

Organisation of Provision to Support Inclusive Education

Summary Report



EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

ORGANISATION OF PROVISION TO SUPPORT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency; formerly known as the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education) is an independent and self-governing organisation, supported by Agency member countries and the European Institutions (Commission and Parliament).



This publication has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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Extracts from the document are permitted provided that a clear reference to the source is given. This report should be referenced as follows: European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014. *Organisation of Provision to Support Inclusive Education – Summary Report*. Odense, Denmark: European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

With a view to greater accessibility, this report is available in 22 languages and fully manipulable electronic formats, which are available on the Agency's website: www.european-agency.org

ISBN: 978-87-7110-540-7 (Electronic)

ISBN: 978-87-7110-562-9 (Printed)

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CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	5
1.1 Main findings	5
2. INCLUSION AS A QUALITY ISSUE	7
2.1. Terminology and a common understanding of inclusion	7
2.2. Legislation and policy	8
2.3. Monitoring and evaluation	9
3. STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS.....	11
3.1. Leadership and managing change	11
3.2. Teacher education and staff development	12
3.3. Development of resource centres	12
4. ORGANISATION OF PROVISION AND SUPPORT IN MAINSTREAM SETTINGS	14
4.1. Teaching approaches.....	14
4.2. Curriculum	14
4.3. Assessment.....	15
4.4 Organisation of support.....	16
5. COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING	17
5.1. Community-level support	17
5.2. Parental involvement	18
6. FUNDING AND RESOURCING.....	19
7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	21
7.1. Conclusions.....	21
7.2. Recommendations	22
7.2.1 <i>Child rights and participation</i>	22
7.2.2 <i>Conceptual clarity and coherence</i>	23
7.2.3 <i>Continuum of support</i>	23
7.3 Concluding remarks.....	24
8. REFERENCES	25



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Organisation of Provision to Support Inclusive Education (OoP) project, conducted by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) from 2011 to 2013, examined the following key question: 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 – United Nations, 2006) in inclusive settings within the compulsory school sector?

This report draws together the key issues examined during the project activities and presents a series of recommendations for the organisation of provision and practice to improve support for all learners in mainstream schools and, in particular, those with disabilities.

The project explored a number of key themes, which were identified as priorities through early project activities – the research literature review and the collection of country information. These themes are as follows:

- **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.** A key element here is developing the role of specialist provision as a resource to support the mainstream sector.
- **Collaboration and networking.** Joint working enhances the effectiveness of educational and multi-agency support within the mainstream sector.
- **Funding and resourcing.** Support should be targeted in flexible ways to meet the needs of all learners, including those with disabilities.

Five sites were selected for follow-up visits: Essunga (Sweden), Vienna (Austria), Flensburg (Germany), Ljubljana (Slovenia) and Valetta (Malta). In autumn 2013, these sites also hosted a series of thematic seminars to explore in more detail the factors arising from the visits that have an influence on the organisation of provision in inclusive settings, taking into account different country contexts.

1.1 Main findings

From the project visits and seminars, the following points were noted as necessary for the development of inclusive practice and the organisation of effective support for learners in mainstream settings:

- Conceptual clarity regarding inclusive education.



- Legislation and policy that recognises the synergy between the UNCRPD and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC – United Nations, 1989) in prioritising the rights of children with disabilities and ensuring consistent policy and practice at all system levels.
- A systemic view that focuses on developing the ‘inclusive capability’ of the education system as a whole and encourages strong links, collaboration and support between and within all levels (i.e. between national and local policy-makers and education and school leaders, teachers, other professionals, learners and families).
- Inclusive accountability that involves all stakeholders, including learners, and informs policy decisions to ensure the full participation and achievement of all learners, but in particular those vulnerable to under-achievement.
- Strong, shared leadership to effectively manage change.
- Teacher education and continuing professional development for inclusion to ensure that teachers develop positive attitudes and take responsibility for all learners.
- A clear role for specialist settings to develop as resource centres to increase the capability of mainstream schools and ensure quality provision and well-qualified professional support for learners with disabilities.
- School organisation, teaching approaches, curriculum and assessment that support equivalent learning opportunities for all.
- Efficient use of resources through collegiality and co-operation, developing a flexible continuum of support rather than allocating funding to specific groups.

These areas are broadly agreed in research literature and in recent Agency work, such as *Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education* (European Agency, 2011), as well as in the Organisation of Provision project activities.

More detailed information is available in the project outputs (literature review, project visit reports, thematic seminar materials) that can be found on the project web area: <http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/organisation-of-provision>



2. INCLUSION AS A QUALITY ISSUE

The OoP project's conceptual framework supports the need for system change to move from a deficit (needs-based) model of disability, which locates the problem within the learner, to a model that considers the rights of learners within education, ensuring that all actively participate in the learning process. This highlights the need for a move from compensatory approaches and organisation of provision in terms of individual support, to how systems of support can be organised to make mainstream schools more capable of meeting the requirements of all learners for a quality education – preventing failure rather than taking 'remedial' action.

This section will address inclusion as a quality issue that involves responding to the diverse needs of all learners.

2.1. Terminology and a common understanding of inclusion

The use of the terms 'inclusion' and 'inclusive education' and their associated meanings vary a great deal among different countries and also among different regions within the same country.

In the thematic seminars, experts pointed out the need for a shared idea of inclusion, with an emphasis on the human rather than the technical side and on the idea that inclusive education is better for all learners in terms of life preparation. Long-standing traditions must be overcome with a move from a medical mind-set to schools where everyone belongs. Inclusion is about ALL learners.

In the inclusive schools visited, learners with special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities were not only physically present in classes, but also participated and worked with their peers according to their own level of attainment. As Crawford and Porter have pointed out, inclusive education can be defined as educational arrangements in which teachers [schools] have the instructional and other supports to:

- *welcome and include all learners, in all of their diversity and exceptionalities, in the regular classroom, in the neighbourhood school with their age peers;*
- *foster the participation and fullest possible development of all learners' human potential; and*
- *foster the participation of all learners in socially valuing relationships with diverse peers and adults (2004, p. 8).*

Such a definition requires new thinking and recognition that diversity, and in particular disability, is not a problem or a 'disturbing' factor.

Inclusion needs to start from the early years – if children grow together, they will learn to accept difference. Where children are sent to separate, 'special' classes in



an attempt to keep mainstream groups homogenous, such provision may become increasingly complex to manage – with an impact on the quality of support provided for learners.

Finally, in a time of economic recession, the allocation of resources that will safeguard each learner's equal entitlement to quality education in mainstream settings becomes crucial. **Inclusion is not a means to cut funding, but a route to ensuring greater quality and equity for all learners.**

2.2. Legislation and policy

At European Union (EU) level, Article 26 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (European Communities, 2000) provides a guiding principle for EU legislative and policy measures to support full inclusion of children with disabilities. This is reflected in the European Disability Strategy 2010–2020 (European Commission, 2010), which clearly supports the inclusion of children with disabilities into mainstream education. Furthermore, it commits the EU to support, through the Education and Training 2020 programme (Council of the European Union, 2009), the member states' efforts to remove legal and organisational barriers to people with disabilities entering the general education and lifelong learning systems and to guarantee them inclusive education and personalised training at all levels of education.

More than half of the Agency member countries participating in the OoP project have undergone significant changes in recent years. Most countries place increasing emphasis on the legal entitlement of all learners to attend a mainstream school, while a smaller number give parents the right to choose schools for their children with special educational needs/disabilities. Another small group of countries refers to education being provided in the 'most appropriate setting' or to learners receiving education 'appropriate to their needs and abilities'. However, it is widely recognised that enshrining the right to support services in any legal framework remains a challenge.

In the study visits and the thematic seminars, experts highlighted the need for a focus on the quality of support rather than the quantity. Positive steps countries are taking to facilitate such an approach include:

- Retaining specialist skills and knowledge and providing support to mainstream schools through resource centres (often former special schools) and centres of expertise.
- Recognising the support needs of many learners in mainstream education (without focusing on impairment/SEN) to provide early intervention and overcome any temporary barriers to learning. This allows resources to be



used more effectively to provide on-going support for learners with more complex support needs.

- Educating all learners on one site – aiming to create flexible learning communities with the capacity to meet a range of support needs (and linking with a range of local services).
- Educating teachers and school leaders to develop competence to work in inclusive settings.
- Working with parents to reassure them regarding the quality of support in mainstream (as opposed to specialist) settings and the benefits of mainstream education.
- Ensuring that support continues through the transition from school into further/higher education, training and employment.

Finally, both the UNCRC (Articles 23(3), 28 and 29(1a)) and the UNCRPD (Article 24) should be considered to ensure that both age and disability dimensions are included in legislation and policy, as countries move on from debating the meaning of inclusion to **a focus on a whole education system that leads to a more equitable and just society.**

2.3. Monitoring and evaluation

National education policy generally sets out the goals of the country's educational system, including provision for learners with disabilities. Regions, municipalities and schools are responsible for making the goals concrete and making their own plans for activities aimed at reaching the national goals. Quality indicators used for monitoring purposes may stem from educational plans and/or research-based evidence on several levels of the educational system. In some countries, the monitoring system (inspection) assesses the effort that educational institutions make to ensure that their learners reach the attainment targets and developmental goals, as well as wider outcomes, including the extent to which provision is 'inclusive'.

In the project thematic seminars, experts pointed out that some accountability systems value different aspects of educational provision that are not necessarily consistent with inclusion. For example, a focus on testing or output-oriented approaches may not support inclusive practice. Consequently, there is a need to develop effective and inclusive ways to monitor and evaluate provision and to secure agreement between policy-makers, inspectors, school leaders, etc., about the definition of success and what quality looks like (taking account of learners' aspirations). All stakeholder groups should pay attention to the questions to be



asked when monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision to ensure that systems reward early support and prevention.

Countries increasingly engage in data collection and while such information can inform planning and development (in particular in ensuring equity and closing achievement ‘gaps’), it should not become the main driver.

Finally, inspection and review need to focus on early intervention – not on failure or wrongdoing – and provide support to schools to increase their capacity to meet the needs of all learners.



3. STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

This section will address effective ways to strengthen the capacity of the mainstream sector to be inclusive and unlock the potential of the specialist sector as a resource.

3.1. Leadership and managing change

Change needs to start with ourselves, in our institutions. As was pointed out by staff in the Essunga school, 'the only thing we can change is the way we work'.

Education is one of the key success factors of a national economy and the quality of leadership seems to be one of its cornerstones. Taipale indicates that: '... principals' work will become all the more challenging, which creates pressure to develop the leadership system and leadership training as a whole' (2012, p. 42). Site visits and seminars highlighted in particular the need for support for 'lonely principals'.

Leadership is a critical factor in the provision of quality support for learners. All project visits demonstrated the importance of leadership in developing a positive school culture, respect for learners and flexible responses to diversity. In all visits, teamwork, distributed or 'shared' leadership and strong relationships were further success factors, together with close collaboration with parents.

Successful schools also have leaders who support professional development, for example through the use of research summaries to develop thinking and practice. It is important that teachers feel supported. As one Austrian teacher remarked: 'It is very important to know that there is always a person I can ask questions. I feel safe.' Support for staff should be provided through a 'team around the teacher' to share knowledge and build competence, providing tools for different needs and situations.

Effective provision for all learners requires a clear focus on learning, recognition of all achievement (not only academic success) and, in particular, systems that allow learners to express their views and influence decisions both in school and in their own learning. The creative use of resources, such as through the development of networks, is a further feature of inclusive leadership noted during the project visits.

Other approaches to organising/managing provision include: making use of flexible and diverse learner groupings, extending the school day or school terms, allowing flexibility around the amount of time spent in the regular classroom, and adapting the classroom environment.

Finally, there is a need for leaders to engage in self-review to be accountable to parents, learners and the local community.



3.2. Teacher education and staff development

Teacher education plays a key role in developing attitudes as well as knowledge and skills. **Teachers need to be able to take responsibility for all learners – not delegate to assistants or other staff.** They should look at children starting with the basic needs they all have in common, rather than think only in terms of additional resources. Teachers should be recruited on the understanding that the job is about all learners.

Initial teacher education and on-going professional development should be done collaboratively between schools and outside institutions in order to ensure the development of the school as well as individual teachers. Teacher educators and the wider workforce also need training and on-going support.

Further work is needed to explore how education and training can develop confidence, increase capacity to meet diverse needs, and develop qualities such as commitment, trust, acceptance and respect. At the project seminars, delegates asked: how can we encourage people who are already highly qualified to 'learn', to reflect and to accept uncertainty? They concluded that both bottom-up and top-down support are needed with help from 'objective outsiders' (for example, in communities of practice).

Teachers need skills in assessment and the use of tools, e.g. for formative assessment and self-assessment for learning. They need to know what they are assessing and why and to be more aware of different needs and individualisation of learning – 'teaching to the middle' is not appropriate. Teachers also need skills in using new technologies to support inclusion and wider achievement.

Co-operation, professional networks and dialogue between staff teams are essential to develop individual and collective capability.

Finally, new teachers need role models/mentors and there should be a continuum of support and on-going professional development to engage all school staff in reflection and improvement.

3.3. Development of resource centres

In many of the participating countries, there have been moves towards building closer links between mainstream and special schools or developing special schools into resource centres.

In the thematic seminars, experts asked 'what will resource centres do differently?' If such centres are to provide institutional and individual support, specialist skills and knowledge must be maintained. Resource centre staff will require strong, on-going leadership and support to enable them to fulfil their new roles and responsibilities. Further training should be provided to ensure that resource centres



and support services are equipped to work with mainstream colleagues as well as with learners. While increasing the capacity of mainstream schools should be a key part of their new role, it should be made clear that the expertise and input of specialist staff will always be needed for some learners (in particular those with, for example, sensory impairments and complex needs).

Overall, the number of special schools appears to be decreasing in most countries, although in a few, the number of learners attending special schools is increasing (often for particular groups of learners, such as those with social, emotional and behavioural needs and very complex disabilities). There are, however, many examples of special schools becoming part of a local area inclusion 'process', with specialist staff working in flexible ways to help create better opportunities within the mainstream sector.

However, it must be stressed that the development of quality resource centres and support services depends on a sustainable supply of appropriately qualified staff. While greater collaboration with voluntary organisations and stakeholders in the local community has an important role to play in the provision of coherent services around learners and their families, this cannot be a substitute for experience and expertise.



4. ORGANISATION OF PROVISION AND SUPPORT IN MAINSTREAM SETTINGS

This section will address ‘provision’ in terms of teaching approaches, curriculum and assessment and the provision of support in mainstream settings.

4.1. Teaching approaches

The teaching approaches used for learners with disabilities in mainstream settings are similar across the majority of member countries. These include additional teaching time, small group/individual coaching and team teaching or co-teaching (pairing a mainstream subject teacher with a teacher who has a SEN specialism). In Essunga, the teachers interviewed during the project visit found this approach invaluable as a form of professional development and recognised that ‘having two teachers in the classroom forces you to improve and think about what you are doing’. An important part of this arrangement is that all learners have access to teachers with subject expertise and that subject teachers are supported to extend their repertoire of approaches to meet increasingly diverse needs in the classroom.

Similarly in Flensburg, team teaching and partner classes are used to good effect with an emphasis on reflection, teamwork and communication. Staff teams accept that they are responsible for all learners in the class.

In some of the schools visited during the project, structure is used to enhance the use of time and ensure that all learners understand what is expected of them. Coaching is provided in study methods and learners are supported to engage in more active learning. Such approaches, along with peer support, have been found to benefit all learners.

For learners who require a higher level of support and differentiated resources and tasks, it should be kept in mind that differentiation can often be teacher-centred rather than learner-led, attempting to fit learners into an existing system rather than contributing to the transformation of settings and routines.

4.2. Curriculum

One adjustment made in a number of countries is to provide some **flexibility to adapt the curriculum or reduce requirements**. Country information, as well as visits and seminars, shows that a focus primarily on academic achievement/national standards may present a barrier to inclusion. In countries where the curriculum is undergoing reform, there is an emphasis on access to the framework of the curriculum – but also an acknowledgement that for some learners, in particular those with intellectual disabilities, there will be a need to adapt content or even to use the curriculum areas as contexts for learning where the knowledge is not considered relevant/appropriate.



In some cases, time pressures created by a heavily prescribed curriculum may create further difficulties for schools, as teachers may feel the need to adhere to ‘traditional’ methods of teaching and assessment which may not be learner-centred.

4.3. Assessment

While a number of countries are beginning to move away from using categories of need relating to different disabilities, this practice is still prevalent. Florian and colleagues (2006) point out that while systems of classification may vary a great deal between different countries, a medical model of disability usually underpins them and, more recently, the Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training (NESSE) report notes that country systems of classification are underpinned by different conceptualisations of difference and normality. On one hand, the labelling process justifies the allocation of extra resources and ensures that reasonable adjustments are made; on the other hand, labelling may lead to ‘social segregation and the development of a spoiled identity’ (NESSE, 2012, p. 20).

In recognition of this dilemma, a range of policies is emerging. Some countries use the OECD cross-national categories – A: Disabilities, B: Difficulties and C: Disadvantages (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005) – while others use the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health.

Other countries focus on individual needs along a continuum of support. In an attempt to reduce the bureaucracy surrounding a lengthy, multi-agency assessment, some countries are introducing an integrated assessment and planning process involving all agencies in the production of a co-ordinated support plan, in particular for learners with more complex needs.

Assessment is usually by a multi-disciplinary team/specialist centre, often working with the school (and parents) in the assessment process. Such centres/teams (often working on a regional basis) provide support in terms of pedagogical advice and resources and in some countries also make placement decisions.

Assessment can often be requested by schools or by parents, who are increasingly involved in decision-making.

At school level, an assessment framework that informs teaching and learning and involves learners themselves – as recommended by Agency work on inclusive assessment (European Agency, 2009) – is more likely to support inclusive practice. In Vienna, the school visit report notes that the emphasis is on what learners can do, listening to learner feedback and providing comment on their work/performance, rather than giving grades. **Providing learners with access to a flexible assessment**



framework with a common structure and principles is needed, rather than a detailed or prescriptive framework that assumes that one size fits all.

4.4 Organisation of support

In the majority of countries, some form of individual education/support/learning plan is in place and although the names given to these vary, the function is broadly the same. Countries may make reference to pedagogical support, personalisation and attention to the learning environment and the co-ordination of all services involved with the learner. Such plans are considered to be of particular importance at times of transition between phases of education.

As schools strive to improve the basic education that they offer, a certain level of support is considered the norm for all learners at different times during their education and, increasingly, reference is made to a 'continuum of support' to introduce greater flexibility to respond to learner needs.

Collaborative approaches proved to be effective in the schools visited, with teaching staff and professionals from a range of disciplines working together. For example, special education teachers, counsellors, coaches, health professionals and social workers may form a 'network' around any learners in need of support. **Effective teamwork increases the likelihood of the need for support being identified – and addressed – as early as possible.**

Other forms of support for learners include communication support (for example, sign language, Braille, symbols), often provided together with specialist aids/equipment and input from specialist/mobile teachers. Learning support assistants (LSAs) are also used in many countries. The visit to Malta showed that the deployment of assistants requires careful management to avoid learners becoming dependent. LSAs increasingly see their role as part of a team, working to support all learners in the classroom, not exclusively learners with disabilities.

In particular for learners with more complex needs, it is necessary to maintain expertise within staff teams to ensure that learners have access to appropriate resources and specialist equipment, as well as high quality teaching that draws on knowledge and experience of particular support needs.



5. COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING

This section will address systems of collaboration and networking that provide multi-agency support to learners as an integral part of their education.

5.1. Community-level support

The Organisation of Provision project visits showed the importance of schools receiving support from local politicians and education administrations. In all project visits, key personnel in the local community showed a genuine commitment to learners' well-being. These people's roles include questioning some assumptions about the way things had been done in the past and trusting school leaders to make decisions, even if there was an element of risk involved. Solid relationships between different stakeholders in the community have led to strong networks of support around the school that have been key in bringing about change.

Multi-agency services in the community need to work closely with schools – and with parents – so that support is consistent between settings. Personnel who know the child and family can provide support in education and community settings. To support a move away from a 'medical' model, services traditionally provided under health may be based in schools or in local community centres, both for ease of access and to improve communication among professionals from different disciplines. In any model, the child must be 'at the centre' of co-ordinated services which should have a role in supporting both schools and families. This was reflected in a statement made by a municipality inspector during the visit to Flensburg:

... the child with disabilities becomes the centre of the organisation of support, and the services are the satellites that rotate around the learner. All the actors in the community collaborate in a continuum and meet on a regular basis to provide the best support for the children with disabilities.

In the seminars, participants pointed out that co-ordination between agencies and others – for example, voluntary groups – is a key factor and can provide support to schools/teachers to support the holistic development of children. Services should support the change of environment, not only the individual.

Finally, in bringing agencies together, a period of consolidation is needed to build shared frameworks (e.g. shared assessment, shared funding priorities, shared professional development), as well as shared evaluation. **Culture, professional constructs and expectations must be shared between agencies and multi-agency and pedagogical approaches combined to use resources in the best way.**



5.2. Parental involvement

Parents' involvement in their children's learning is a key factor in the development of trusting relationships between schools and families. In the project visits, it was evident that collaboration with parents is a key aspect of support for learners, as parents are the most important supporters of their children.

In interviews held during project visits, parents highlighted that they like to be involved in school developments, to be informed about their child's progress and to be involved in the learning process. They appreciate it when teachers focus on what learners can do, rather than on any challenges.

In the seminars, participants highlighted that parents have rights, but need honest guidance – not contradictory professional advice – to enable them to make an informed choice. Families should be involved in any assessment and be empowered to follow their children's progress. Parents are the best advocates for their children, but they may also influence policy as well as the placement of their own child.

Finally, although pressure for results is increasing in schools all over Europe, evidence shows that inclusion does not lead to poorer outcomes and the benefits of inclusion should be highlighted.



6. FUNDING AND RESOURCING

This section will address the effective and efficient use of resources for identifying needs and targeting support.

According to Booth and Ainscow, resources should be seen more broadly than as money, devices or staff. By adopting a broad understanding, school communities should learn to identify the resources that are available in any school, but that are not yet used. Booth and Ainscow say such resources can be found ‘in any aspect of a school; in students, parents/carers, communities, and teachers; in changes in cultures, policies and practices’ (2002, p. 5). As Kesälähti and Väyrynen point out:

In inclusive schools, we should make efforts to identify resources in learners by trusting in their capacity to direct their own learning and the capacity to support one another. The same applies to the school staff. They might have ideas, skills, initiatives, or knowledge of what creates barriers to learning and participation (2013, p. 81).

Most countries receive funding for the education of learners with disabilities from the central government. In some countries, funding is devolved to local authorities or municipalities. In others there is a mix of central and local funding. Regarding special education, most countries provide central funds for additional staff, specialist equipment and transport.

For learners with disabilities, funding is usually linked to the assessment of learners. In most countries, a statement or formal decision is written by a specialist/multi-agency team or resource centre in order to secure additional funds.

Following assessment, most countries allocate a number of additional ‘SEN hours’ or LSA time.

In some countries, a number of hours of additional support is now included in regular provision. Pedagogical assessment and support is allocated as part of the regular system. In many countries, the municipality may provide additional funding for aids, equipment or additional staff (LSAs). In order to support inclusion, a small number of countries reduce pupil numbers in classes where there are learners with disabilities.

Some countries operate a backpack or ‘pupil basket’ system via municipalities. Here, funding follows learners. However, this type of ‘pupil-bound’ system only provides additional resources to those with identified difficulties who meet the SEN criteria, while others who may be in need are unable to access support.

A recent study conducted in Austria points out that input-oriented support – at a flat rate to schools based on the number of learners recognised as having SEN – is not sufficiently responsive, as needs vary among pupils and over time. An output model



is also seen as problematic, as resources are withdrawn if a programme is successful. **There is a need to move from a system that rewards such lack of success to a model of early support and prevention.**

A further consideration is that **support given to individual learners does not necessarily improve the capacity of the school system.** If schools focus on the quantity rather than the quality of resources, they are unlikely to make the necessary changes to the way that mainstream systems and school staff respond to learners (Frattura and Capper, 2007).

Schools, rather than struggling with the limited 'additional' resources available for them, could develop cost-effective networks of support and professional development involving collaboration between local stakeholders and local schools/ support centres (Ainscow et al., 2006; Benoit, 2012; Ebersold, 2012). Examples of such practice were seen during the project visits, as the following quotes show:

'It is possible to change a school with the resources available' (Chief Executive, Head of Education and Social Services, Essunga).

'... it was not an issue of providing more resources to the school, but to use the ones we had already got in a different way' (School Principal, Flensburg).



7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Conclusions

The conceptual framework for the Organisation of Provision (OoP) project recognises that in order to make progress towards a rights-based approach to learners with disabilities, countries need to move from organising provision in terms of individual support (often based on a medical diagnosis) to analysing how systems are organised to support mainstream schools to meet the needs – and fulfil the rights – of all learners. The inclusion process therefore should focus on building the capability of mainstream schools to cater for learner diversity, rather than distributing additional resources to meet the needs of selected groups.

To underpin system change, a shared understanding of inclusion and related vision and values needs to be built among stakeholders at all levels, with a common view of quality and methods of evaluation that support inclusive practice.

Project participants highlighted the need for countries to develop legislation that recognises the rights of all children – including children with disabilities – to early support, quality education (without discrimination) and full participation in all educational activities. While it is important to balance the rights of all stakeholders, learners should be kept at the centre. Both the UNCRC and the UNCRPD should be referred to when developing national legislation and educational policy, and attention given to the correspondence between them.

Networks need to be developed to support school leaders as change agents and ensure that they take a ‘team’ approach and develop a positive ethos and a culture that respects all staff and learners. They should work together with local leaders and community members to analyse the school context and plan ways forward to develop ‘strategic capabilities’, including a clear focus on learning, strong relationships, open communication, collegiality, reflective practice and a creative approach to problem solving.

As Peters notes, individualised education is ‘a universal right, not a special education need’ (2004, p. 42). All learners are entitled to a relevant and engaging curriculum (including out-of-school activities), fit for purpose assessment, ‘equivalent’ learning opportunities and pedagogy that recognises and meets diverse capabilities ‘up front’ (universal design). In this way, quality education should be designed to fit learners, rather than to fit in with school administrative structures.

There is also a need to address the following, which may form barriers to increasing equity: deficit thinking, failure to respect difference, rationalising bad behaviour (blaming others), maintaining unsuccessful practices and accepting negative



attitudes across the school community. Here, initial teacher education and continuing professional development play a crucial role.

In order to organise effective support for all learners, in particular those with disabilities, project experts have also pointed out the need for a systemic view that focuses on developing capability at all levels of the system. Strong links between all system levels (i.e. between national and local policy-makers and education leaders, school leaders, teachers, other professionals, learners and families) are needed to ensure a coherent approach.

A further issue highlighted by experts is the need to clarify the new role of special schools and of support staff (e.g. LSAs) as resources to improve provision for all learners in mainstream schools. They pointed out the need to retain specialist personnel, but to use them creatively to support whole-school practice as well as individual learners, developing flexible support in mainstream as the 'norm'. It should be recognised that there will be times when 'extra' is needed by all learners and specialist personnel will continue to be required, in particular for low-incidence disabilities.

Finally, regarding the issues of funding and resourcing, instead of struggling with the limited 'additional' resources available to them, schools could develop cost-effective networks of support and professional development involving collaboration between local stakeholders and local schools/support centres (Ainscow et al., 2006; Benoit, 2012; Ebersold, 2012).

7.2. Recommendations

The following recommendations, based on the main project outcomes, are addressed to policy-makers and aim to improve systems of support for learners with disabilities in mainstream schools.

7.2.1 *Child rights and participation*

Policy-makers should:

- Review national legislation and education policy to ensure that they are consistent with and actively support the principles of both the UNCRC and the UNCRPD and uphold the right of all learners to full participation in school with their own local peer group. This would include in particular:
 - the right to education and inclusion;
 - non-discrimination on the grounds of disability;
 - the right of the child to express their view; and
 - access to assistance.



7.2.2 Conceptual clarity and coherence

Policy-makers should:

- Clarify the concept of inclusion across and between levels of the system as an agenda that increases quality and equity for all learners, addressing underachievement by all vulnerable groups including children with disabilities. All education policy-makers need to take responsibility for **all** learners.
- Consider the links between system levels (i.e. between national/local policy-makers, local education/school leaders, teachers, other professionals and learners and their families) and enhance them through collaboration and coherent partnerships between ministries and local services. Such action should broaden perspectives, increase mutual understanding and build the 'inclusive capability' of the education system as a whole.
- Provide incentives for schools to take all learners from the local community and ensure that methods of assessment, inspections and other accountability measures support inclusive practice and inform further improvement of provision for all learners.

7.2.3 Continuum of support

Policy-makers should:

- Develop a 'continuum of support' for teachers, support staff and, in particular, for school leaders through the use of research, networking and links to universities and initial teacher education institutions in order to provide development opportunities for all groups as lifelong learners.
- Develop the role of special schools as a resource to increase the capability of mainstream schools and improve support for learners. There is a need to maintain and further develop the specialist knowledge and skills of resource centre personnel in ways that enable them to support school staff (for example, through counselling and collaboration), as well as provide a specialist network that will enhance support for learners, such as those with low-incidence disabilities.
- Develop more accessible curriculum and assessment frameworks and support greater flexibility in pedagogy, school organisation and resource allocation so that schools can work in innovative ways to develop a continuum of support for learners, rather than fitting them into an existing system.



7.3 Concluding remarks

The Organisation of Provision project activities support the need to move from a deficit (needs-based) model of disability, which locates the problem within the learner, to a model that considers the rights of learners within education, ensuring that all actively participate in the learning process. This highlights the need for a move from organising provision in terms of individual support, to how systems of support can be organised to make mainstream schools more capable of meeting the requirements of all learners for a quality education.

To quote Ebersold et al.: 'Efforts towards inclusion in mainstream are mainly made for those who "fit" within the system as it stands' (2011, p. 10). The target group for this project – learners with disabilities – may require significant support to 'fit' within existing systems. However, as the examples studied in this project show, education systems and mainstream schools can be 'transformed' to meet the support needs of this group – and benefit all learners.

In order to organise effective support for all learners, including those with disabilities, project experts have highlighted the need for a coherent, systemic approach that focuses on developing strong links and mutual support between all levels of the system.

During the project activities, the examples of provision emphasised support for learning – for everyone – and showed that, in schools that provide opportunities for all learners to participate on an equal basis, those with disabilities can 'learn without limits' (Hart et al., 2004). As one specialist teacher in Slovenia explained: 'We are working for life – not for one lesson'.



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