

International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI)

Inclusive Education Implementation Guidelines - 2012

Inclusion is not a programme but an approach:

Inclusive education is an approach and not a programme but a dynamic process that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners. It is a concept of effective schools where every child has a place to study and teachers become facilitators of learning rather than providers of information. Inclusion should be the broad goal in nations and the ways to work towards achieving inclusion are many.

For those countries that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, compliance with article 24 on education is mandatory and inclusive education should be ensured.

Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education means teaching, within the ordinary educational system, all children, young people and adults with special educational requirements.

When we discuss the right to education, we mean the right to the best education, just as when we talk about health services. The school is the first experience of social living for a person outside the family circle and for this reason it is of the utmost importance that all students with disabilities are able to be educated in the same place as all other members of the human family, to share space and experiences.

Inclusive education means stepping from the medical model to the social model. In the medical model, the problem lies in the child who has to cure him/herself and adapt him/herself to be able to go to an ordinary school, and this requires numerous specialists and special centres. In the social model, the problem lies in the environment and community services

have to cater for all people, including people with disabilities. The starting point is that all people are different, although some differences are more obvious than others. In the field of education, this idea means that ordinary teachers and ordinary schools must be ready to offer training opportunities to heterogeneous people, including people with disabilities. Therefore, inclusive education does not refer to the way to educate the «odds», but rather the way to educate everyone.

This implies that the general classroom teachers should be equipped with skills to address the educational additional support requirements of children with minimum or no assistance of qualified teachers and professionals. This calls for strengthening the pre-service general teacher preparation programme by including adequate component of disability awareness in the general curriculum. The concept of effective schools will flourish only when the general educators understand the individual learning requirements of children with disabilities.

There are **three major principles of inclusive education**. The concept of inclusive education recognizes the fact that **every child in the class is special in a way or other**. The children are not categorized on the basis of the achievement or cognitive abilities or even sensory defects. They are treated as individual children having specific strengths and limitations. This approach makes the teacher to see the child as an individual, which is very vital for the overall development of the child. The second principle of inclusive education is that true **learning happens in a non-threatening environment**. This approach focuses on using all flexible methods of teaching in the classroom. The third principle is that the **teacher plays the role of facilitator of information rather than provider of knowledge**. These fundamental principles provide strength to the concept of inclusive education.

Parameters of Successful Inclusion for children and young people with a visual impairment:

The following broad parameters can be used to help measure the effectiveness of the implementation of inclusive education

1. Increased readiness of the general education system to accept responsibility for the education of children with disabilities.

At a national level the process of inclusion requires

- formalisation through legislation of the right of all children and young people with disabilities, including those with a visual impairment, to education
- development of a national policy and strategies for the implementation of inclusive practices in all schools
- financial commitment to providing the infrastructure and resources to develop equal access to learning and attainment – establishment of a system for measuring and monitoring the effectiveness of inclusion policies/strategies at the local and regional/national level

An indication of the success of policies is the achievement of an enrolment rate for children with disabilities that is at least on par with that of children without disabilities.

2. Increased community support for including children with disabilities in local schools.

Successful community support requires

- Raised awareness and understanding of the principles and processes of inclusion and increased commitment to the implementation of inclusive policies across the community
- An effective participatory process of consultation that leads to commitment to inclusion from a wide range of stakeholders including the local educational and health authorities, local policy makers, all schools in the designated area, teachers, parents of all students including those with a disability, students, NGOs, local religious leaders, school governors / managers, fundraisers
- access to unbiased information, advice and training for all parties involved in the process

- readiness to commit local/regional resources and finances to implementing inclusive policies

3. Increased awareness among parents of children with disabilities that their children can be enrolled in local schools, and increased willingness to send their children to local schools

In order for parents to make informed decisions, they need

- to be actively involved in the decision-making processes regarding their child's education from the point of the identification of the disability
- access to support and unbiased information from professionals
- access to pre-school services for assessing the learning needs of their child followed up practical help and support

4. Increased awareness among general classroom teachers of the basic educational requirements of children with disabilities

To fulfil this aim in relation to children with visual impairment, initial training courses for teachers should include specific information about:

- the range of visual impairments and the key implications for learning and development
- the key requirements for access to learning in the classroom, including awareness of basic communication methods eg Braille
- how to adopt teaching and learning styles that will include children who are blind and who have low vision in the learning process (see below)

For serving teachers, regular professional development should be available to reinforce inclusive practices.

5. Admission of an increasingly wide range of children with disabilities, including the full range of visual impairments, in local schools

Policy makers need to be cognisant of the fact the children with visual impairment are not a homogeneous group. The term 'visual impairment', refers to a very broad spectrum of needs with different levels of complexity. Some children will have a total loss of vision and rely on tactile methods for learning, others will have low vision which may be sufficient to learn through print. Some children will have stable conditions and others may have vision which will deteriorate over time. Some children are born with a visual impairment whilst others will experience vision loss during their preschool or school years. Some children with low vision will benefit from high levels of lighting whilst others will be photophobic and require lower levels of illumination.

The effects of vision loss vary from child to child and the child[s] attainments will be influenced by a wide range of factors that go beyond the degree and nature of the vision loss itself. Children's attainment will be shaped not only by their ability and personality but by the responses and attitudes of those around them.

6. Increased retention of children with disabilities in schools.

Increased admission rates of children with disabilities into local schools do not necessarily equate to successful inclusion. Low drop-out rates can be a more useful indicator of the success of the inclusivity of a school or support programme. Among the prerequisites for achieving low dropout rates in relation to children with visual impairment are

- a welcoming school with a positive ethos and attitudes by all staff, parents and students to students with a disability including visual impairment
- shared goals for developing an inclusive school that are understood by the whole school community

- a commitment to the social inclusion of all children with positive steps to achieve this
- access to advice and support from teachers with a high level of specific skills and knowledge about visual impairment. In some cases this specialist support will be provided by a qualified advisory/itinerant teacher of the visually impaired who will coordinate in-service training and support for both staff and students. The responsibilities of the advisory teacher might include assessing and monitoring the progress of students, providing pastoral support, liaising with parents and providing specific input eg teaching mobility and orientation skills, developing children's braille skills or skills in using low vision devices, providing training in access technology devices and liaising with external agencies (see below)
- appropriate resources according to the needs of the students to take account of their educational and visual requirements (see below)
- adequate facilities for the preparation and safe storage of specialist learning materials

7. Increased ability of the general classroom teachers to modify teaching learning strategies to teach children with disabilities.

Teachers need confidence in their ability to support children with disabilities in their class. Often fear of failure and inability to 'cope' can have a negative effect. Careful advance planning and preparation before the child is due to start school with can ameliorate this situation. For example schools can

- work with all staff and pupils in developing their understanding of general disability issues and develop positive attitudes and shared goals in relation to inclusion
- provide staff and children with specific knowledge about a disability to clear-up misconceptions
- provide workshops on ways of adapting materials, teaching strategies, how to make their classroom a safer environment,

- ensure that staff understand how to make the most of the support systems within a school with clear lines of responsibilities
- provide on-going training/meetings to update teachers on changing needs and to evaluate progress

8. Increased availability of support from peer-group to children with disabilities and vice-versa in teaching-learning processes.

The social inclusion of children with disabilities can be seen as a key criterion of a successful school. For many blind and low vision students social skills can be particularly difficult to understand and acquire and this may constitute a major barrier to inclusion. Unlike fully sighted children they cannot rely on learning social behaviour and incidentally through observation of the behaviour of others. Unless positive steps are taken to teach the student acquire culturally appropriate social conventions and practices from a very early age, and to develop positive relationships with their classmates, isolation can quickly become a reality.

The use of 'buddies', a fully sighted peer of similar or older age, is a well-established way of encouraging social inclusion and not only benefits the child with a disability but also has a positive impact upon all children. As well as being a good friend a buddy can help the child with tasks, interpret the environment and even act as sighted guide in some circumstances. A positive ethos in a caring school and wider society prevents bullying and other forms of anti-social behaviour towards all children.

9. Reliable provision of support materials such as aids and appliances and books.

Successful inclusion cannot take place unless financial support and an infrastructure for the development and provision of resources that are essential for access to the curriculum. On a national/regional level, there need to be effective systems for identifying the resources

that are needed by child with disabilities in local schools and effective systems for their timely and targeted distribution. A minimum of level of provision for a child who is blind for use in school and, in some instances, at home may include

- timely access to relevant textbooks in Braille (with copyright permission)
- a system for writing braille eg slate and stylus, or a mechanical braille writer
- a system for recording audio information eg a tape recorder for note taking
- access to written information on worksheets, on the blackboard etc
- access to tactile diagrams where appropriate
- access to appropriately formatted examination papers in Braille (see also below)
- equal access to information technology where this is available to fully sighted children in mainstream schools eg computer with appropriate navigation software for visually impaired users
- appropriate mobility aids (eg a long cane)

For the low vision child

- access to appropriate reading devices eg magnifiers, low vision devices and instruction in using and maintaining them a reading stand
- appropriate writing materials eg a felt tipped pen with black ink, lined writing paper of various widths
- suitably adapted reading materials eg handouts in clear print (this benefits all children in the classroom)
- access to appropriate levels of lighting
- equal access to information technology where this is available to fully sighted children in mainstream schools eg computer with appropriate navigation software for visually impaired users

Some children may need specific provision eg children with albinism may need sunglasses to reduce glare and appropriate clothing to offer protection from sunburn when out of doors)

10. Academic attainment of children with disabilities in curricular, plus curricular, and co-curricular activities that is comparable to other children and reflects their true capabilities.

Inclusive practices not only require the development of equal opportunities for all students to access the full mainstream curriculum, but they also need the development of systems that will assess and measure the educational attainment of all children in a fair way.

In relation to children with visual impairment, the processes of assessment of attainment in curriculum areas (eg internal and external examinations) will need to take account their specific access requirements. To provide a fair reflection of their ability, children may need

- adapted or modified examination papers eg in braille, large print, aural format
- access to an amanuensis or reader*
- extra time to complete the examination
- use of computer with screen reading software*
- appropriate levels of illumination*

In some cases assessment in a separate room may be advisable eg to avoid disturbance to other students from the noise of a mechanical Braille writer

While access to the full mainstream curriculum and to fair assessments of attainment are fundamental components of inclusion, children with disabilities also need equal access to extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. These activities play an important role for all students and can facilitate opportunities for

successful social interaction with a larger number of peers, allowing some children opportunities to enhance their self esteem by excelling in non-academic areas eg in drama, choir or orchestra participation, or by participating in leisure and sporting activities, clubs and societies.

Some children with disabilities will also need to acquire specific additional skills that fall outside the school's regular curricular and extra curricular activities. The 'plus' or 'expanded' core curriculum refers to those specific areas where instruction, usually from specially trained professional, may be needed. In the case of children with visual impairment, these additional skills are directly related to their visual disability and will be need to be continually assessed and monitored on an individual basis. They include instruction in

- Compensatory skills that permit access to the general curriculum (such as braille, communication skills, study skills, and concept development)
- Independent living skills
- Orientation and mobility skills
- Recreation and leisure skills
- Assistive technology
- Social interaction skills
- Career education
- Sensory efficiency (including visual, tactual and auditory skills),
- Self-determination

While these specific skills need regular reinforcement during the school day, it may also be helpful for children to have access to short vacation schemes where they can acquire, practice and develop skills alongside other children with visual impairment in their region. (see below).

11. Availability of additional support to the regular classroom teachers from an advisor with specialist knowledge.

Successful inclusion of children with complex needs relies upon adequate support for the class teacher from a professional with specialist knowledge and understanding of those needs. In the case of children with visual impairment this professional is most likely to be a trained specialist teacher of students with visual impairment. Their role is varied and the degree of their involvement will be determined by the age of the student, the severity of their vision loss and by the willingness of staff in the mainstream school to embrace inclusive strategies. Their importance can be demonstrated by this list of responsibilities.

Child centred

- provide instruction for visual impairment specific skills eg braille and other communication skills, low vision device training, tactile skills, concept development and academic skills, activities of daily living, mobility and orientation skills, study skills, visual efficiency skills, social skills, self advocacy skills
- regularly monitor of academic progress and assessment of needs
- regular monitor social inclusion
- liaise with parents, families and key workers through the year
- give instruction in the use of new technology
- advocate for children's needs at every stage of their education

Teacher centred

- identify areas of the curriculum where student will require assistance and suggest teaching strategies
- select and provide supplementary teaching materials eg large print reading, materials, tactile diagram for maximum access to the curriculum
- suggest optimum learning and environmental conditions

- interpret the effects of eye condition for teaching and learning
- assist classroom teachers with those activities which need adapting
- assist with coordination of all forms of assessment including external examinations
- take part in individual and group planning meetings
- assist with extra-curricular activities ensuring full participation by the student

Whole school based

- provide in-service training on a regular basis to meet changing needs
- work with fully sighted pupils on specific visual disability issues
- maintain a reference library pertaining to disability issues, technology, research
- liaise with all outside agencies including all external support services, examination boards, fund raisers

Among the parameters outlined above, the first five relate predominantly to the creation of an *inclusive climate* in mainstream schools while the remaining items focus mostly on the practices of *inclusive education in the classroom*. The creation of an environment for inclusion will not of itself guarantee inclusive practices in the classroom. Efforts are needed to ensure that educational support in the inclusive setting is targeted and effective.

Priorities for facilitating Inclusive Education:

For facilitating effective inclusive education, the following three areas need utmost attention.

1. Preparation of general classroom teachers to adopt strategies to teach children with disabilities in general classes. This may be achieved through in-service programmes, special capacity building programmes,

2. Effective systems for the planning, development, production and distribution of support materials for facilitating inclusion on a local, regional and national level. For example in planning decisions about which textbooks are to be used in schools, simultaneous consideration should be given to their production in Braille.
3. Developing plus curricular skills in children with disabilities. This may happen through deployment of specific number of special teachers in a region, arranging summer programmes for children with disabilities to develop plus curricular skills, teaching these skills to teachers, peer-group, parents, etc in order to help the children with disabilities.

Expanding role of Special Schools for facilitating Inclusion:

Inclusive education is not a threat to special school programmes, indeed special schools can play a strategic role in supporting the development of inclusive education by centrally planned initiatives that enable them to share their expertise with mainstream through training, outreach programmes and curriculum development. Special schools can play an important regional role through a range of activities including offering training for teachers from mainstream schools, modelling good practice in mainstream classrooms, providing regional facilities for assessment and the provision of vacation schools for children in mainstream settings (see below). Until the development of effective inclusive practices in mainstream schools, the educational needs of some children with complex needs will continue to be best served by placement in effective special schools. As special schools evolve they will increasingly need to focus on supporting children with complex additional impairments.

A changing role for "special schools" is an essential part of the development of inclusion and of the historical development of educational services for the disabled. With appropriate central backing, they can provide support for inclusion in the following ways:

1. Serving as resource centres for a cluster of general education schools which are involved in inclusive education.

2. Organizing inservice courses to the teachers of general schools in methods of handling children with disabilities.
3. Sharing special equipment with general schools for enriching the learning experiences of children with disabilities.
4. Organizing summer camps for children without disabilities to create awareness in them on disability related issues.
5. Providing residential school facilities to children with severe and profound impairments.
6. Undertaking action research studies on disability related issues and disseminate the information to general schools.
7. Initiating community based rehabilitation services to provide alternative education and rehabilitation to persons with disabilities in their own localities.

Translating Policy into Practice – Immediate Need in Developing Nations

In short, there should not be any barrier of policy for including special requirements children in developing nations. A single model may not be the solution and therefore, practices pertaining to inclusion should also be developed in specific contexts. The culture issue should not become a hindrance for inclusion of all children in developing nations. When the society is inclusive, education which is a small component of the society would also become inclusive. Therefore, there should not be any attitude barrier in the minds of people for the promotion of inclusion.