



INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (IECE) PROJECT

EXAMPLE OF IECE PROVISION: FRANCE

1. Abstract

In France, there is a programme specifically designed for autistic children entering nursery school. This programme (Unité d'Enseignement Autisme Maternelle – UEAM – or Pre-primary Autism Teaching Unit) aims to prepare autistic children for continued education in mainstream schools during their three pre-primary years.

Once established in a nursery school, the UEAM programme associates teachers with health and social welfare professionals. It is run under a contractual agreement between the educational establishment and a support service specialising in invasive development disorders.

The success of this programme is assured through a combination of several principles:

- Early entry into the programme at 3 years old, the age at which the large majority of French children begin pre-primary education.
- The number of children entering into the programme (a maximum of seven) and the diversity and collaboration of various professionals (teachers along with health and social welfare professionals) taking part in the programme, which practically ensures a 1:1 ratio of adults to children.
- The implementation of this programme in mainstream nursery schools, which makes it possible for these children to gradually explore the possibility of their inclusion in a mainstream environment in a wide range of situations (recreation, school lunchroom, nap, learning individually, in groups, with or without support, for various periods of time, etc.) during the three pre-primary years.
- The goal of the programme is to prepare autistic children for continued education in a mainstream environment.
- The implementation of the programme in mainstream schools also allows other children to gradually adapt to the specific needs of their schoolmates, to get to know them and to communicate and interact with them.
- The involvement of all the adults in the school in the project constitutes a fundamental asset for its implementation and for the evolution of representation. The entire school staff is trained in therapeutic educational approaches and adapted teaching, which constitutes a significant qualitative



factor. The total number of hours in these UEAM teaching units is slightly lower than that of the schools in which they are established, which allows institutionalised and qualitative exchanges between the different stakeholders (parents, teachers and the health and social welfare team).

There are UEAMs in different French departments. Two UEAMs located in the Paris area are available to visit within the framework of this European Agency study:

Louis Pergaud School, 2 rue Anne Frank, 91700 Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois.

- Support structure: IME (institut médico-éducatif, or medical education institute) Notre Ecole

La Challe Nursery School, rue Salvador Allende, 95610 Éragny-sur-Oise.

- Support structure: IME la clé pour l'autisme – Fondation John BOST

These two UEAMs have already been contacted and have accepted the possibility of a visit. If the UEAM model is of interest but the Agency would prefer to visit a school elsewhere, other UEAMs are set up with the same operating features.

2. Inclusive features

The schools in which these programmes are established are mainstream public schools open to all children in the municipality or district from age 3. As well as the autistic children included in the UEAM programme, the nursery schools are open to all the children in the municipality, whatever their culture, language, difficulties or disabilities.

For some children with disabilities, a notification from the MDPH (department-based structures for disabled people) allows them to be supported full-time or part-time in their education by a school aid (AVS), following an assessment of their specific needs. These school aids are contracted state employees hired to support the child's education according to their specific needs. Their role within the school can vary considerably, depending on the child's specific needs. For some (with motor disability, for instance), the school aid's role will be mostly related to organisation, help with the child's movement, care, the child's positioning in school assignments and possibly assisting the child in building relationships with the other children. For others (with intellectual or learning disabilities, for instance) the school aid will mostly ensure the child understands instructions given, and support the child's efforts when necessary.

In France, there is specific pre-primary teacher training. Teachers get the same training (Baccalaureate plus five years of higher education) for both pre-primary and primary school education. Teachers' initial training has been undergoing changes for



several years. Since September 2014 new institutions, ESPEs (Écoles supérieures du professorat et de l'éducation, or higher-learning schools of professorship and education), have been set up to dispense this training. Each ESPE enjoys some autonomy but must offer a curriculum that will match the specifications drawn up for teacher training.

The following inclusion-orientated features are to be developed among future teachers:

- Promoting the shared values of the Republic
- Putting action as a basic principle of the education system and of the school's regulatory framework
- Factoring in learners' diversity
- Acting as a responsible teacher with ethical principles
- Co-operating within a team.

Teachers and expert learning practitioners are trained in:

- building, implementing and organising teaching and learning situations that factor in learners' diversity;
- preparing class sequences and defining programming and progression;
- identifying teaching goals, contents, programmes, obstacles, scaffolding strategies and training and assessment methods;
- differentiating their teaching according to each pupil's learning speed and needs;
- adapting their teaching practices for pupils with special education needs;
- taking social conditions and representations into account (gender and ethnic, socio-economic and cultural origins) when dealing with possible difficulties in access to knowledge.

School aids (AVS) are contracted state employees and are given around 60 hours' training. They are supposed to be multi-task employees, able to adapt to the diversity of the learners' needs. Given the complexity of their function and their position in the school, their lack of a professional status is a current issue. Their training is considered insufficient given the complexity of the role they play in the school.

Concretely, their actual function in schools varies considerably, depending on each child's needs and the class teacher's wishes. Collaboration between the school aid and the teacher remains imprecise and highly variable depending on the context



and the people involved.

With regard to training specifically related to the establishment of an IME in a nursery school, schools have very different forms of support.

La Challe Nursery School

UEMA teacher – autism-related specialisation

- no ad hoc training of the other teachers in the school;
- continued training currently under discussion.

Louis Pergaud School

UEMA teacher – specialisation and previous experience

- training in specific assessment tools;
- specialised autism training for all of the school's professionals (6 days);
- additional continued training planned.

3. Inclusive highlight

All the elements of the UEMA prepare children with autism and their school peers to be educated together. The support is important and matches the ambition of the goal.

Mobilising national education in conjunction with medical and educational fields creates the necessary partnership from early childhood. This partnership requires collaboration between all professionals in order to ensure the coherent implementation of the project.

La Challe Nursery School

To date, daily inclusion takes place in the playground during lunchtime (partial inclusion for the moment). There are exchanges among the teachers and the presence of a specialist teacher during the period of inclusion:

- 1.5 hours twice a week for the UEMA team with occasional teacher presence;
- 3 hours Wednesday morning for the complete UEMA team with the teacher;
- only the teacher takes part in the school's team meetings and on the school board.

Louis Pergaud School

Meetings with the teaching and extra-curricular staff were organised prior to the



start of the programme. As the children have only very recently started the programme, the team has focused on their welcome and getting to know one another. The school's teacher takes part in teacher, course and school meetings.

For now, the children are in partial inclusion in the school lunchroom (there is a specific table for the UEMA children, who are in the lunchroom at the same time as the other children). There is complete inclusion during recess and nap time for some children. Inclusion plans in other classes as well as the inclusion of other schoolchildren in the UEMA classroom are already underway. Because the programme has only recently opened and in order to respect the children's rate of development, these plans will be implemented as soon as it becomes relevant for the children benefiting from support.

Exchanges with the other school professionals appear to be the key to better inclusion for the children attending the nursery school UEMA.

Implementation of this programme in a mainstream school ensures moreover that the child will have significant visibility at the community level and among other families.

4. Other evidence of quality IECE

Municipalities are stakeholders in the establishment of nursery school UEMAs. They take part in the project by funding the necessary on-site installations and equipment.

La Challe Nursery School

The municipality invested in necessary UEMA adjustments, including repairs to the activity room (floors and walls) and the purchase of UEMA-specific furniture.

Outside adjustments were also made to make it possible for the UEMA children to have a specific place during recess periods.

Louis Pergaud School

The municipality gave the project a favourable welcome, allowing the programme to use all available premises, infrastructure and materials. It also takes charge of the maintenance of these premises and of the school lunch services.

Before the opening of the UEMA, children in the other classes in the school were given information so they could understand the needs of their classmates.

In ***La Challe***, the UEMA was presented in all classes by the teacher along with a specialist teacher.

In ***Louis Pergaud***, the children's awareness raising is planned for the first quarter of



2016. It will be carried out by the specialist teacher and the school psychologist. Festive events, such as a Christmas tales evening, will be an opportunity for parents to meet the teachers and one another.

The UEMA programme is currently being tested in order to make progress on school inclusion of children with autism. Many questions are still raised by school professionals wishing to go beyond the principles of inclusion in order to improve the responses given to these children's special needs.

Through collaborations between professionals, class sizes and the projected stability of the programme (the children will be able to attend the school for all of their three pre-primary years), the programme aims to respond to children's educational needs and to be a place of research, observation and exchange intended to improve inclusive education practices for these children.