



ORGANISATION OF PROVISION
TO SUPPORT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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**Inclusive education as a quality issue – a collaborative
approach to quality management**

**Lernwerkstatt Donaustatt, Inklusive Wiener Mittelschule (Vienna
Middle School), Vienna, Austria**

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PREAMBLE

The Organisation of Provision to Support Inclusive Education project is being undertaken by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (the Agency) from 2011 to 2014. The project's key question is: how are systems of provision organised to meet the needs of learners identified as having disabilities under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) in inclusive settings within the compulsory school sector? The themes to be explored include:

- Inclusion as a quality issue – the presence and participation of all learners in the school/classroom community enhances the quality of the educational experience.
- Strengthening the capacity of mainstream schools to respond to diverse needs (including developing the role of specialist provision as resources to support the mainstream sector).
- Collaboration and networking – effective provision of educational and multi-agency support within the mainstream sector.
- Funding and resourcing – targeting support to meet the needs of learners with disabilities.
- Leading the change process.

Project activity and project outputs will include:

1. **A Literature Review:** this provides the conceptual framework for the project and includes a review of research literature post-2000 on project themes as well as an analysis of past Agency projects.
2. **Country Information:** a questionnaire has been circulated to Agency member countries to gather information on how provision for learners with disabilities in mainstream schools is organised and evaluated.
3. **Identification of examples of practice:** five sites in Sweden, Austria, Germany, Slovenia and Malta will be visited in February/March 2013. A report will be produced following each visit.
4. **Thematic seminars:** following collection and analysis of data from the visits, a series of seminars will be held in autumn 2013. The seminars will explore in detail the factors that have an influence on the success of inclusive education, taking into account different country contexts. A report will be produced following each seminar.
5. **Project synthesis report:** the report will draw together evidence from all project activities and, following an analysis of key issues, will provide a series of recommendations and potential quality indicators for the organisation of provision and implementation of new practices to improve systems of provision for learners with disabilities in mainstream schools.
6. **Leading the change process:** a practical tool to support policy-makers in leading change towards more inclusive policy and practice will also be produced.



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Finally, the Agency would like to acknowledge the key role played by members of the Project Advisory Group, Agency Representative Board members and National Co-ordinators who took part in the visit and provided additional support.



INTRODUCTION

This report provides information about the study visit conducted by the Agency team in Vienna in March 2013.

Lernwerkstatt Donaustatt, Inklusive Wiener Mittelschule (Vienna Middle School) was selected, along with another four sites, from practice examples provided by Agency Representative Board members and their networks as part of the Organisation of Provision project questionnaire.

The Agency team, in collaboration with the Project Advisory Group (PAG) members, identified criteria for the selection of the sites that should be followed up to provide relevant information for the project. The criteria were: relevance of the site, clarity of the information provided and evidence of the following: quality assurance; system leadership and the management of change; collaboration and partnership; sustainability and a variety of support systems (different approaches to and ways of organising support). Overall, the examples selected also needed to reflect diversity of geographical location and learner needs.

Vienna Middle School was selected for its focus on quality management. The visit theme was: 'Inclusive education as a quality issue – a collaborative approach to quality management'.

The focuses of the other study visits were:

- Essunga, Sweden: strengthening the capacity of mainstream schools – changing practice to improve support for learners with different needs (in particular those with disabilities).
- Flensburg, Germany: how do inclusion networks support the needs of learners with disabilities?
- Ljubljana, Slovenia: developing the role of special schools as resources to support mainstream provision.
- Valetta, Malta: organisation and resourcing of in-class support (with a focus on the roles of school and multi-agency staff).

After presenting a short summary of the lessons learnt from the study visit to Vienna, this report describes the different supports provided to learners with disabilities in mainstream settings and the different factors that contributed to their development. Information about the management of change, transformation strategies and sustainability is also included.



HIGHLIGHTS

- There is a clear vision of the school system as being the learning space for all, with clear goals at all levels: management, personnel, learners. The leadership team shares responsibility and is able to introduce the vision to other staff members.
- The school leadership team is developing an inclusive culture, by valuing and respecting every learner and responding to the diversity of learners' strengths and needs.
- All participants in the learning and teaching processes are respected – in both directions.
- There is a child-centred approach with a focus on individual levels of development and needs. Learners' opinions are respected.
- Strong and open-minded coaching is provided by the director and her team.
- Clear roles are outlined for all managerial, educational and support staff and they all share responsibility for the school.
- There is support for staff to initiate new ideas on inclusive practice and bring them into the classroom.



CONTEXT

In Austria, since 1993 learners with special educational needs (SEN) have been legally entitled to attend primary school. Through the 1996 amendment of the School Organisation Act, this option was also extended to lower secondary education (for learners from 10 to 14 years of age).

The legal framework for the inclusion of learners with SEN has modified the Austrian school system. Mainstream schools have been obliged to take organisational and pedagogical measures to meet the special educational needs of learners. In Austria, there are nine federal states that have the same laws on education, but schools and classrooms function in different ways.

In the federal province of Vienna, a proposal for inclusion was initiated jointly by the parents/guardians of learners with SEN and by committed teachers more than two decades ago. The Vienna Board of Education had a clear standpoint: not only were the parental wishes legitimate, but also the principle of 'inclusion instead of exclusion' was absolutely valid. As a result, the first inclusion classes in primary school were initiated in the 1986/87 academic year and the first inclusive classes at lower secondary school in the 1990/91 academic year. In these classes, learners with and without disabilities were co-educated. Today, the inclusion of learners with SEN is a basic element of compulsory education in Vienna. In the 2012/13 academic year there are 674 inclusion classes at primary and secondary level.

Vienna's educational programme is considered unique in Austria. In Vienna there are 220,000 learners in total. All learners from the ages of 6 to 10 follow the same curriculum. If a learner faces problems with the curriculum, additional support is provided. There are around 7,000 learners in the Vienna education system receiving additional support. Half the learners with SEN attend mainstream classes and the other half attends special classes. At the age of 10, 50% continue their schooling in academic lower secondary schools and 50% in vocational lower secondary schools. In the rest of Austria, only 20–30% of all learners attend academic secondary education.

In an inclusion class, learners with and without SEN are taught in a co-educative system. Particular emphasis is placed on the social climate in class, in which the learners with their differing requirements, individual needs and communication abilities learn to accept and respect each other and to carry out different activities together.

Although the learners work together on the same theme, it is often necessary to present the teaching material in different ways and with different methods, depending on the learner's individual capabilities and skills.

The SEN teacher primarily carries out the methodological and didactical presentation of the teaching material for learners with SEN. However, the actual teaching process for all the learners in the class is the joint responsibility of the class teacher and the SEN teacher. A pre-condition for this kind of teaching is a constant dialogue between both teachers. A helper system in class is also fostered based on learners' maturity and capabilities.

Assessment is based on individual capabilities and skills and according to the personal curriculum (curriculum for general education, curriculum for SEN or a combination of both).



Lernwerkstatt Donaustatt, Inklusive Wiener Mittelschule (Vienna Middle School)

The Vienna Middle School (VMS) is an inclusive school for all learners aged 10 to 14. Eighteen years ago, the school was a special school, not open to the region, in a way, a 'closed' system.

A reform of the special schools in the lower secondary sector marked the beginning of a school development process. The change started with a reform of the classes for learners with learning difficulties from the age of 10 to 14. Gradually the numbers of special classes (for learners with learning difficulties) were reduced and the number of inclusive classes increased. Influenced by the Viennese school pilot project (Schulversuchs Mittelschule + VMS), the school started a process of developing inclusive classes, aiming to be an inclusive school for 10- to 18-year-old learners.

Now it is a modern, achievement-oriented school, with a total of 200 learners (90 girls and 110 boys). Some 30% of the learners are from an immigrant background, 30% have identified SEN and 60% come from socially disadvantaged families and need financial support. Learner enrolment does not depend on the final report card marks from primary school. All learners from one primary school class can move on together to the VMS.

In total, there are 45 teachers (from grammar schools, secondary modern schools and special schools), one 'Zivildienstler' (a person who has chosen an alternative to the compulsory military service in Austria) and one social worker at the school.

Specially trained teachers who are familiar with the transition phase from primary school accompany learners during their transition to the VMS. Teaching is based on the curricula of the Austrian Grammar School. Those who want to can learn two modern languages. German, maths and English are divided into core and extension material. Talents are fostered in achievement courses. Special training courses help learners catch up in order to achieve a solid learning base. In extension courses, gifted and talented learners are supported.

The VMS has class teacher teams. Teachers from secondary modern and secondary grammar schools teach together. SEN teachers are an integral part of the class teacher teams in inclusion classes. Individual learner differences are respected and supported by the school. Particular care is given to these differences through differentiated and individualised teaching. Learning-Coaching sessions help learners plan their learning week.

Multilingualism is perceived as positive and is actively fostered. English is partly used as a language of instruction. The school offers more than just normal education. A voluntary whole-day programme offers learning help and meaningful leisure activities.

A joint start to the week's learning with a Learning-Coaching session helps learners plan their individual learning goals. Support and help with learning outside of normal lessons make private tuition unnecessary.

The school enables an easier transition to any type of upper secondary education. Advice and support at the VMS starts in the 4th grade of primary school and continues through to 9th grade. An individual statement of achievement provides orientation regarding the next steps in each learner's academic career. The final report card shows which learners are qualified to move on to any upper secondary school.

The VMS also functions as a Sonderpädagogisches-Zentrum (SPZ – Special Education Centre). The school's change to a model of good inclusive practice has influenced the mainstream schools in the area to move more and more towards inclusion. Since 2009, the VMS has started to advise and support inclusive classes in primary and secondary



schools in different districts of the region. There are 40 inclusive classes in the region: 14 inclusive classes in primary schools and 26 inclusive classes in secondary schools.

As the principal noted, 'By identifying quality indicators for inclusive education, adapted to the special needs of the region, knowledge of special education is turning into a pedagogy for all children'.

Key influences of the country context

During the visit, colleagues working at the national level highlighted the features of the education system in Austria that might have a particular influence on the developments in the VMS.

More information about the national system can be found in the national overview for Austria at: <http://www.european-agency.org/country-information/austria>, but relevant points are summarised here.

In Austria, inclusive education for learners with SEN is currently legally regulated in primary and lower secondary school and in the lower grades of schools in general secondary education. Three models of joint education are applied:

- *Inclusive classes:*

Learners with and without SEN are instructed in all lessons by a team of teachers.

- *Classes with support teachers:*

Mainstream classes where one or two learners with SEN receive extra support from a special school teacher for a few hours per week (depending on their disability).

- *Co-operation classes:*

Primary, lower secondary and pre-vocational school classes are generally separated from special school classes in terms of organisation. The teachers involved agree upon a plan according to which learners are instructed together, either some of the time or all the time.

Special Education Centres have the task of providing and co-ordinating all measures of special needs education to ensure, through inclusive education, that learners with SEN can be educated at mainstream schools in the best possible way. These tasks include:

- issuing expert opinions to identify SEN (special needs opinion);
- co-operating with compulsory education regional schools, other Special Education Centres, school authorities, the district school inspector, the special school inspector, regional non-school institutions, etc.;
- supporting inclusive education through educational and organisational counselling and assistance for the set-up of teacher teams;
- providing information for parents, public relations, exchange of experience and further training;
- administration;
- co-operating with other institutions to support learners and their parents in the best possible way. For example, if other institutions require additional assistance, therapy, training programmes, diagnoses, etc., the Special Education Centre establishes contact with the competent bodies and procures the respective provision.

(Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2009)



Special schools have the task of fostering the development of learners with physical or psychological disabilities according to their type of disability and to give them, as far as possible, a degree of education which corresponds to primary school, lower secondary school or pre-vocational school and – in the case of the job preparation year – to make them ready for integration into the labour market.

There are ten different types of special schools with a focus on different types of disabilities (for example, special schools for learners with learning disabilities, physical disabilities or visual impairments, etc.). Specially trained teachers instruct their learners in smaller classes; the curriculum, methods and materials are adapted to the learners' abilities.

In special schools, learners are either educated according to the primary or lower secondary school curriculum or to a curriculum of the respective special school type. Special schools that are conducted according to the primary or lower secondary school curriculum have to enable learners – depending on their interests, orientations, talents and abilities – to carry on to higher secondary education schools.

Education at special schools comprises compulsory schooling (nine years of school attendance). However, if necessary, it is possible to prolong attendance at a special school to a maximum of twelve years. The maximum number of pupils per class is between eight (for example, in a special school for learners with hearing impairments) and thirteen (in a general special school).

The mobile special education service provides support for children and adolescents with diverse disabilities through advisory and support teachers for learners with visual and hearing impairments, behavioural difficulties, speech impairments and for children in hospital. This additional service is provided outside the classroom depending on the learner's needs.

From 2004 to 2007, a team of researchers, teacher trainers and experts carried out the *Quality in Special Needs Education* (QSP) project. The overall aim of this project was to develop evidence-based proposals for policy-makers in order to improve quality in special needs education and inclusive education.

On the basis of the experience of experts from various practical fields of special needs education, it was recommended that the following tasks be pursued:

- denominate problem areas where more precise legal and financial framework conditions are needed to better guarantee the quality of all SNE offers;
- formulate guidelines for the organisational management of SNE offers in the framework of existing legal regulations in the regions and at school locations, thus putting an emphasis on school obligations which arise from the general SNE objectives;
- define pedagogic requirements and preconditions for instruction more explicitly, which can be regarded as minimum standards taking into account the individual promotion of all pupils and the achievement of inclusion targets.

The QSP Core Team identified a number of areas for further improvement which policy-makers should focus on:

- inclusive education as the standard alternative for special needs support;
- making resource allocation for special needs support more flexible;



- developing Special Education Centres as hubs for resource distribution and quality agencies;
- objective procedures to identify SEN;
- Individual Education Plans – process standards for special needs support;
- optimal use of resources and support potential within the fully adapted inclusive minimum standards for material equipment and personal resources.

The current outcomes of the project suggest further efforts should be specifically made to improve the following areas:

- quality standards for education in inclusive classes;
- Individual Education Plans as instruments for education planning, evaluation and quality assurance;
- re-organisation of the SEN procedure to ensure better consideration of the principles of provision diagnosis, participation and transparency;
- more flexible resource allocation – preventive support provisions;
- measures to change the professional self-conception of special needs teachers.

According to some of the outcomes of the QSP project, the Ministry of Education provided the regional and district school boards with circular letters in order to set up more standardised procedures concerning the basic assessment of learners with SEN, the use of Individual Education Plans and quality standards in inclusive settings.

The Austrian Ministry of Education, Art and Culture, which took over the general co-ordination of the implementation of the UNCRPD in Austria in spring 2011, in co-operation with the Austrian Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, has started with an implementation strategy in the field of education (article 24).

Under the management of the Ministry of Education, round tables were held in 2011 and 2012. In a scientifically supported, participative process, representatives of the whole society (community-based organisations, NGOs, etc.) were heard, as well as experts from the Ministry, the school authorities, universities involved in teacher training and school representatives. The goal was to portray the complex situation with its many diverse views and interests, to find ways to define measures for a successful system and thereby achieve a basis for further political decisions.



THE PROJECT VISIT

A team of Agency staff, PAG members and consultants visited the VMS from 6 to 8 March 2013. The visit provided opportunities to hear first-hand about the developments in the school, to observe lessons and interview different stakeholder groups: regional/district inspectors, school principal, teachers, support staff, parents and learners. Interviews were conducted according to a schedule to provide consistency across the five project visits. All interviews were recorded for later analysis. In addition, relevant documents on national and regional policy and practice were collected prior to and during the visit. All these sources of evidence have been used to draft this report.



INCLUSIVE PRINCIPLES

The motto of VMS is: 'Strengthening Strengths, Reducing Weaknesses' (Vienna Middle School, website).

Values and beliefs

During the visit and the discussions with the different stakeholders, at regional and school levels, it was highlighted that the inclusion of learners with SEN is a basic element of the compulsory education system in Vienna. This change process towards inclusive education, on-going since 1986/87 when the first inclusive classes were set up, has involved a lot of developments in both policy and practice. As the Chief School Inspector stated, 'The concept of inclusion has to be constantly reviewed and analysed in an attempt to maintain high standards'.

The principal also notes that, for the VMS, 'The vision of inclusion is not an isolated concern only in special needs education, but it is a common and global issue for school development'.

The transformation of the VMS from a special school to an inclusive school is based on values and beliefs, such as learning 'together' and 'from each other', 'leadership' not 'management', developing networks and the fact that 'it needs a team to build a dream'. In addition, openness, professionalism and respect for heterogeneity, passion and confidence have been crucial in the transformation, which is the result of a clear vision on inclusion, strong and distributive leadership, the right time for reform, an open-minded and hard working team, optimism and a positive approach to learners.

The guiding values and principles of inclusive practice in VMS comprise:

- a clear vision of the school system as being the learning space for all;
- the crucial perception that inclusion should not only be the concern of special school teachers – that a change in all schools in the region is needed;
- a change of management in the sense that the school principal not only works towards inclusion, but is also reliable for teachers, parents and learners, while remaining flexible;
- a teamwork approach in inclusive classes; SEN teachers are an integral part of the class teacher teams in inclusion classes;
- a learner-centred approach: particular care is given to individual learner differences through differentiated and individualised teaching;
- a respectful approach to learners' opinions.

Attitudes

The transformation of the VMS from a special school to an inclusive school has influenced the beliefs and attitudes of many stakeholders in favour of inclusion at regional and local level.

As the school principal noted: 'the concept of inclusion should not only be the concern of special school teachers. A change is needed in all the schools of the region'. This involves a change in the attitudes, knowledge and skills of all teachers, a change in the school management and in communication with parents.



The promotion of inclusive education by the Ministry of Education at national level and the clear commitment towards inclusive practices by the Vienna Board of Education has had a positive effect on attitudes towards inclusion at regional level. Different stakeholders – school inspectors, headmasters, teachers, support staff, parents, learners – can see the positive results of inclusive approaches in terms of academic achievements and social interaction.

At school level, the educational and support personnel focus on the strengths and abilities of the learners, on what they ‘can do’ and not on what they ‘cannot do’.

As a result, in the school, there seems to be an atmosphere of motivation and commitment to inclusion where learners with SEN have the feeling of belonging to their class. As one learner said, ‘I feel happy to come to school every day, I learn a lot and I am respected by my classmates’.

Collaboration

Collaboration among the different stakeholders is a key factor for the provision of high quality education in inclusive settings and was evident in Vienna at all levels: regional, local and school.

At regional level, there is good co-operation between the Vienna Board of Education and the VMS. The Inspector for SEN and Inclusive Education in the region and the District Inspector have supported the inclusive approach of the school from the very beginning and there is open dialogue between both sides.

There is also good co-operation with the head teachers and educational staff of the other schools in the region. The change of the VMS to a model of good inclusive practice has influenced the mainstream schools in the area towards inclusion. Since the VMS became a resource centre for the primary and secondary schools of the region, the number of inclusive classes has increased in all schools and the teachers are in favour of inclusive approaches. The school collaborates with other community institutions and services for additional support provided to learners.

At school level, co-operation between the managerial, educational and support staff is an important element for the co-ordination of work and the smooth running of school activities. The role of the school parliament and the participation of learners’ representatives in the school development team indicate that learners’ opinions are heard and respected in the school.

At classroom level, co-operation and a teamwork approach between the mainstream and SEN teachers is considered the only way to work effectively.

The school has also developed good co-operation with the parents, who are encouraged to be involved in their children’s learning process.



TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIES

Transformation at regional level

A variety of initiatives and support measures have been introduced by the Vienna Board of Education to ensure the quality of inclusive schooling. All these initiatives have had a positive effect on the change towards inclusive education. The most important measures are described in this section of the report.

The Inclusion Advice Centre was set up to deal with all of the various questions regarding inclusion. The key areas of responsibility include: advice and conflict mediation, team composition and support, in-service training, co-operation and networking with institutions and key persons, information dissemination, co-operation with the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, publication of materials relating to inclusion, and transition from kindergarten to school and from school to work.

Special Educational Needs Centres, in the form of resource centres, have been established at all of the special needs schools in Vienna. Every inclusion class is affiliated with a Special Educational Needs Centre. The centre will give the necessary support in all matters relating to inclusion.

Some of the most important tasks of the centres are: advising parents; appraising learners (an appraisal procedure has to be carried out by a member of staff or the head of a Special Educational Needs Centre for every application for SEN support); co-operation and networking with mainstream schools where there are inclusion classes, as well as with the district school authorities; determining and supporting specific measures that are necessary for inclusion; and regular contact with SEN teachers who are working in inclusion classes.

SEN teachers can call upon the support of visiting specialists for specific questions regarding learners with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, sensory disabilities and social-emotional issues.

The Vienna Board of Education, in co-operation with the Neurological Hospital Am Rosenhugel and the Association of Autism Support Vienna, initiated a special project for the inclusion of learners with autism. Over the years, the project has developed and currently there are about 160 inclusion classes with learners between 6 and 15, where learners with autism are included. Advice and 'mentor' support for the learners with autism are key factors in the inclusion project.

In the case of learners with serious social, emotional and behavioural problems, the Viennese model has developed a flexible and 'soft' form of segregation so as to offer these learners and their parents more time and understanding and more affection and care in order to give them the support they need for inclusion in society. The programme includes: teachers specially trained for the inclusion of learners with serious behavioural problems who support the learners and their families, the development of innovative educational projects (e.g. open admission to primary and secondary schools, inclusion models) and input to teacher education, etc.

A large number of in-service courses for class and SEN teachers are organised by the Vienna Board of Education in co-operation with the Pädagogische Hochschule (Teachers' College) in Vienna.

The Bureau of Inclusive Education (BIB) was set up by the Teachers' College in Vienna in 2010, based on the main idea that, in education, 'integration enables participation,



inclusion avoids exclusion' and that further investigation and development is needed in a sustainable way. As the co-ordinator of the BIB stated:

Inclusion puts the differences of human beings as a common characteristic of 'being human' at the centre of its deliberations. The diversity of human life concerning gender, religion, culture, language, social conditions and abilities is seen as a 'developmental resource' for all. Heterogeneity equals normality.

The main activities of the BIB include: research and development projects in inclusive contexts (e.g. a code of best practice on inclusive practices); consulting and mentoring for learners, lecturers and teachers concerning inclusive practice; study workshops offering materials on inclusive education and networking at national and international level.

One of the projects conducted by the BIB on inclusive education is the development of the QIK-CHECK to monitor quality in inclusive classes. The QIK comprises different levels:

- A. INCLUSION (idea of humanity/humankind, values, goals);
- B. I (my attitude, my competences);
- C. WE (the team of teachers, school administration/management, experts from internal and external school areas, parents/guardians);
- D. STRUCTURE (the class/learning group, the school, publicity);
- E. PRACTICE (planning of classes, realisation of classes, reflection on classes, assessment);
- F. PRACTICE (priority social learning, priority inter-cultural learning/multilingualism, priority gender learning).

The tool's framework includes the vision for selected items, the action plan (what, how, who, when), the realisation (intermediate results, next steps, evidence) and evaluation (star rating, external views). It is an easy-to-use tool oriented towards practice.

Transformation at school level

Eighteen years ago, nobody wanted to attend the special school on Steinbrechergasse street voluntarily. The teachers had not opened their doors; they had somehow hidden themselves in the school and were not motivated to go out with their learners in public (School Principal).

The situation described above has changed and now the vision of the VMS is 'all learners learn together and make it possible'.

Since 1994, when the current school principal started working in the school, a number of changes have taken place. The change process started with a reform of the upper classes, by recruiting mainstream teachers and following the mainstream curriculum. The SEN teachers started co-operating with the mainstream teachers in the classes. By making the school an all-day school, more resources, in terms of teachers, time and individual support, were available.

An advisory committee on inclusive education was set up at regional level and inclusive classes were extended by law to secondary education in 1997. The free choice of parents to send their children to a special school or to a mainstream school had a positive effect on the transformation of the VMS and it became a mainstream school in 1997. The new concept of inclusive practice was also influenced by the Montessori theory of education and the *Index for Inclusion* developed in the United Kingdom. The introduction of a teamwork approach by the Vienna Board of Education in 1998 also had a positive effect on the school's development – successful teamwork is the key to successful inclusion.



As described above, the VMS has also become a resource centre for the primary and secondary schools of the region. In 2009, the VMS started to provide advice and support to inclusive classes in primary and secondary schools. Currently, there are 14 inclusive classes in primary schools and 26 inclusive classes in secondary schools.

The VMS has, therefore, become a mainstream achievement-oriented school, with a total of 200 learners. There are ten classes in the school: eight inclusive classes and two classes for learners with SEN, called 'Aufbaulehrgang'. These classes aim to strengthen the learners' personality and offer an intensive learning environment with individual support for future re-integration. The school respects and supports individual learner differences through differentiated and individualised teaching. Learning-Coaching sessions help learners plan their learning week.

Regarding the transformation of a special school to a reform-oriented inclusive school, the principal of the school feels it is necessary 'not only to work towards the goal of inclusion, but also to be reliable for the teachers, parents and learners and to be flexible'.

A new system of provision has been developed, with positive effects on the participation and learning of learners with SEN. This new system includes:

- a change of management, involving development of the personnel and the school in general;
- developing democratic structures within the school so that teachers' and learners' opinions and voices are heard;
- developing reform pedagogy oriented concepts where learners have the opportunity to invent, discover and do some research;
- promoting individualisation and learner-centred approaches.

In summary, the key strategies supporting the move towards inclusive practice in VMS, appear to be:

- Clear policy on and a commitment to inclusive education by the Vienna Board of Education and the provision of the necessary support measures, guidelines and tools to ensure the quality of education in inclusive schools.
- A clear vision of the school system as being the learning space for all, with clear goals at all levels: management, personnel, learners. The leadership team shares responsibility and is able to introduce the vision to other staff members.
- The change of school management towards a distributive approach and development of democratic structures within the school (e.g. school parliament, peer mediation) so that the opinions of teachers and learners are respected.
- Clear roles for all managerial, educational and support staff and shared responsibility at school level.
- Strong and open-minded coaching by the director and her team.
- A teamwork approach between the mainstream teacher and the SEN teacher in the classes.
- The development of child-centred approaches with a focus on individual development and needs.
- The development of trusting relationships between schools, parents and students.



- The engagement of all stakeholders at regional level, with shared beliefs and values on inclusive policies and practices and a focus on the strengths and abilities of learners rather than on the challenges.
- Support for personnel to initiate and discuss new ideas and approaches and bring them into practice.



SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

Support structures in the community

Key partners at regional and local level have supported the transformation of the VMS from a special to an inclusive school. The Vienna Board of Education has supported this change process from the very beginning.

The Inspector for SEN and Inclusive Education for the region and the Local Education Authority Inspector have supported this project as much as possible on a regular basis. A pilot project was not needed. The perception that inclusion was not only the concern of special school teachers was crucial – a change in all schools in the region was needed.

The head teachers of the mainstream schools in the region were in favour of this inclusive approach and supported the development of inclusive classes in their schools. Individualisation and professional development have changed the pedagogy in the region towards inclusion and the role of the school as a resource centre has played a crucial role.

Many local people (politicians, headmasters, teachers, professionals, parents, etc.) have been involved in the process of transforming the school into an inclusive school and their main goal, besides academic achievements, has been the well-being of all learners. A group of senior people from a residential home for the elderly has been involved in the school's change process from the very beginning. They produce and sell handicrafts and give the money to the school to support learners with SEN.

Besides the wide range of support services provided to learners within the school, additional counselling and advisory services are offered to learners, at community level. The role of the counselling/advisory group of the region is to support learners, teachers and parents in inclusive classes. As one representative noted:

... at the beginning of the academic year we receive around 100 applications for learners that need additional support. After providing the necessary counselling and advice, the learners that really need additional support are around 10–20.

The school has established networks with other institutions at local level for additional support: co-operation with the youth welfare office for psycho-drama sessions, animal support therapy to reduce fears and increase self-esteem, training in motor skills in order to learn coping skills for daily life, speech therapy, etc.

In addition the Vienna Board of Education provides a number of support measures to ensure quality in inclusive practices, such as the Inclusion Advice Centre, support from visiting specialists, the project on including learners with autism, the project on including learners with severe social and behavioural problems, in-service training, etc.

Support structures in the school

In the transformation process, a new system of provision and new arrangements have been introduced at school level, with positive effects on the participation and learning of all learners. This system includes:

- A change of school management through the development of personnel and the school in general through periodical talks, collegial observations and feedback, study visits to other schools and in-service training and facilitation of teamwork by team meetings. All teachers teaching the same grade are a team and the co-ordinator of a particular team is responsible for communication with team partners and the principal. Special education counselling is offered at the interfaces of the school system (i.e. from kindergarten to primary school or from primary to



secondary school) and it supports all stakeholders (teachers, parents, learners) in order to meet their needs. The introduction of the school-development team – made up of one representative of each teachers' team, one from the therapeutic aid team, the principal, the special needs counsellor, two parents and the SET (school development team) – has been effective in the co-ordination of the school work.

- The development of democratic structures, such as a school parliament, respecting the opinions of learners, weekly class meetings for better co-ordination of the work and peer mediation sessions to avoid school conflict and overcome problems
- The development of reform pedagogy oriented concepts, such as study workshops ('Lernwerkstatt') where the learners are offered a room where they can invent, discover and do some research.

Support structures in the classroom

During the observations in classes and discussions with teachers, learners and parents, it became evident that the VMS respects and supports individual learner differences through differentiated and individualised teaching. As one mother remarked, 'The school has helped my child to be empowered by the individual teaching approach and to develop in all different directions: emotionally, socially, etc.'

Promoting individualisation and learner-centred approaches is a key factor of the school learning process. This involves:

- measures to accompany the learner's development in a holistic way, as an integral part of the teaching and learning process;
- a course system in each class, offered for approximately three lessons a week to provide intensive support for learners in small study groups;
- individual feedback on learners' achievements by means of the Portfolio of Competences ('Kompetenzenpass'). This provides an on-going description of the learner's development process and allows learners to present their achievements to teachers and parents.

As one teacher noted:

Beside the different types of support provided at classroom level, it is the focus on learners' competences that makes the school able to create the specific path to inclusion for each individual learner with SEN.

An 'arrival phase' in the morning shows learners that they are welcome at school even before lessons begin. A joint start to the week's learning with a Learning-Coaching session helps learners to plan their individual learning goals. The Learning-Coaching sessions in class, one hour per week, help learners to plan their learning week. There are four teams with one trained learner coach per team. The curriculum of the Learning-Coaching sessions includes: developing individual learning strategies; learning techniques and organisation; training in support strategies, such as concentration, self-motivation, relaxation and co-operating with others. Through these techniques, learners are helped to talk and express their opinion, to make presentations, to learn poems, to develop learning diaries, etc. These sessions seem to have positive effects on learners' confidence and self-esteem and change their learning behaviour, as well as their communication with their peers in the class.

The teamwork approach of teachers in the class is effective for all learners. Teachers from secondary modern and grammar schools teach together. SEN teachers are an integral part of the class teacher teams in inclusion classes.



Curriculum and assessment

In inclusive classes, the VMS follows the mainstream curriculum of lower secondary schools, adapted to individual needs.

An alternative form of assessing skills, abilities and competences of learners – the 'KOMPASS' – has been developed by the school team. It is used to register and record the different competences that learners gain, step-by-step in different fields (social, learning, language, science skills, etc.). It helps learners, parents and teachers to visualise the process of learning, the strengths and needs, progress made and next steps. It also helps learners to take responsibility for their own learning process. It is used for parent-teacher-learner discussions, learner discussions with the learner-coach/advisory teacher and for decision-making in relation to career guidance. The KOMPASS tool focuses on competences instead of learning targets.

In the discussion with the teachers, the positive aspects as well as the challenges of the use of the KOMPASS tool were highlighted. It enables differentiation inside the classroom and reduces pressure and stress as it takes account of four years of individual development. It is a good basis for discussions, reflection and next learning steps. Regarding the challenges, one teacher states, 'It is not yet "perfect" for all subjects and there is still a problem with handling it – some teachers do not know how to use it during the lessons'.

In their daily work, the KOMPASS is not regarded with the same importance by all teachers. It is easier to focus on failures – on what 'learners cannot do' – rather than what 'they can do'. Thus, a change of perspective on abilities is still needed by some teachers, parents, learners and society.

Support for professional development

A number of in-service training courses for mainstream and SEN teachers on new developments regarding inclusive methods and approaches are organised by the Vienna Board of Education in co-operation with the Teachers' College.

For the last six years, the VMS has organised coaching courses for teachers. When young teachers start working in the school, they have no experience of inclusive practices and feel frustrated. An experienced teacher accompanies young teachers for at least one school term. The aim is to provide assistance in getting to know the school routine and to act a consultant for problems with learners, so that young teachers gain competences and learn by doing step-by-step. The key requirements of the coaching for teachers model include: communication and perception skills, ability to form relationships, co-operation, self-esteem, respect, empathy and the ability to maintain enthusiasm and 'FIRE'.

In the discussions with teachers, it seems that this approach has been a great help to young teachers in their daily work. As one teacher noted:

It is very important to know that there is always a person I can ask questions. I feel safe. At the same time I have learned that this school provides the space for learning for all learners. The focus is on the abilities of the learners.

The school principal is open and supports new ideas initiated by the personnel in relation to new methods, techniques and tools that can improve inclusive practices in the school.

Support for learners and family involvement

A new democratic development in the school is the school parliament, made up of elected learners from all the classes. This is a clear sign that the learners' opinions are respected



at school level. The aim of the school parliament is to work together with the manager and the school personnel in order to improve 'the life for all' in the school. The motive is 'learning by doing'. When learners experience problems at school, they discuss them and try to find a solution with the members of the school parliament.

Peer mediation is also a key element of democratic development in the school. A one-year training course on peer mediation is organised by the school. The aim of the school is to deal with conflict at school via peer mediation.

During interviews, learners highlighted that they respect each other and are friendly and that the relationship with the teachers is very good. They can always ask for additional support from their teachers and they feel satisfied with the school. As one learner noted, 'It is cool to be a student in this school'.

Parents' involvement in their children's learning process is a key factor in the development of trusting relationships between the school and the families. Parent information meetings are held on a regular basis and discussions between parents and teachers about their children's progress, as well as about their strengths and needs, take place frequently.

During the interviews with parents it was highlighted that they like to be involved in the school developments, to be informed about their child's progress and to be involved in the learning process.

They also noted that their children feel happy and respected at school. They have developed their social skills, increased their self-confidence and all teachers support and include them in school activities. Their contact with teachers and support staff is very good. Once problems arise they can always discuss them with the teachers in order to find solutions.

They appreciate the fact that the teachers focus on the abilities of learners rather than on the challenges. Their main concern is the future of their children after they graduate from the VMS.

Resources for learner support

In Austria, according to the Compulsory Education Act, the district school board is responsible for issuing a SEN statement for any learner who, due to physical or psychological disabilities, is not capable of following education in primary or lower secondary school or in pre-vocational school without receiving special educational support. The Special Education Centres issue opinions that form the basis for decision-making by the District School Board on whether a learner presents SEN. In addition, expert opinions issued by public health officers, school psychologists or other professionals can be referred to.

Special Education Centres have the task of providing and co-ordinating all measures of special needs education to ensure, through inclusive education, that learners with SEN can be educated at mainstream schools in the best possible way. These tasks include: co-operation with compulsory education regional schools, school authorities, the district school inspector, the special school inspector, regional institutions, etc.; support for inclusive education through educational and organisational counselling; assistance for the set-up of teacher teams; information and co-operation with families, etc.



INCLUSIVE OUTCOMES

The change process towards inclusive education in Vienna, which started more than 20 years ago, has led to a change in the beliefs and attitudes of all stakeholders towards diversity and has increased the number of inclusive classes in all the primary and secondary schools of the region.

The transformation of the VMS from a special school to an inclusive achievement-oriented school has been a model of good practice that provides an overview of the different changes that need to be made, so that all learners are able to attend inclusive classes.

Motivation and commitment to an inclusive approach, a change of school management, the introduction of democratic structures in the school, the promotion of a learner-centred approach and the teamwork approach taken by all the educational and support staff, combined with the continuous in-service training of all the school staff, have had a positive impact on the progress made by all learners in the school, in academic and social learning as well as in the development of confidence, self-esteem and well-being.

As one parent noted, 'What I like in this school is the focus on "what works well for every learner" and using it for the further development and progress of the learner'.



SUSTAINING THE INCLUSIVE PROCESS

The progress made towards inclusive education in Vienna is evident, with the increased number of inclusive classes in all primary and secondary schools in the region, as well as the successful change of the VMS from a special school to an inclusive school.

The key factors that have facilitated this progress at regional level include, among others, the motivation and commitment of the Vienna Board of Education, the availability of a wide range of support services, the change of beliefs and attitudes of the managerial, educational and support staff, the co-ordination of services, the teamwork approach and the in-service training of personnel in new developments in inclusion.

At school level, the key factors that have facilitated this change include, among others, clear and strong leadership, the change of management practice, the learner-centred approach and focus on the abilities of learners, the coaching for learners and teachers, the alternative form of assessing the competences and skills of learners and the openness to new ideas and methods for inclusive practice.

During the discussions with the different stakeholders, their main concern was how to continue with the improvement and further development of the inclusive education system and ensure the sustainability of the inclusion process.

Some key issues were highlighted that need further consideration.

Although the national policy and that of the Vienna Board of Education is in favour of inclusive education and the number of inclusive classes in all primary and secondary schools of the region has increased, there is still a two-track system of education: special schools versus inclusive schools. Some further investigation is needed to identify the roles of each system, the co-operation between inclusive and special schools, the transformation of special schools into resource centres, etc.

Many parents highlighted the transfer process of learners with SEN to upper secondary education, to vocational training and to the labour market as a very problematic area. From the 9th grade onwards, there seems to be no inclusive provision for learners with SEN and learners and parents feel very frustrated about their future and what will happen after they finish middle school. Further work needs to be done to ensure a smooth transition from one level of education to another.

Further work is also needed for the adaptation of the curriculum for learners with severe learning difficulties.

The 'back-pack' system for learners with SEN, in the sense that resources are somehow learner-bound, was also highlighted during the discussion as a challenge that needs further investigation to become more efficient for the learner.

There is still the feeling of discrimination shown for, example, by the use of some 'traditional' terms about disability. The school principal has stated that the use of certain terms reflects the attitude towards diversity and stressed the importance of learning to use the correct language.



KEY LEARNING POINTS AND AREAS OF FURTHER DISCUSSION

Some key areas needing further investigation include:

- The adaptation of the curriculum for learners with learning difficulties in inclusive classes.
- The transfer process of learners with SEN to upper secondary education, to vocational training and to the labour market and the lack of inclusive practice in the Gymnasium and in further education placements from 9th grade upwards.
- The funding system. At present, SEN resources are pupil-bound, not system-bound. This means that resources are provided only if learners are considered to have SEN. The resources should be based on socio-economic factors that, in areas such as Vienna, are well known.
- The two-track system of special schools and inclusive schools and the need to improve the image of schools in the community.
- The improvement of co-operation and communication between the Board of Education in Vienna and the Ministry of Education.
- Professional development opportunities and coaching for teachers in inclusive systems to strengthen personal competences and enable them to perform all their required roles (multi-functionality).
- The lack of inclusive day-care for all children and the lack of resources available for such provision.
- Ways to highlight the potential of inclusive education to make a positive contribution to the education of learners with disabilities.



CONCLUDING REMARKS

As was stated by a member of the visiting team, the successful change of the VMS into an inclusive school was the outcome of 'A clear vision on inclusion, strong and distributive leadership, the right time for reform, an open-minded and hard working team, a positive approach to learners and optimism'.

The gradual development of inclusive education in Vienna, with the support of the Vienna Board of Education, has influenced the beliefs and attitudes of all stakeholders towards diversity and has resulted in an increase of the number of inclusive classes in all the primary and secondary schools of the region.

The transformation of the VMS from a 'closed' special school into a successful inclusive school had a positive impact on the head teachers and the school staff of the other schools in the region, by changing their attitudes in favour of inclusive approaches. This has also influenced the attitudes of the local community, of parents and of learners themselves. However, inclusion is a long process and that requires further continuous development.



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