








# Creating an inclusive classroom culture

In order for a student with disability to participate and thrive in their learning environment, it is important that they feel comfortable and that their education setting is inclusive.

A comfortable learning setting is underpinned by a set of values which prioritise inclusion. These are:

	<b>Respect</b>
	<b>Empathy</b>
	<b>Openness</b>
	<b>Curiosity</b>
	<b>Trust</b>
	<b>Fairness</b>
	<b>Accountability</b>

## How do I create these values in my classroom?



### Respect

A student with disability may require an adjustment to be made in order for them to participate in lessons. Through engaging with them and their parents/carer before the school year starts to understand their needs, and by putting in place reasonable adjustments to assist learning, a teacher shows that they value and respect the student. These conversations should be continual, with a teacher noting that an adjustment needed one year may be different to the adjustment needed the following year. Respect is also shown by not speaking down to a student with disability, and by not referring to them as “disabled” or “handicapped”.



### Empathy

Recognising and empathising with the challenges faced by a student with disability can improve their educational experience. By making small changes to your practice, such as not speaking with your back turned to the class if you have a student with a hearing impairment, or by ensuring a student who uses a mobility aid has sufficient room to move around the classroom, a student can be made to feel more at ease. Checking in with the student during your conversations and seeing how they feel their experience could be improved can be helpful with this. It is important not to assume that you know what the student will or will not need, and to implement any changes to your practice discreetly so as not to draw unnecessary attention to them.



## Openness

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Being open not only includes speaking with and listening to a student with disability, but also fostering open-mindedness within a classroom environment. This can be done by encouraging students to focus on the abilities and not the disability of a student. Another way to encourage open-mindedness is to choose resources (videos etc.) which include students with disability or to invite speakers who have a disability to the school.



## Curiosity

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Learning more about the student as a person, not just about their disability, is key to having them feel acknowledged in a learning environment. Through engaging with them around their interests and their strengths, as you would with any other student, the student will feel more comfortable being themselves in the classroom.



## Trust

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Through embodying the above values, you will foster a relationship of trust with a student with disability. The student will trust that you, as their teacher, have their best interests at heart. It is important for the teacher to also trust that the student knows best when it comes to their abilities, how they learn, and how they like to interact in a classroom.



## Fairness

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Striking a balance between meeting the needs of a student with disability and the needs of the rest of the class can sometimes be challenging. Through recognising that a student with disability may not be happy with a sideline role, be it in sports or in any other aspect of their learning, and by altering the plan for the lesson to cater for their participation, this balance can be struck. Fairness is also shown through the language used when speaking about a student with disability. By referring to them by their name, and not by their disability, you set the tone for how they are treated not only within the classroom but within the larger school environment.



## Accountability

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Through recognising the important role that you play in the life of a student with disability, you must also take accountability for any actions or mistakes that you make which may be hurtful. Through engaging in self-reflection and professional learning which can enhance your knowledge of teaching a student with disability, you increase your awareness of the role that you play as an educator. While it may not always be possible, it can also be helpful to remind other teachers and leaders within the educational context that they too are accountable for the learning experience of students with disabilities.

**In order for a student with disability to participate and thrive in their learning environment, it is important that they feel comfortable and that their education setting is inclusive.**

## Inclusive school culture

Through living the above set of values, you can help enlighten other members of the school community of the importance of inclusivity within the school. When these values are recognised school-wide, they lead to an inclusive school culture.

An inclusive culture is driven by:

- **values and a sense of belonging** – by underpinning the above values throughout the school, students with disability will feel more comfortable participating
- **beliefs and behaviours of the school community** – as the community becomes more open-minded about students with disability, long held beliefs and behaviours which may have held those students back can be broken down
- **systems and processes** – revisiting school systems and processes to ensure that they serve all students, including students with disability, can lead to further participation
- **universal design** – designing the environment on a physical, educational, and emotional level to support the participation of all students, including those with disability.

Using positive language can also help to build an inclusive culture.

✗ Avoid:	✓ Try:
Disabled/handicapped	Person with disability
Suffers from...	Has disability
Wheelchair bound Confined to a wheelchair	Person who uses a wheelchair Wheelchair user
Mental Crazy Mad	Person with a mental health condition
Mentally retarded	Person with cognitive disability
Simple	Person with intellectual disability
Mentally disabled	Person with psychosocial disability
Mentally defective	
Brain damaged	Person with a brain injury
Normal person	Person without disability