Glenorchy Primary School has a very diverse student population. Nearly 30% of students have a disability of varying degrees. Due to this large number of students with disabilities, we have a strong support network in place for those students. We have a number of support teachers that work with individual classroom teachers as well as with teams to make sure that we are providing the best support possible to all of our students with disabilities. Our support teachers assist us to communicate with families, as well as with external providers such as occupational therapists and physiotherapists.

This is a grade three/four class and we were focusing on the curriculum areas of English and Science. I had two TAs (Teacher Assistant) present during this lesson to facilitate the inclusion of my students with disabilities, as well as to help all of the students within my classroom. Within this class I have two students with cerebral palsy who both have very different needs. Both students have involuntary body movements and weakness in their muscles that make everyday tasks difficult. I have two students with ADHD who require significant adjustments to their learning program, as well as a student with a mitochondrial disorder.

One of our students with cerebral palsy is in a wheelchair, but they also have an Eyegaze system, which at the start of the year was something that a lot of the kids were very unsure about. So we had a conversation as a class, with the students consent, about what the device was and how it worked. And with the assistance of Jasmine, we were able to show the kids exactly how that device works, which they found fascinating because it is an incredible piece of technology. So once they knew that this child had the capacity to communicate with them, it just looked differently to how they would normally communicate with someone else, it really allowed them almost that peace of mind that, yes, it was okay to come and talk to that student. That student was more than capable of asking questions or requesting things or saying, “No, I don't want to do that.” So, I treat all students as if they have agency over the choices in their lives, especially in regards to how they treat others and the rest of the team model that as well.

We really do try and model empathy, respect and patience as our main values, and we expose these to students both explicitly, through explicit teaching, but also vicariously through literature and film. So, really focusing on those prosocial behaviours and teaching them explicitly because both our students with disabilities and those without really struggle with some of those social skills. We make sure that our students with disabilities are included socially with their peers as much as we can.

We have opportunities throughout the day within the classroom to work in groups but also opportunities throughout the week to play games and to talk with their peers. And we ensure that our students with disabilities are included so they might need more modelling from an adult or they might need help to facilitate starting that conversation with their peers, or maybe including them in a game. And the team that I have are really beautiful at being able to manufacture those friendships and make sure that if the students have been left out, how can we change that and how can we include them with their peers?

How can we make them feel connected with their peers, but also with the grown ups in the room as well. We make sure that the games we play are accessible for everyone in our classroom, so our brain breaks the things that all of the students can participate in.

Okay, Aaron can you help Soph out with this word? What does it say? Rubbish, says Jed. He is just. Can we find this word, Soph? Would you like me to help you? Help. Yeah, okay.

We run differentiated reading groups daily, and we do this so that all of our students can be working close to their level of proximal development. We have a very diverse group of learners in our classroom, and as such, we need to differentiate in order for everyone to be able to access the curriculum at their level. The body language of our students with disabilities is something that we have to keep a close eye on. So, for one of our students, her ability to communicate centres around using the Eyegaze. But that is not always the easiest thing for her to use. And, so, sometimes she requires to get our attention in different ways, or sometimes we just need to read her body language to make sure that she's comfortable so that we can ask her what we can do to help, because her ability to communicate her wants or her needs with us is obviously very reduced and very dependent on having constant access to her Eyegaze system.

At times through the video you might notice that I'm holding the student's hand or holding her arm. This is in response to when I can see that she's trying hard to focus on her EyeGaze. She needs extra trunk support when she's doing that, but she can also find it quite difficult because she has uncontrolled movements in her limbs. So, sometimes as we will be working, her arms will flail. And so she actually finds it very comforting and will often seek, you'll sometimes you hear the vocalisations that she's making when she's trying to get my attention, when I'm sitting next to her you’ll see her watching. And so I look for those little cues and then quite often I’ll ask “Would you like me to hold your hand while we're doing this?” And it does just help her to stabilise her body in a way that it makes it easier for her to communicate.

We use some different technology in the classroom to assist our students with their different needs. You can see the EyeGaze system being used by one of our students with cerebral palsy. That has been a wonderful device for her and it allows her to communicate with those around her much more efficiently. We also use iPads for several of our students, with voice to text software as well, because it reduces the need for handwriting, which is a very difficult thing for one of our students. So, being able to communicate his thinking and his understanding through speech to text is a valuable skill for him, because that is how speech to text has been chosen as an optimum way for that student to communicate, especially moving forward into high school.

We also have lots of small adjustments that we make that have been recommended by occupational therapists and physiotherapists. So, you might notice that there are hand splints and elbow splints that help support the children to hold their arms independently; gives them a little bit more support. We've got the tray table on the wheelchair that allows the student to have a pedorod which helps them to stabilise their trunk and their core. I also have and wear a Roger device that goes around my neck and it's simply a microphone that transmits my voice or the voice of the person wearing it into the hearing aid of a student.

It's very important for us that we are moving safely throughout the classroom. It's also really important for us to make sure that the kids are thinking about their movements and thinking about little actions that they can do that will support other people. The classroom is configured in a way that we have wheelchair access to every point in the room, but we do have sit spots on the floor. They are there not necessarily to sit students in individual places, but to make sure that the students are within a square that allows for a pathway around the mat. So, that allows for our teacher assistants to move freely, but it also allows for a student in a wheelchair if she has come from another space to come in and join the group without needing to move everyone to facilitate that. We also have space at the front so that if she would like to sit at the front, she is able to do so. She doesn't always need to be at the back of the classroom.

We review our IEPs (Individual Education Plan) termly, and we have 3 to 4 goals for each student. As I have four students in my class on IEPs, we generally try and align their goals with our whole class goals for that term. So, for instance, in term 4, students had goals around communication, English and Maths. The Maths goals were around graphing, which was a whole class goal, but they had specific goals that they had for that Maths topic. One of the student's communication goals for term was to ask questions of peers and adults in the school community. That was a goal that was practised across the whole curriculum areas. So, we were asking questions in graphing, but they were also asking their peers about their preferences at different times. Things like asking, “Can I have a song” or “Can I have a story?” All of those things to reinforce what we were trying to do with that goal.

I'm very lucky in the fact that the two teacher assistants that I currently have working with me have been working with this student for a number of years, and they have been present for a lot of sessions with therapists that we have involved with these students. Because I've been able to communicate in person with the therapists that offer us input into these student’s programs, they are able to have more of an input into the adjustments that we make. Because essentially these are the people that are needing to make these things happen. I take on the information that they have gained and then when we are looking at the sorts of things that we're going to be doing as a class, I have a talk with my teacher assistants about what I might need to do in order to make it accessible for those students, because they are the ones that are providing the hands on support to make these things happen.

We also have a support teacher who is able to help us with those things as well. So, she is there to help us to make decisions about what adjustments we can make and how we can make the best possible adjustments for that child. Sometimes it might be a large adjustment and sometimes it can just be a small adjustment. We also have our occupational therapist who comes and visits one of our students three times a term. She helps us to make small adjustments that will help this student long term. As our student is nonmobile we also have a physiotherapist who I am in contact with quite frequently. So, up until recently this student has, in addition to their classroom academic work, also needed significant physiotherapy at school. So, they have needed access to a standing frame which requires two people to hoist her in and out of which we then have her working on her jobs in the classroom while she is standing. So, there's been significant input from her physiotherapist in how we can make that as safe and engaging as possible, not only for the student but also for the staff that are doing the lifting and the moving. So, we have manual handling procedures in place.

We are going to be performing an experiment. We're going to be working together and we're going to be thinking about.

Mrs. Free?

Just waiting Soph. Our hypothesis.

I have found that it's really important to include my teacher assistants in the planning as much as possible, especially when what I'm asking is going to be different to something that we've done before. So, it might be “I would like to go and do this. What will we need to bring?” They’ll let me know. Or it could be “I want to try this new program” and they'll go “Okay, we'll give it a go” and then we'll have a conversation after about whether that was something that worked or whether it just really did not work.

Our teacher assistants are vital in our assessment processes for our students on IEPs (Individual Education Plan). IEPs are something that take a considerable amount of time to ensure that we are getting enough evidence. As such at Glenorchy Primary School, we have TA (Teacher Assistant) logs which they fill in each day with what the student's been working on, their observations, what they've seen.

So, what we need to do now is we need to get our ingredients, alright?

The Science experiment was planned to follow on from other lessons that we have done in an enquiry unit this term. So, our inquiry focussed question for the term was “How do we know it's true?” The experiment was chosen because it was something that everyone could participate in.

The materials that were used were chosen because they were things that everyone could access. We used the syringes for the vinegar because that is something that we have practised with all of our students before. It also results in less mess, but it's also working on their skills of measurement as well. And we've used them for a few different experiments. This makes it much easier for my children with cerebral palsy as well because they are able to hold it and squirt without it making a big mess. But things like scooping and using the plunger on the syringe are things that we have experimented with previously with these students and has been successful.

As you would have seen in the video, there was a lot of hand over hand support provided for our students with cerebral palsy. And this is because in order for them to be able to participate, they need to have that adult help. A long term goal is for increased independence. However, hand over hand support is required at this time and is the most appropriate adjustment that we can make for these students so that they can be doing things alongside their peers.

When I'm planning lessons, I think about the reasonable adjustments that will be needed in order for our most reliant students to participate. So, for instance, I will start by looking at our student with the highest needs and looking at how she can participate in that lesson. It is very much a case of looking at the individual student, looking at their strengths and weaknesses, and looking at how we can best plan for their next steps.

When it comes to differentiated tasks, I also give differentiated feedback so that feedback to my students will be different based on their current goals. So, for some students, they might be working on writing stories and including paragraphs and making sure that they have all of the different story elements. Whereas for some students in my class, when it comes to that same topic or that same focus on story writing they will be working on “Are you able to sound out your words?” “Can you use some high frequency words and spell them correctly?” “Can you remember your basic punctuation?” And so I will be giving feedback on those things rather than on paragraphing or stretching out sentences into making more interesting stories. So, feedback is very much different for each child, and it's all about knowing your students.

When it comes to reflecting on lessons, I like to have conversations with my support teacher and my teacher assistants. When it comes to thinking about the inclusion of my students with disabilities. I like to look for evidence of student learning through work samples. Through photographic evidence, through videos. Making sure that the learning that they were doing that day is accessible for them physically, but also making sure that it's in their proximal level of development. Making sure that we are stretching their thinking, but not to the point that they lack understanding. So, we're really trying to get that fine balance of “This is new learning, but it's not too hard.”

Can you put your hand up if your reaction worked? Who was able to make their balloon expand?

We know if a reasonable adjustment is working if the student is able to participate in the lesson for one. They are physically able to access the materials we’ve provided with. Are they able to grip the pencil? Are they able to use the tablet? Is the stylus the right size for their hand? All of those sorts of things that we also have to consult with OT (Occuptaional Therapist) and physio about as well. So, with their input, OT (Occuptaional Therapist) and physio are really fantastic at making sure that the adjustments that we're putting in place are the best possible adjustments that we could be making in that situation at that time. So, we try and review these adjustments quite frequently. Quite often this is just a quick conversation in passing between the TAs (Teacher Assistant) and myself. “Did that work, that looked like it was working really well” or “No that didn't work at all.” “It was so hard to grip that stylus” or “The student was disengaged today.” And it's just that really quick assessment. And then if it isn't working, then we look at why. Is there a reason for that at the time? And obviously with more than one student with a disability, we need to be looking at the adjustments that we make across the board. So, is it that the working environment is too noisy at the time? Do we have the wrong mix of children working together? All of these factors can influence whether the adjustments that we're making are effective at the time.