choice over tasks and pacing within a shared whole-school structure.
- A Finland school lets students build individualised timetables after disengagement — sometimes starting with a single subject and adding others as confidence returns.



THEME 7

Flexibility and strengths-based pathways



- Wilson School uses satellite classes co-located in mainstream schools, so integration is calibrated to each student rather than forced uniformly.

THEME 7

Flexibility and strengths-based pathways

- Strong transition planning



THEME 7

Flexibility and strengths-based pathways

Strong primary to secondary transitions

Gradual re-engagement and flexible attendance pathways

Work experience and community participation



THEME 7

Flexibility and strengths-based pathways

- Focus on independence and life beyond school

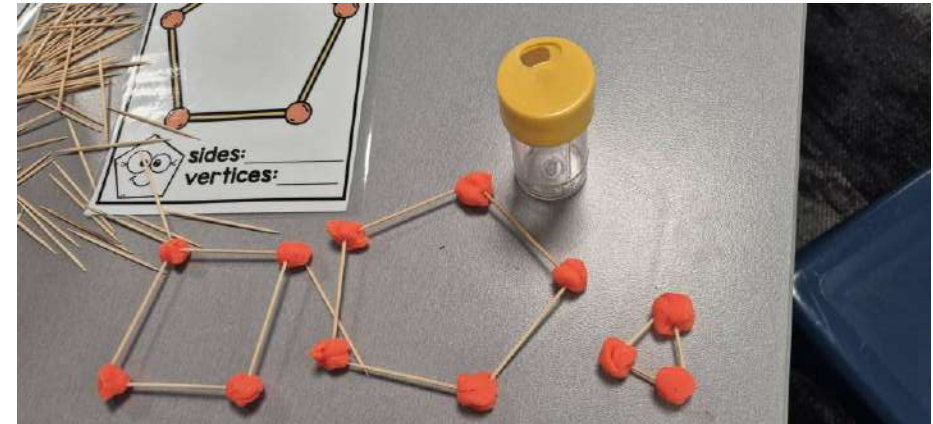


THEME 8

Funding That Follows the Student

New Zealand's Ongoing Resourcing Scheme attaches funding to the individual student, regardless of whether they attend a special or regular school.

Canada changed legislation specifically to make it legal to transfer funding from special school programs into mainstream schools — allied health support moves with the student.



THEME 8

Funding That Follows the Student

- Kent's SEND Strategy treats closing its mainstream-attendance gap as an explicit strategic goal.

35%

Kent's own EHCP mainstream-attendance rate

48%

the English national mainstream-attendance rate Kent is working to close the gap to

-
- This is the most consequential single reform observed — and precisely the one identified as structurally absent in Australia, where funding is tied to place of enrolment rather than to the student.

The persistent gap between policy and practice

- Australia: no state or territory review since 2016 has recommended closing special schools or shifting funding from segregated to inclusive settings — and special school enrolments have risen.
- A 2024 national policy review (Carrington, Mavropoulou, Saggers & Nepal) made 20 recommendations for policy, research and practice — none yet adopted in full by any state or territory.
- New Zealand: Budget 2026 confirmed the existing pace of Learning Support delivery, is leaving a “middle group” of students under-served, rather than accelerating it
- England: Kent's SEND Strategy is openly on an “improvement journey” after a 2019 inspection failure, with its Improvement Notice only lifted in August 2024.
- Finland: inclusion is never formally defined in legislation, and a division between “regular” and “special” education persists beneath the tiered-support architecture.

What this means for NSW

Fund	Protect	Embed	Shift	Use	Link
Fund the student, not the placement •Advocate for resourcing tied to need, rather than enrolment location. The single, highest-leverage, hardest to shift lever identified	Protect time for reflective culture •Use existing NCCD / SEF strength as a platform for structured peer reflection, not another audit layer.	Embed inclusive pedagogy in teacher education •Pair skills-based PD with an explicit challenge to deficit thinking, from initial teacher education onward.	Shift from withdrawal-based intervention to in-classroom, capacity-building collaboration.	Use the data already on hand from the NCCD and the students it portrays to guide your school in a tiered, autism-specific self-review	Link your school improvement planning to develop improved priorities for inclusion.

The same logic, closer to home: QsArt

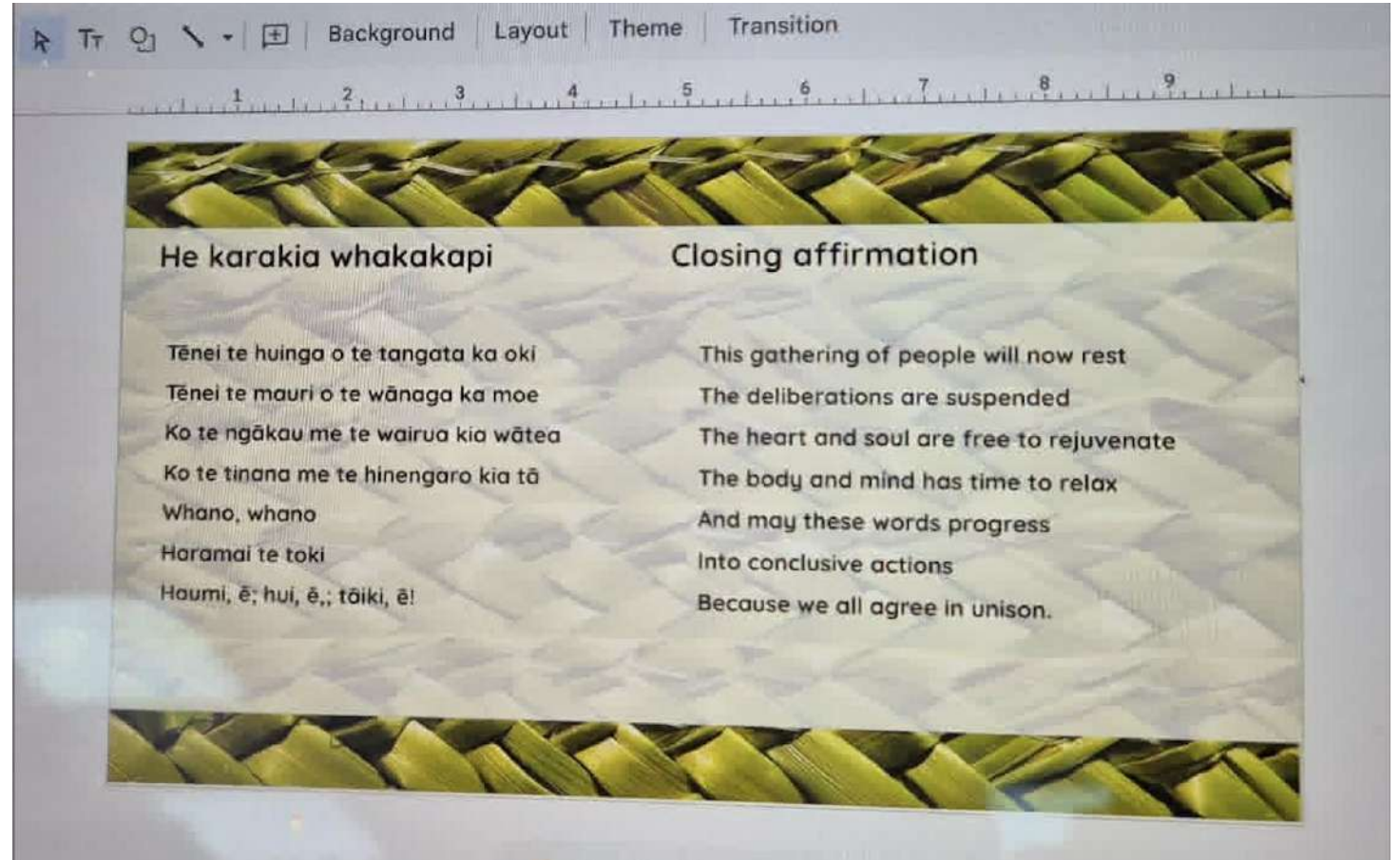
The Queensland School Autism Reflection Tool (QsArt), developed by Griffith University and the Queensland Department of Education, keeps the Index's self-review structure — with five whole-school domains, rated and progressed through an action plan.

It reworks that structure and is autism-specific rather than generic, a built-in tiered support model, and competencies are linked to existing accountability instruments rather than standing apart as its own compliance regime.



Insights from New Zealand

- Strong cultural responsiveness and belonging
- Flexible learning pathways and student agency
- Embedded specialist collaboration
- Authentic community and transition programs



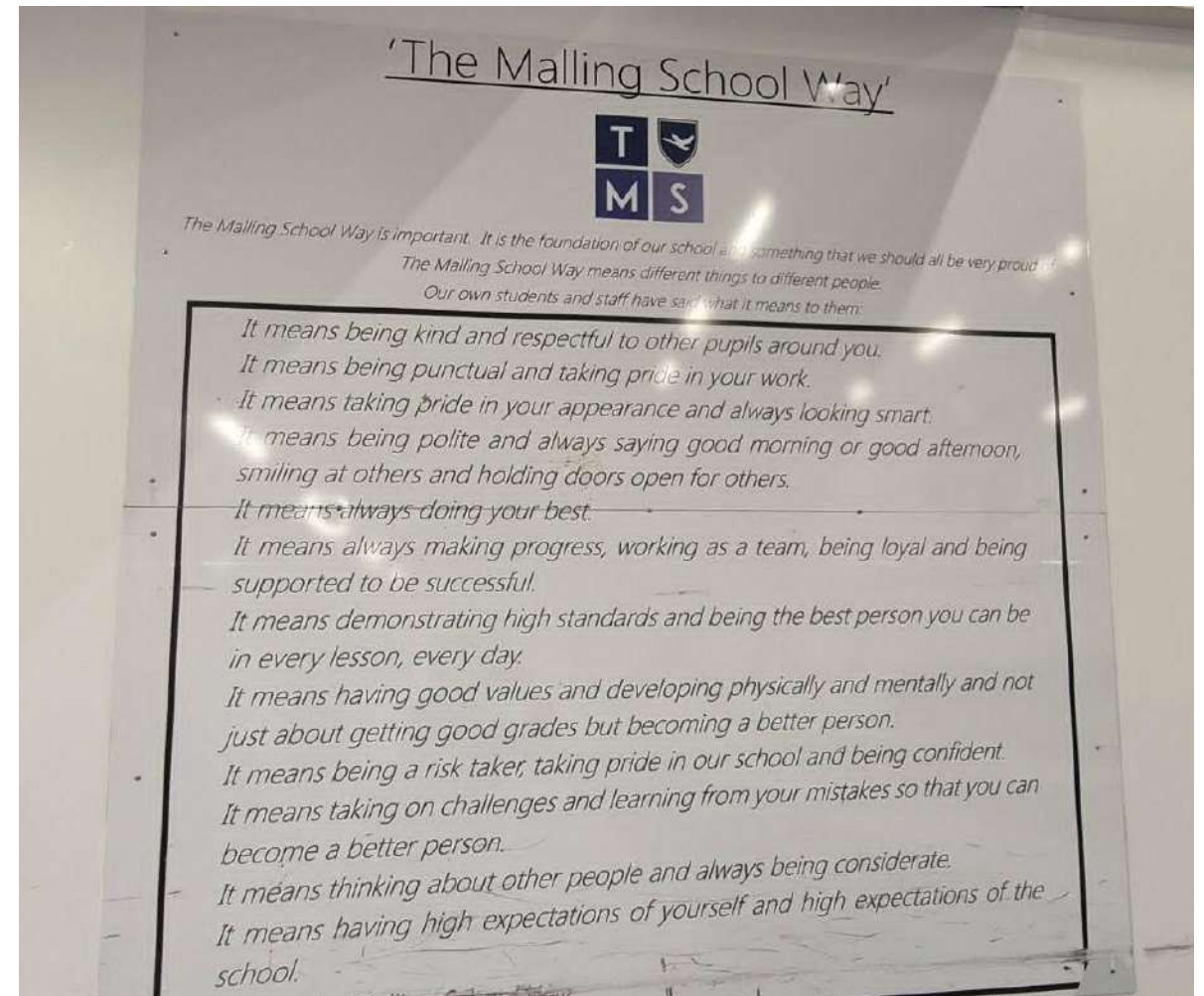
Insights from Finland

- High trust in teachers and reduced bureaucracy
- Strong focus on equity and wellbeing
- Flexible support structures
- Personal responsibility and independence promoted early



Insights from the United Kingdom

- Strong whole-school systems and routines
- Focus on belonging and emotional wellbeing
- Structured intervention and scaffolded learning
- Growing responses to school avoidance and anxiety



Leadership Actions for NSW Schools

- Develop a shared definition of inclusion
- Embed inclusion into school improvement planning
- Use student, staff, and family voice
- Audit barriers to participation and belonging



A Practical Inclusion Improvement Cycle

- 1. Audit current practice
- 2. Identify one high-impact focus area
- 3. Build staff capability
- 4. Trial small changes
- 5. Collect student feedback
- 6. Scale successful practices
- 7. Celebrate the small wins!

Year 7 2025 - Students with Additional Learning Needs

Family name	First name	Yr	Additional Need					DP	NCCD	
			IEP Updated	Details	Additional Information	Dis Con	Expiry Dt	Provisions	Disability category	Level of adjustment
Δαμάσκ	Ωύλλω	7	IEP Updated	Benefits from fidget tools	High performing	Au/MH3	2025		Cognitive	Substantial
Κυνηγά	Σαρά	7	IEP Updated	Check for student understanding. Break larger tasks down into smaller sections. Student can often be overwhelmed with a large task. Impulse control. Benefits from fidget tools and regular breaks.	Requires significant support engaging with peers and staff. Also requires significant assistance with her learning and processing time.	AU	2025		cognitive/social/emotional	Extensive
Μορέλ	Χηρόλτα	7	IEP Updated	Requires additional processing time and		Au	2030		Cognitive	Extensive
Ρεγφάμαν	Εσπ	7	IEP Updated		High performing	Au	2030			Substantial



Strategic Improvement Plan 2022-2026

Bulli High School 8878



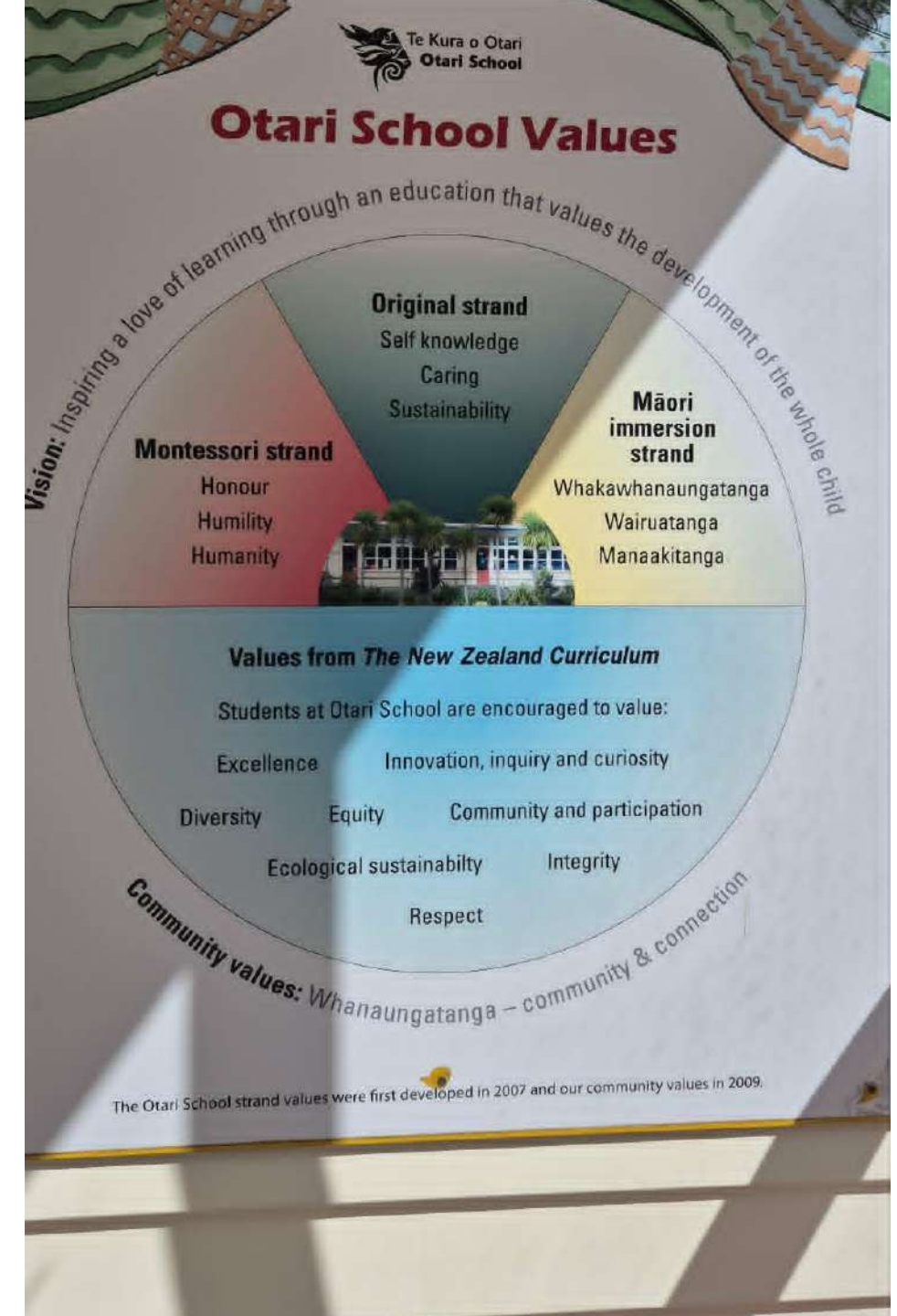
A high-angle photograph of three students sitting on a grassy area. They are gathered around a large, colorful mural that features a stylized figure in a blue and orange design. The students are looking at a document held by one of them. The student on the left has long dark hair and is wearing a black shirt. The student in the middle has short brown hair and is wearing a light blue shirt. The student on the right has long dark hair and is wearing a black shirt. The document they are looking at has some text and a blue header. The background shows a grassy field and a building in the distance.

Final Reflection

Inclusion is most powerful when
embedded into everyday school life

Final Reflection

- Inclusive schools shared strong leadership, flexible systems, and relational cultures





Final Reflection

- Goal: Every student belongs, participates, and flourishes

