

# Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education

## Recommendations for Practice





# **KEY PRINCIPLES FOR PROMOTING QUALITY IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

## **Recommendations for Practice**

**European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education**



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## FOREWORD

The first report in the Key Principles series was based upon Agency work published until 2003. A further review of Agency work was published in 2009 in the document *Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education – Recommendations for Policy Makers*. Both publications provided a synthesis of main findings from Agency thematic work to support the development of inclusive policy.

In 2007, Agency representatives agreed that such summary information should be produced on a regular basis. They also agreed that this work should move beyond policy to also synthesise the key principles for practice. This document therefore reviews Agency work since 2003 to provide a summary of the principles for inclusive practice, as evidenced by thematic projects across all member countries. The full list of the documents reviewed can be seen in Section 5.

These recommendations, developed by policy makers for policy makers and practitioners, present key messages for practice. It is hoped that they, together with the 2009 publication, will support all those providing leadership in education to promote a more inclusive education system across Europe.

The evidence from Agency thematic publications used to draw up the practice principles in this document has been set out in a matrix. This can be found, along with full information about this work at: <http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/key-principles>

### **Cor Meijer**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Agency Key Principles reports published in 2003 and 2009 have highlighted recommendations regarding aspects of educational policy that seem to be effective in supporting the inclusion of learners with different types of special educational needs (SEN) and that also underpin the principle of quality education for all. This current document draws on evidence from Agency work since 2003, and summarises the key principles for practice that appear to be crucial in providing quality support to learners with different needs in mainstream settings.

### 1.1 Background context

Some key European and international guiding principles for inclusive education are outlined at: <http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/key-principles/a-european-and-international-approach-to-inclusive-education>. A number of more recent publications also highlight the need for schools to become better at educating all learners in their communities and provide the context for the current work.

Building on the UNESCO *Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education* (2009), it is increasingly recognised that inclusion and quality are reciprocal – that an inclusive ethos can make a significant contribution to the quality of education for all learners. The role of inclusive education in the development of a more just, equal and democratic society where diversity is celebrated is also considered to be of increasing importance. Such development involves principles such as equal opportunities, non-discrimination and universal access and needs to take account, in particular, of the individual needs of learners who are at risk of social exclusion and marginalisation.

The Council of the European Union (2009) stresses that: ‘Education should promote intercultural competences, democratic values and respect for fundamental rights and the environment, as well as combat all forms of discrimination, equipping all young people to interact positively with their peers from diverse backgrounds’ (p. 3).

This is also reinforced by the *Conclusions of the Council of Ministers on the social dimension of education and training* (2010) which note that education systems across Europe need to ensure both equity



and excellence and recognise that improving educational attainment and key competences for all are crucial not only to economic growth and competitiveness but also to reducing poverty and fostering social inclusion.

Defining equity, the Commission of the European Communities (2006) states that it is: ‘... viewed as the extent to which individuals can take advantage of education and training, in terms of opportunities, access, treatment and outcomes’ (p. 2). The OECD (2007) links equity to fairness and states that personal and social circumstances should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential.

The United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006) (UNCRPD) and in particular Article 24 on Education also advocates inclusive education and together with the optional protocol has been ratified by a growing number of Agency member countries and the European Union (see: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/latest.asp?id=169>). The EU Disability Strategy 2010–2020 aims to align EU policies with the UNCRPD.

The *World Report on Disability* (2011) emphasises the importance of appropriate training for mainstream teachers if they are to be confident and competent in teaching children with diverse educational needs. The report notes that teacher education programmes should be about attitudes and values, not just knowledge and skills.

Inclusion is a widely debated issue across Agency member countries and although there is variation in the approaches taken to providing for the diverse needs of learners, in particular those needing additional support due to special educational needs and disability, there are also a number of common elements focusing on raising the achievement of all learners. The following section outlines the basis for the evidence-based practice principles emerging from Agency work presented in Section 3.



## 2. WIDENING PARTICIPATION FOR ALL LEARNERS

In the publication *Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education* (2009), widening participation to increase educational opportunity for all learners was identified as an over-arching principle. The following interconnected themes stemming from this were highlighted:

- education and training in inclusive education for all teachers;
- organisational culture and ethos that promotes inclusion;
- support structures organised so as to support inclusion;
- flexible resource systems that promote inclusion;
- policies that promote inclusion;
- legislation that promotes inclusion.

These themes provide the basis for the practice principles identified from Agency thematic projects and presented in this document. They are therefore discussed in more detail here.

As stated in the introduction, inclusion is now understood as a human rights issue that concerns a wider range of learners than those with special educational needs. As the Agency 2011 report *Participation in Inclusive Education – A Framework for Developing Indicators* states, many learners, although present in school, are not engaged in their learning and leave school with few positive outcomes. Active participation in all aspects of school life is essential if learners are to continue in education and make the most of their learning for life, work and global citizenship.

With reference to early school leaving, the Council of the European Union (2011) states that: 'Policy measures which can make a difference may include better early childhood education, updated curricula, improved teacher education, innovative teaching methods, individualised support – particularly for disadvantaged groups, including migrants and Roma – and stronger cooperation with families and the local community' (p. 2). Through building effective partnerships, schools are increasingly able to exert a positive influence on conditions beyond the school, improving support to learners and their families.



The recent Agency publications *Implementing Inclusive Assessment* (2009) and *Teacher Education for Inclusion across Europe* (2011) note that teachers need time for professional reflection and state that both teachers and learners must develop a positive mind-set, seeing challenges and errors as further learning opportunities. In all settings, diversity must be celebrated and valued and difference considered as a resource for learning. Clearly, initial and continuing teacher education has a vital role to play in the development of positive teacher attitudes as well as knowledge and skills.

The publication *Assessment in Inclusive Settings* (2007) emphasises the crucial role of school leaders in the move towards inclusive education. While teachers are leaders in their classrooms able to influence teaching and learning, they cannot guarantee the development of inclusive practice if the school leadership team does not support their work and continuing professional development. School leaders must create the conditions for inclusive development through strong relationships and a commitment to collaboration, teamwork, inquiry and innovation.

Within a positive school ethos, learners are listened to and actively involved in their assessment and learning as noted in the publication *Young Voices: Meeting Diversity in Education* (2008). The *World Report on Disability* (2011) also stresses that the voices of learners with disabilities must be heard. In order for this to happen, learners must be given a range of opportunities to access information (e.g. through appropriate methods of communication) and then be helped to process information, organise ideas and respond in meaningful ways.

The Agency report *Assessment in Inclusive Settings* (2007) suggests that teachers increasingly act as guides and facilitators of learning. Assessment becomes an integral part of the learning process with learners highlighting their own preferences, interests and barriers to learning. The Agency publications *Special Education across Europe* (2003) and *Multicultural Diversity and Special Needs Education* (2009) further stress the importance of such individualised approaches and the report *ICTs in Education for People with Disabilities* (2011) (a joint publication with UNESCO IITE) stresses how information and communication technology can be a powerful tool in supporting individualised learning approaches.



A key partner in the development of inclusive practice may include special settings. As they develop their role as resources, such settings can facilitate the exchange of professional expertise, through networking and dialogue and increase the capacity of all schools to respond to diverse needs. The publication *Special Needs Education in Europe – Thematic Publication* (2003) suggests that this practice would improve the support provided to all learners.

Learners and families who need additional support should be able to access coherent plans to secure appropriate, affordable and consistent services to meet their needs and achieve positive long-term outcomes. As stated in the document *Early Childhood Intervention – Progress and Developments 2005–2010* (2010), schools and support services from all disciplines should work in close co-operation to meet the needs of learners and their families in every local community. Investment in early years provision and in early support for all learners should be seen as long-term, reducing the services needed by vulnerable learners in later life. The *ICTs in Education for People with Disabilities* (2011) report stresses the importance of involving families in developing tools and approaches for learners that can be used in the learning and home situations as a continuous and co-ordinated approach.

The paper *Implementing Inclusive Assessment* (2009) describes the move from multi-disciplinary to interdisciplinary working, which integrates the knowledge and perspectives of different areas of professional expertise in order to consider issues holistically and provide more flexible support options. This co-operative approach requires collaboration across policy sectors (e.g. health and social services) at all levels.

While acknowledging the critical role of the teacher and of school leaders discussed above, the key principles presented in this document start from the learner's perspective, putting children and young people at the heart of planning for their presence (access and attendance), participation (in quality learning experiences) and achievement (of outcomes through engagement in the learning process). This model, outlined in the UNESCO *Guidelines for Inclusion* (2005) draws together elements of Agency work and stresses that presence – in any educational setting – is not enough in itself. As young delegates at the European Parliament hearing in



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Brussels in November 2011 stressed, learners need to be actively involved in their own assessment and learning and in all decisions about their future.



### **3. KEY PRINCIPLES FOR PROMOTING INCLUSIVE PRACTICE**

While the focus of most Agency work is on the compulsory education sector, these principles will apply to all sectors and phases of life-long learning and to formal and non-formal education. The learner-focused principles will apply equally to learners with and without disabilities, as inclusion is concerned with the quality of education of all learners.

#### **3.1 Responding to learners' voices**

Learners' voices and those of family and advocates should be listened to, particularly when decisions are made that affect their lives.

Learners must be provided with relevant information in appropriate formats to enable them to take a full part in all discussions and decisions regarding their education and plans for the future.

Learners should have a voice in decisions that affect them:

- in assessment – choosing different ways of showing what they know, understand and can do, being involved in discussions about assessment information and how it can support future learning;
- in the learning process – having different ways of accessing information, making it meaningful and expressing themselves;
- in planning their learning, taking personal factors into account;
- in the provision of support to overcome barriers to learning that does not stigmatise them or separate them from their peers;
- in curriculum – having a say in relevant, meaningful, personalised outcomes; and
- in evaluating the learning outcomes to ensure educational achievement and well-being.

#### **3.2 Active participation of learners**

All learners are entitled to be active participants in the life of the school and community.

All learners should feel part of their class/school, being valued for the individual contribution that they make to the life of the community.



Learners should be consulted about any additional support needed to help them participate in the full range of activities and experiences offered.

Learners should:

- have a sense of belonging and feel secure in the school environment;
- have opportunities for collaboration and co-operative learning, with flexible peer groups to develop social and communication skills;
- have their achievements recognised and celebrated;
- take a full part in extracurricular and out-of-school activities;
- take responsibility for their own learning and an active role in the learning process, maintaining high expectations and increasing independence in learning; and
- recognise their responsibilities to others in the school and community.

### **3.3 Positive teacher attitudes**

All teachers should have positive attitudes towards all learners and the will to work collaboratively with colleagues.

All teachers should see diversity as a strength and a stimulus for their own further learning. In their initial and continuing education, teachers need experiences that will develop positive attitudes and values and encourage them to research, reflect and find innovative solutions to new challenges presented by learner difference. In particular, teachers should welcome support from colleagues with different areas of expertise and work co-operatively moving from an individual to a collective approach to their work.

Teachers should:

- take responsibility for all learners and show understanding of the fundamental needs that they all have in common e.g. to feel safe, to belong, to enjoy their time in school and achieve meaningful outcomes;





- value and show commitment to meeting a broad range of outcomes (including emotional health and well-being, social skills) and maintain high expectations for all learners;
- recognise when learners need support and arrange this sensitively together with the learner, without using potentially limiting labels;
- have knowledge of a range of resources (including ICT) and the skills to enable them to be used effectively in the classroom;
- have a positive attitude to innovation and be prepared to continue their own personal and professional development;
- collaborate with and support colleagues to reflect on practice and build 'team' knowledge and skills in order to help learners (for example in the development of individual support, classroom strategies or transition plans); and
- communicate effectively with learners, parents and colleagues from all agencies and support collaborative practice to benefit learners.

### **3.4 Effective teacher skills**

All teachers should develop the skills to meet the diverse needs of all learners.

In their initial and continuing education, teachers should be equipped with the skills, knowledge and understanding that will give them the confidence to deal effectively with a range of learner needs. Teachers should develop a range of approaches to assessment and pedagogy to enable them to use these in flexible ways to reduce barriers to learning and enable participation and achievement. They should develop a clear rationale for the approaches used, recognising and reflecting on factors that can impact on learning and the barriers that can occur.

Teachers should:

- assess learners using a range of approaches which allow them to show what they know, understand and are able to do in a variety of ways;
- use feedback to identify and overcome barriers to learning (physical, attitudinal, organisational) and plan with learners to



ensure that future learning is accessible, coherent and connected to their lives;

- provide a range of learning opportunities with choice for all learners, in line with a view of intelligence as multi-dimensional;
- use a range of approaches to teaching, using flexible groups and taking account of learners' preferences;
- plan a relevant curriculum that provides coherent opportunities for the development of core, cross curricular competences and meaningful engagement for all learners; and
- work with colleagues to develop individual plans to ensure the consistent deployment of any necessary support, aids and adaptations to meet learners' needs.

### **3.5 Visionary school leadership**

School leaders should value diversity among staff as well as learners, encourage collegiality and support innovation.

Effective inclusive practice requires visionary leadership at all levels that demonstrates inclusive values and develops the positive ethos and environment for learning that form the basis of quality education. Throughout the whole school, inclusive values should be evident in all policies and development plans and demonstrated through the mutually supportive working relationships and practice of all school leaders, staff and learners.

School leaders should:

- establish a positive ethos and a learning culture by making their vision and inclusive values and beliefs explicit in all aspects of school life;
- ensure that inclusion and learner well-being are central to all policies and evident in all practice;
- organise school in ways that avoid labelling or categorising learners, e.g. flexible, mixed groupings for different activities;
- actively work to promote responses to difference that include learners by extending what is available in their usual learning environment;



- encourage and empower staff to develop their capacity and competence to meet a diversity of needs through different approaches and contribute their expertise to the whole school learning community;
- support staff to reflect on their practice and become autonomous life-long learners;
- manage resources effectively and ensure that they reflect and respect the diversity of learners within the school;
- use sources of funding creatively to ensure physical access to buildings and appropriate support (including aids/ICT) for all learners;
- develop effective monitoring, self-review and learner-centred evaluation that takes account of the achievement of all learners and of wider, as well as academic outcomes;
- use the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation to inform planning and strategic improvement to develop the school's capacity to support the best possible progress for all learners;
- provide effective pastoral support for all staff and work to mediate external pressures by developing a clear rationale for approaches taken by the school;
- manage specialist staff and internal and external networks to take joint responsibility and to work in partnership to facilitate access to the curriculum and extracurricular activities for all learners; and
- communicate effectively with the local community, interdisciplinary support services and specialist settings to ensure a holistic and co-ordinated approach to learners and their families that recognises the importance of meeting broader needs to enhance learning.

### **3.6 Coherent interdisciplinary services**

Every school should have access to the support of interdisciplinary community services.

Children and young people will not be successful in their learning if their basic health, social and emotional needs are not met. This may require support for families and communities and will need services



such as health and social services to collaborate and ensure a holistic approach.

Interdisciplinary services should:

- demonstrate good working relationships and effective communication across and between different sectors/services and schools in the community. They should enable information to be shared and appropriate and timely support provided to address additional needs (such as therapies for medical needs, mental health support etc.);
- work closely with parents and learners to strengthen links between the family, school and the interdisciplinary team; and
- work with schools to involve all stakeholders, including local special schools/settings in their support networks and seek innovative ways to share expertise.



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## 4. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Building on the work of the Agency and in particular the key principles outlined in the 2009 recommendations, this document sets out some major considerations for promoting inclusive practice.

Acknowledging the importance of the role of the teacher, the Commission of the European Communities (2006) states: 'The most important factors for efficiency and equity are the quality, experience and motivation of teachers and the types of pedagogy they use. Working in collaboration with parents and pupil welfare services, teachers can play a key role in securing participation of the most disadvantaged' (p. 6).

As the Agency Director Cor Meijer, speaking at the launch of the *World Report on Disability* (June 2011) said: 'We can discuss inclusion on many levels, conceptual level, policy level, normative or research level, but in the end it is the teacher in the classroom who has to cope with a variety of students in the classroom. It is the teacher who implements the principles of inclusive education.'

The key principles outlined here, if underpinned by those aimed at policy makers in 2009 could support teachers and other practitioners to develop more inclusive practice and effectively meet more diverse needs in mainstream classrooms.



## 5. MORE INFORMATION

All of the information referred to in this document can be found in the Key Principles – Practice area of the Agency website at:

<http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/key-principles>

This includes:

- A ‘matrix’ of evidence from Agency studies supporting each of the key principles outlined in section 3;
- Links to all Agency publications and materials referred to in this document.

### 5.1 Agency sources

- *Special Education across Europe* (2003)
- *Special Needs Education in Europe – Thematic Publication* (Volume 1, 2003 and Volume 2, 2006)
- *Inclusive Education and Classroom Practice in Secondary Education* (2005)
- *Young Views on Special Needs Education* (2005)
- *Early Childhood Intervention* (2005)
- *Individual Transition Plans* (2006)
- *Assessment in Inclusive Settings* (2007 and 2009)
- *Young Voices: Meeting Diversity in Education* (2008)
- *Lisbon Declaration – Young People’s Views on Inclusive Education* (2007)
- *Implementing Inclusive Assessment* (2009); *Assessment for Learning and Pupils with Special Educational Needs* (2009); *Putting inclusive assessment into practice* (2009); *Cyprus Recommendations on Inclusive Assessment* (2009)
- *Development of a set of indicators – for inclusive education in Europe* (2009)
- *Multicultural Diversity and Special Needs Education* (2009)
- *Early Childhood Intervention – Progress and Developments 2005–2010* (2010)



- *Inclusive Education in Action – Project Framework and Rationale* (2010)
- *Teacher Education for Inclusion – Literature Review* (2010)
- *ICTs in education for people with disabilities* (2011)
- *Teacher Education for Inclusion across Europe* (2011)
- *Participation in Inclusive Education – A Framework for Developing Indicators* (2011).

## 5.2 Other sources

Commission of the European Communities (2006) *Communication from the Commission to the Council and to the European Parliament. Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems*. Brussels, 8.9.2006 COM(2006) 481 final [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/comm481\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/comm481_en.pdf)

Commission of the European Communities (2010) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. European Disability Strategy 2010–2020: A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe*. Brussels, 15.11.2010 COM (2010) 636 final <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0636:FIN:EN:PDF>

Council of the European Union (2009) *Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training* ('ET 2020') (2009/C 119/02) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:119:0002:010:EN:PDF>

Council of the European Union (2010) *Council conclusions on the social dimension of education and training*. 3013<sup>th</sup> Education, Youth and Culture Council meeting 11/05/2010 [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/114374.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/114374.pdf)

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Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2007) *No more failures: Ten steps to equity in education*. OECD, Paris



UNESCO (2005) *Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*. UNESCO, Paris

UNESCO (2009) *Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education*. UNESCO, Paris [http://unesdoc.unesco.org/Ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=177849&set=4A9F89E7\\_2\\_250&gp=1&ll=1](http://unesdoc.unesco.org/Ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=177849&set=4A9F89E7_2_250&gp=1&ll=1)

United Nations (2006) *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. New York, United Nations

World Health Organization (2011) *World Report on Disability*. Geneva, Switzerland, WHO





The first report in the Key Principles series was based upon Agency work published until 2003. A further review of Agency work was published in 2009 in the document *Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education – Recommendations for Policy Makers*.

Both publications provide a synthesis of main findings from Agency thematic work to support the development of policy for inclusive education.

This third document in the Key Principles series again draws on Agency thematic work carried out since 2003, but focuses upon Key Principles for Practice that support quality in inclusive education. It has been prepared by education policy makers and practitioners for policy makers and other professionals providing leadership in education. The aim of the document is to provide a summary of the main principles for practice that appear to be crucial in providing quality support to learners with diverse needs in mainstream settings.

It is hoped that these key principle recommendations will provide further support in the move towards more inclusive education systems across Europe.

