

Showcase

Awards for Excellence in Schools



Design

See our story - [Every Student with Disability Succeeding Framework Focusing on Capability](#)

"We chose Ferny Grove for our daughter over other local schools because of their inclusive attitude to schooling. I followed the FB page last year and saw so many kind teachers, programs and examples of going over and above for those students requiring a few extra resources to ensure they had a great school experience." Kelly Reeves, Parent 2018

The Disability Discrimination Act and Anti-Discrimination Act promotes practices that increase access to, or quality of, education for people with a disability. The Deloittes report into schools' inclusion of students with a disability (2017) states that *"it is a widely held view among academics, advocates and community groups alike that the default setting of education for students with disability should be in regular schools"* and that, *"domestic and international policy encourages education providers to not just deliver the best possible education for students with disability, but to do this within inclusive settings."* These beliefs are strongly embedded in the culture of FGSS – they inform every decision, every day, for all of our students.

Ferny Grove State School is a unique and diverse community. We currently have 875 students enrolled. Of these, 58 students are verified or awaiting verification, 140 students have parents working in the Australian Defence Force and a wide range of ethnic and cultural groups are represented.

Our challenge commenced with a mission to develop a whole of school commitment to inclusion, a culture where difference is acknowledged, supported and valued. A place where all students and adults are empowered to be the best they can be. A place where professional behaviours and processes challenge existing language, attitudes and practices and demonstrate excellence in differentiation. A place where school and community partnerships empower parents and carers with the knowledge and capability to advocate for their children through formal and informal avenues.

"Inclusion is really about making schools a reflection of their community and we commit to ensure that any child that walks into our school will be included, will be supported and be part of our community." (Brett Shackleton, Principal, Ferny Grove State School)

[Alec's story](#) reflects how a whole school community has embraced the uniqueness of a little boy with a life limiting illness.

Where did we start?

In 2012 our school undertook a 12 month process of redefining our school vision, values and schoolwide pedagogy. To develop these we engaged systematically with staff, students and parents to determine what our school would look like over the next 5-10 years. At the heart of our work was the valuing of student, staff, parent and community voice. If we were to be a truly inclusive school then we first needed to engage respectfully with all those with a stake in our work, developing strong school and community partnerships. The strength of our collaborative process ensured shared ownership of our vision, values and school wide pedagogical framework driving our culture and our behaviour since then – [FGSS SWP](#). A review of our SWP across 2017/18 indicates that what we set out to achieve in 2012 is embedded in practice in 2017.

The information presented in this application provides evidence of real, personalised and sustained impact on the social, emotional and academic outcomes for the full range of students at FGSS.

How is diversity our strength?

Attending class alongside a student with a disability can yield positive impacts on the social attitudes and beliefs of non-disabled students. A literature review describes five benefits of inclusion for non-disabled students: reduced fear of human differences, accompanied by increased comfort and awareness; growth in social cognition; improvements in self-concept; development of personal moral and ethical principles; and warm and caring friendships (Staub & Peck, 1995). [Tahlia's Story](#)

One of the six core pedagogical principles that guide our work is diversity which we define as *"recognising and valuing differences; where everyone is respected and appreciated for who they are and has the opportunity to achieve-to be the best they can be."* Inclusion is built firmly on a foundation of valuing diversity. Our actions therefore must align with our words and be evident not just within the school but across the community. Teachers are pivotal in creating an inclusive culture of engaging learning that improves wellbeing



and achievement but so too are all staff in the school. Our Defence Force Transition Aide [ADF at FGSS](#) and our Chaplain [Victoria's Story](#) have established strong, innovative and strategic profiles in our school that expand opportunities and contribute directly to greater student success.

How did we embed and sustain our vision for diversity and inclusion?

Leaders take responsibility for keeping the commitment to inclusion visible in as many forums as possible. We celebrate the little wins for kids and staff. We expect our staff to align their practices with our vision, we support them to do it and we learn from our mistakes. Collaborative empowerment is key. By working together, communicating better with each other, developing our people, and reviewing our performance, we ensure Ferny Grove State School has high expectations for, and improves the educational outcomes for all students.

Words matter but only if they align with knowledge and capability to make it possible for those words to be turned into actions. Teachers are in the most powerful position to do this through the provision of timely teacher capability building and support. If inclusion is important and part of our improvement plan then leaders have a responsibility to dedicate time, resources and professional conversations to making it real in schools. We sought to foster not mandate consistent schoolwide practices that have authoritative and achievable frameworks for teachers.

We build teaching quality through collaborative expertise practices with a high effect size on student outcomes. Our systematic approach to developing collaborative inquiry-based professional learning cycles reflects in excellence in differentiation for teachers. Through the annual performance review process teachers are able to choose the six week pedagogical deepening cycle that aligns with their goal. We know our learners by regularly updating and analysing our Kid Tracker at individual, class, cohort and whole school levels. It informs our year level planning and is used to identify students at risk.

All teaching staff are responsible for creating and updating Personal Learning Records and referring students to our Student Needs Action Committee (SNAC). This group, comprised of the Principal, Deputy Principals, Guidance Officer, Head of Special Education Services, Speech Language Pathologist, Support Teachers for Literacy and Numeracy, Student Welfare and Engagement Teacher and Chaplain, meets weekly to case manage vulnerable students. Our [SNAC](#) process is clearly documented and engages professionals as necessary to ensure all student needs are tracked and reviewed.

Impact

What does a culture of successful whole school inclusion look like?

Telling a story of whole school cultural change is challenging and complex. There are many overlapping strategies, leadership behaviours, case studies and evidence sources collected to make it happen. It takes time, resilience, perseverance and deep philosophical commitment. Diversity and the need for inclusion necessarily leads to stories of individual students, their families, their educators and their successes and challenges. Our students' stories demonstrate that there are several core and fundamental actions that drive improved inclusion models and more importantly sustain inclusion over the long term. This is not a strategy, a program or a project, it is about highly capable educators working in sustained and resilient partnerships with parents to meet the diverse and challenging needs of children. Every case is different, every approach is tailored and every child is at the core of the work. This is about telling the stories of individual students, their teachers, their parents and every professional that walks beside them all to make it possible for success to be achieved.

How do we know we are close to our vision for inclusion?

The staff at FGSS have taken extraordinary and innovative steps to ensure the inclusion of students experiencing high impact medical issues that prevent their attendance at school. The case studies of both [Brodie](#) and [Harlie](#) highlight the attention to personalised learning and maintaining connection to our school, and the significant outcomes this can have on them academically and emotionally. Our data sets also tell us. Imagine a school where the numbers of students with disability have increased and the levels of staff who view our school as having an inclusive culture where diversity is valued and respected has also increased - [My School has an Inclusive Culture](#). Our staff model it in their practice and in their collaboration [Reuben's Story – a team approach](#). Our parents remind us [Why Ferny Grove?](#) Our students show us in their long journey with us [Kian's Story](#) and their shorter journey with us [Marcus' Story](#) and when they see how diversity advantages rather than disadvantages others [Luke's Story](#). And our system recognises our work in the [Every Student with Disability Succeeding Framework through Focusing on Capability](#).

Scalability

Research suggests that it is through the development of this culture of collaborative problem solving that the inclusion of students with disabilities can serve as a catalyst for school-wide improvement and yield benefits for non-disabled students (Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993; Hehir & Katzman, 2012). In effective inclusive schools, the traditional isolated classroom is replaced with a more flexible structure that facilitates collaboration across school staff and with outside industries. Our work with a telepresence robot in *Brodie's Story* has led to our support for a nation-wide roll out of such equipment for sick children experiencing long periods away from school. The not for profit group, [Missing School](#) have used our on the ground technical, legal and educational experience and expertise to guide their project planning.

Our experience has taught us that you need seven key elements to create whole school culture change around inclusion:

Leadership - Leaders must model through their language (words matter), their use of time, their engagement with staff and students and their willingness to listen, challenge and support. This is not a one time staff meeting discussion, the vision must be discussed, linked to success stories, personalised and shared.

Processes - Our personalised learning records and [SNAC](#) processes are planned and detailed. We know all our vulnerable students, we review them regularly, we track their progress and once per term we prioritise time to allow teachers to update PLRs, to ensure we capture what is working for these students.

Vision and values - If we don't take the time to determine what it is we stand for then how can we possibly align our actions. We developed our vision using a research based framework called IDEAS that assumed teachers as leaders and researchers. We determined that if we wanted teachers to be involved in creating a culture of inclusion then we better take the time to talk about why it is important and then justify it in research.

Celebrating Success - Our most challenging students are defined as 'our kids', they belong to everyone, we are all accountable. Success breeds success: build on what the student can do and celebrate it.

Professional Learning - Our working assumption is that 'the knowledge is in the room' so we provide opportunities for our teams to collaborate, problem solve and plan. If necessary we bring in outside experts with specific knowledge of either the child or the goals for that child. Goals are based on what is needed for that child right now in their development, we focus on a 'just in time and just for me' model of goal setting.

Reflection – We provide capability for teachers to reflect, experiment and take risks with their pedagogy. Every child, every case, every teacher is different so why would we assume a 'one size fits all' approach to planning and goal setting. If necessary, we will release a teacher from class to ensure deep discussions are held with leaders, support staff and parents sitting round the table.

Engage with Community - Parents want to know their child is safe, happy and learning. For parents of children with challenges this need is heightened. All individual plans involve parents in the decision making process as well as when we work with [Private Providers as Partners](#). We also engage our community to raise awareness and provide education in alignment with national initiatives [Disability Action Week](#).

Investment

Implementing inclusive education is not exclusively a matter of additional financial resources (Curcic, 2009). Effective inclusive education requires teachers and other educational professionals to regularly engage in collaborative problem solving. Through whole school collaboration, school staff can share ideas and strategies to address the specific challenges faced by individual students with and without disabilities (Carter & Hughes, 2006). Teachers and other school staff work together to devise classroom-based interventions that can increase a student's chances for success (Bouillet, 2013). This collaboration may involve interactions between classroom teachers, speech and language specialists, school psychologists and the principal, who all work together to meet the needs of each individual student, dividing time and sharing resources. All schools are now empowered through 'direct to school' resourcing. We have taken maximum advantage of this and our IPS status to ensure we align our resourcing with our vision for inclusion.

Conclusion

Inclusion is not just a word or a pipe dream. Inclusion is a mindset. It can be achieved given time, leadership, resourcing and quality teaching. Inclusion benefits all; students, parents, staff and community. Inclusion doesn't happen by accident; it's deliberate, it's every day, it's every person. It is a hard, but worthwhile, journey that involves a school setting an example for its community. Our story is multi-faceted and complex but an extremely important one that needs to be told.

References

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Appendix



Alec's Story *(full transcript)*

Alec is 11 years of age in Year 6 with a fatal genetic condition called Sanfilippo Syndrome – this condition is progressive and will result in Alec slowly losing all his abilities. The family experienced misdiagnoses of ADHD, ODD and Autism throughout first 3 years of schooling prior to diagnosis of Sanfilippo. With FGSS, the family experienced student focussed and planned integration, high levels of considered and consistent communication, and being embraced by the whole school community. Outcomes for Alec include a significant increase in: regular class participation, meaningful peer relationships and engagement in every aspect of school life.

"This is absolute testament to the leadership team and the way they have chosen to respect the diversity of their community and embrace the differences of their students and to pass on these beliefs to their entire school community. In my eyes this school is one that needs to be replicated," (Michelle Morrice, Alec's mother)

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Tahlia's Story

"I have had the privilege of working in and out of the classroom with disabled classmates for the past 4 years. In that time I have formed some amazing friendships and learnt to see past their disability, to be friends with them for who they are. Learning to communicate with them has helped me to speak up and not be shy in and out of the school grounds. Each day I try to encourage my fellow peers to treat people equally and accept people for who they are beyond their disability. To me, inclusion means identifying their individual strengths and weaknesses and changing the game for them so that they don't feel left out. I'm thankful that I have these opportunities and experiences."
(Tahlia, Alec's friend)



ADF at FGSS

Nearly 16% of FGSS students have a parent serving in the ADF. Our capacity as a school to enrol, connect and engage these families is absolutely critical. Our school has a strong understanding of the unique experiences and diverse needs of students from Defence families, in particular, the impact parental absence and mobility has on Defence students' education and their social and emotional wellbeing. Driven by FGSS' core values, one of the key focuses of the support provided by the DSTA program is to create a sense of belonging, inclusion, acceptance and appreciation of all Defence families in our school community. The student delivered commemoration of ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day is about connection and belonging for these families. Whole school participation creating a family Wall of Honour, art and craft displays, baking ANZAC slices to share with everyone and family morning teas enhance students' understanding of military history and the sacrifices made by Australians Defence Force members. It also gives our Defence families an opportunity to proudly showcase the commitment and contribution their families have made as part of their military service. Our commitment is to understand the impact of deployment and mobility, know our families and take the time to connect them to our school as soon as possible. For some students the contact needed is infrequent while for others it is regular and often. Know the student and their family first.



[Our Award Winning ANZAC Day Schools' presentation](#)
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Victoria's Story

Our LRT and performing arts coordinator approached our Chaplain to discuss how Victoria who is 13 years old and intellectually impaired could contribute to the after school drama program. Each week, Chappy and Victoria plan and make afternoon tea for up to 50 students and adults. They start during the school day providing opportunities for staff and students to connect and develop their relationships with Victoria asking her what she's making this week. This has evolved into more students participating in this activity and working alongside Victoria further developing her language and social skills.



"Last week I heard a student say who was helping, 'after you've finished serving the food, come and I'll save you a seat beside me.'" (Alexia Hoffman, Chaplain)

Chappy posts pictures on the drama FB page and parents, hearing about the positive impact this is having on every child, donate ingredients. Amongst the business and mess in the kitchen is laughter, hugs, chatter, engagement, responsibility, a sense of accomplishment and achievement, and feeling every bit a part of the whole production. This significant increase in confidence has recently seen Victoria compete at the north West District Cross Country where she laughed her way through the whole process and practically bear hugged the announcer when receiving her medal.

"She is teaching me many things in the whole process. This story is a reason to continue what I do." (Alexia Hoffman)

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Appendix: Impact

Brodie's Story (full transcript)

Brodie was diagnosed with Leukaemia in July 2016 and missed most of Term 3 and 4 2016 due to his treatment. For Year 5, Brodie joined an iPad class to support his capacity to complete work when physically unable to attend. Through community connections the family borrowed a Telepresence Robot 'Wally' to allow Brodie to attend school via the robot from home. The main benefit of "Wally" was that he could remain connected with his class but it also increased his participation in school – for example he could attend reading groups.



“The use of the iPad also increased Brodie’s engagement in the academic side of school and as such we saw his grades improve back to pre-diagnosis.” (Bianca Mullin, Brodie’s mother)

On Brodie’s first day back in 2017, a large number of students in both his own class and across the school participated in the ‘World’s Greatest Shave’ raising a significant amount of money for the Leukaemia Foundation.

“As his parents it was a really special moment to see the students shave their hair to support us and it certainly helped Brodie feel more at ease on his return as he had no hair left due to the chemotherapy. At no time has Brodie been made to feel any different by his peers since his treatment commenced.” (Bianca Mullin)

Brodie’s story and the school’s response was profiled by multiple news organisations after which our school connected with an emerging advocacy group, [Missing School](#), who had recently been funded to provide these robots to hospitals across Australia.

Our work was used as part of their submission for funding and our technical support was provided to maximise the chances of success for the national project. Both Education Qld and Apple have visited since then to capture our experience for sharing. A partnership was developed with a mining software company to provide access to the robot along with significant technical support and problem solving by our school IT leaders.

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Harlie’s Story [\(full transcript\)](#)

Harlie has cerebral palsy, is wheelchair bound and currently in Year 2. Approaching Prep age, Harlie’s Mother, Jacqui, began phoning local schools for enrolment inquiring about extra assistance and access to all areas.

“[Other schools] told me they cannot install ramps or appropriate toileting facilities and that I should consider a special school as they would be equipped appropriately. I decided to try Ferny Grove State School before settling on a special school as I was sure a mainstream school is where Harlie belonged.” (Jacqui Russell, Harlie’s mother)

Upon speaking our HOSES, Jacqui was informed how Harlie’s education would be tailored to her needs and was assured that all necessary facilities such as ramps, change table and toilet access would be in place in time for her to start school.

“Her Prep class spoke regularly about inclusion and even allowed Harlie’s peers to try a wheelchair in the classroom to better understand the world from Harlie’s point of view and the obstacles she faces,” (Jacqui Russell)

These discussions developed not only understanding in all students but the skills to identify when Harlie might need assistance in and outside of the classroom.

During Semester 2 of Harlie’s second year at Ferny Grove, she had 6 weeks away from school for spinal surgery in America. During this time the school organised a video call with her class so Harlie could share her experience in real time and upon her return, a special education teacher visited home 1 hour, 3 days per week so Harlie could concentrate on rest and physiotherapy but continue her learning. These home visits continued for most of Term 4. This year she has many friends, was elected class student councillor and joined the choir.

“Harlie has achieved more than I ever dreamed because her school recognised her needs and opened up new opportunities for her to develop, not only academically, but socially. Harlie’s future is bright and I believe Ferny Grove will continue to be a part of her success.” (Jacqui Russell)

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Reuben’s Story – a team approach

Immediately upon commencing prep this year, Reuben was displaying frequent significantly inappropriate physical behaviours and high levels of non-compliance. This presented incredible challenges for staff and students.

His high need for support to function successfully in the classroom meant that a team approach of the SEP, Guidance Officer, school leaders and outside support professionals was essential. A plan that aligned the needs of the teacher, teacher aides, Reuben and other students with the goal of learning to function within and feel included in the classroom, year level and school community was put in place. Support was individualised and intense with both HOSES and Guidance Officer providing one on one support, feedback and interaction with Reuben in his classroom. The whole



process involved in class support, no withdrawal programs were used apart from short term planned and negotiated managed attendance. Family support was accessed through our region to ensure alignment between parenting and school.

“Supporting Reuben’s mother through this time was equally important. Reuben’s learning and our strategies in this short period will have a huge long term positive impact on Reuben’s school career and life outcomes. This is well worth celebrating.” (Stacey Day, HOSES)

“Reuben now is able to stay safely in the classroom for the whole day. He has developed an understanding of the boundaries that he needs to keep within, his role in the classroom and the roles of those around him” (Nicole Ingram, Class Teacher).

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Why Ferny Grove?

“At FGSS the value of diversity is not just tokenistic and written in policy documents and on the website for the sake of it, it is clearly demonstrated and put into practice, it is evident when you walk around the school, when you speak with staff, when you see children interacting with each other and in correspondence such as emails from the school and the school newsletter... There were many opportunities available to us to gain information about the school and on every occasion and interaction with FGSS I felt like they had time for us. We weren’t just another parent or a number, our questions and concerns about our son starting school were valued and heard and that they would help him to be the best he could be... I know his teacher has put in place strategies to encourage and support Harley to learn his peer’s names. He is engaged in his peer group and in learning and excitedly shows me his pieces of work when I pick him up from school, with a sense of purpose and achievement... I did not expect Harley to transition this well to school, I feared there would be many challenges and he would be unhappy. I have no doubt that the school environment as a whole supports Harley and all the students to feel valued and to value and respect each other. The school ethos and value of diversity really shines through in the positive teacher-student relationships as well as the friendliness of the students and their interaction with one another.” (Kirsty Tinsley, mother)

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Kian’s Story

“My son Kian (10) is a very complex little man...he doesn’t fit any box, too smart for special school, main stream was our only choice for him. Since 2013 Kian has done nothing but excel every single year. Each year better than the last. Thanks to FGSS and their fantastic SEP Kian has been at school full days since Grade 3. I am pleased to say that entering Grade 5 this year Kian has met his challenges head on and with great eagerness. He is doing LOTE (German) and he got an A- and B on his first ever test, to say he was pleased was an understatement! He is taking part in interschool sport (Soccer), he is making new friends with sport and he is very much an important part of the team. He is reading and writing things I was unsure if he would ever be able to do. I am so happy with Kian’s progress at FGSS that I and another parent started a support group called SUCCESS. We wanted parents to have a support network within the school to know that they are not alone. We have great support from our SEP but nothing can match the support of other special needs parents as well. We are one big family.” (Carrissa Ahern, Kian’s mother)

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Marcus’ Story [\(full transcript\)](#)

“In 2009 our son (2 years old) was diagnosed with Spinal Cancer, he would not walk again and was introduced to his first wheelchair. In 2012 Marcus started at a small private school. As the years progressed, emotionally and academically Marcus was regressing. January 2017, we started Marcus at FGSS a reserved young man, not confident in his academic ability and very shy with his teacher and amongst his peers. FGSS took on board these concerns of Marcus’ and treated him with dignity and respect. If he wanted to sit at a regular desk, no worries. If he wanted to transfer to a chair, go for it. If he wanted to get on the floor with his mates, just do it. If he was assigned a weekly classroom job, just get on with it. It does not matter how it was done, as long as it was done. He was treated as an equal, and that is exactly how Marcus wanted to be treated. Marcus had access to Quick Smart and Maths Jam to consolidate his maths skills and build his confidence. Tennis was incorporated into the Interschool Sporting schedule to allow active participation. Transportation to sporting events, excursion and school camp, no problem, a wheelchair accessible bus was ordered. And school camp (WOW!), Camp Good Enough, embraced Marcus as one of the boys. Marcus was able to participate in all activities, high ropes, crate stacking, building Billy Go-Carts and even the giant swing. FGSS’ strong culture of diversity and inclusion is one I greatly commend. Effective communication with us as parents, Marcus’ Community Support, and FGSS AVT has and continues to ensure his success in his schooling journey. Thank you FGSS, we wish we made the transition to your school sooner.” (Kerry Lentini, Marcus’ mother)

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Luke's Story

Luke was diagnosed with dyspraxia and severe cerebral palsy at birth and for the duration of his schooling was treated as intellectually impaired and was isolated from his peers. For thirty years Luke remained trapped in his body with no way to communicate, until he discovered facilitated communication. This unlocked an innate, natural ability to express himself with a truly wonderful vocab/imagery and a unique perception of life in his interactions with others. Working with the students offered Luke an opportunity to share his love of writing poetry and also motivated and inspired reluctant student writers. The results of his interactions with students is astounding.



"Not only do children now view writing as a truly valuable skill worth sharing but it has opened their eyes to the capabilities of people even in the face of profound disabilities." (Matt Kurth, Class Teacher)

"Luke is an amazing man who truly takes the "dis" out of disability. It was inspirational to meet a man that has risen above the challenges that life has served him with such strength and ability. His poetry bought tears to my eyes and his communication skills and vocab are incredible and it made me realize that you don't need a voice to be heard!!" (Year 6 student FGSS)

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Private Providers as Partners

"There has been considerable flexibility shown by staff at FGSS. It has never been assumed that a student with a diagnosis (e.g., an anxiety disorder or autism spectrum disorder) would have the same presentation or needs as another student with the same diagnosis. Staff have sought knowledge about each student that I have worked with to determine what inclusivity looks like for them and they have adjusted their approach accordingly. Moreover, if the severity of a child's presentation has not warranted a diagnosis, class teachers and support staff have happily taken suggestions on board to promote that child's engagement. In situations in which children have not met criteria for verification, FGSS staff have found ways to provide additional support to these children, where other schools have not." (Chrystal Grey of Grey Matters Psychology)

"As private therapists, we are frequently involved with families as they make their transition to primary school. It is with confidence that we can share our positive experiences with this school – including sharing of goals and strategies for individual goal setting and planning as well as reciprocal feedback with classroom staff and specialist staff from the support unit." (Katrina Langtry and the Everton Therapy team)

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Disability Action Week

In 2015, Ferny Grove State School was successful in obtaining Department of Communities funding for an event for Disability Action Week. We partnered with cluster schools and outside providers to develop a program. On Sunday 13 September, we hosted Showcase for Success – Parenting Diverse Learners, focused on educating, connecting and supporting students with disability and their families in our extended community. The Showcase for Success combined speakers and interactive workshops, information booths/stands and supervised activities for students with disability and their siblings to allow parents to participate fully in the Showcase offerings. Our Keynote Speaker was well-respected Asperger's researcher, Professor Tony Attwood. Parents came from as far away as the Bundaberg and the Gold Coast to access this program. Attendance was over 150 with 50 children booked into our activity program. This was all provided at no cost to parents.

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