

# INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (IECE) PROJECT

## EXAMPLE OF IECE PROVISION: ICELAND (1 OF 2)

### 1. Abstract

Múlaborg preschool in Reykjavík, Iceland, was established in 1975. It is close to the centre of Reykjavík and the children come from all areas of Reykjavík. Múlaborg co-operates closely with organisations in the neighbourhood, such as primary and upper-secondary schools, as well as non-profit organisations and companies which provide services to people with disabilities in Iceland. Múlaborg was originally developed as a special needs institution with four divisions for children aged one to six. Eight out of 94 places have been allocated annually to children with disabilities and, in recent years, the preschool has specialised in inclusive education for all children. As the preschool has now begun to receive an increasingly ethnically diverse group of children, it has begun to respond to this linguistic diversity with inclusion. The preschool is open from 7.30 a.m. to 5.15 p.m. from Monday to Friday and the children attend the preschool for six to nine hours per day. Múlaborg's mottos are respect, trust and security and the preschool emphasises receiving every child with warmth and respect so that the child will feel secure in the preschool. The learning environment is organised so that it is adapted to all children. The preschool is a pioneer in the inclusion of children with and without disabilities. It also provides consultancy for other preschools on inclusive practices and has received awards for its inclusive work. Parents have also confirmed their satisfaction. The parents' association is active, with parents developing individualised curricula in collaboration with the staff. The preschool has exceptionally diverse staff composition compared to other preschools in Iceland ([Ragnarsdóttir and Blöndal, 2010](#) – in Icelandic only).

### 2. Inclusive features

Iceland's educational policy that appears in the national curriculum guide is based on six fundamental pillars on which the curriculum guidelines are based. These fundamental pillars are:

- Literacy
- Sustainability
- Health and welfare
- Democracy and human rights

- Equality
- Creativity.

Each of the fundamental pillars derives from laws on preschool, compulsory school and upper-secondary school. The fundamental pillars refer to social, cultural, environmental and ecological literacy so that children and young people may develop mentally and physically, thrive in society and co-operate with others. The fundamental pillars also refer to a vision of the future and the ability and will to influence and be active in maintaining society, changing it and developing it.

On the municipal level, Reykjavík preschool policy on inclusive education states that the special assistance and stimulation of children with special educational needs in the form of special education must always take into account the objectives and guidelines defined for all children in the Icelandic National Curriculum for preschools. Furthermore, the Reykjavík preschool policy aim is that children's special educational needs are met within the group in daily activities and that play is respected as the child's main learning path. Preschools in Reykjavík have also formulated a policy on issues of multiculturalism. These include a focus on the children's language and cultural aspects and the provision of voluntary interpreters for parents. Múlaborg is operating according to the teachings and practices of this inclusion-based strategy. The staff's goal is to develop a preschool of equality and respect for the individual, where all children's needs are met in co-operation with the parents.

### ***The context***

The children in Múlaborg are diverse in many ways, including children with severe disabilities, non-disabled peers and children with various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The school works according to international conventions such as the *Salamanca Declaration*, adopted in Spain in 1994, and Reykjavík city's school inclusion policy. Múlaborg is registered as a specialised preschool and is seen as a role model in inclusive preschool education in Reykjavík. It provides other preschools with consultancy on how to meet children's different needs.

The children in the preschool are in many respects a diverse group. In 2011, the number of children of non-Icelandic or mixed background in the preschool was 27 out of a total of 81 children, or 33% ([Elíasdóttir and Jóhannsdóttir, 2011](#) – in Icelandic only). Although Múlaborg provides eight places for children with disabilities, the preschool principal notes that it generally has more children with special needs, which are discovered after they begin. There is a total of 13 different mother tongues among the children.

### ***The workforce at Múlaborg***



Múlaborg's staff composition is diverse. Both men and women are employed, as well as teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds. The staff members speak a wealth of languages. Other aspects of staff diversity include an exceptional age range and education, including preschool and compulsory school teachers, a sports instructor, social educators, philosopher, engineer, and other university degrees. The principal and the teachers regard the diverse staff as one of the preschool's strengths.

Moreover, a ministry evaluation report ([Elíasdóttir and Jóhannsdóttir, 2011](#)) claims that the diverse staff must be regarded as a strength of a preschool which emphasises inclusive practices. It further states that the preschool's equality policy is reflected in many ways, such as in the opinions of the staff and parents, in the equal rights of all the children and in the diversity of the staff. The percentage of men among staff has for many years been relatively high compared to other preschools.

### ***Leadership and culture***

As stated in the ministry evaluation report ([Elíasdóttir and Jóhannsdóttir, 2011](#)), the principal of the preschool is strong and has a very clear vision. She regards the diverse group of children, teachers and other staff as being the strength of her school as well as posing challenges. The principal describes her vision as being an equality- and human rights-based approach and the preschool as being a learning community where both staff and children learn from each other.

### ***Curriculum***

Múlaborg's main objectives are based on international conventions, preschool law in Iceland, the Icelandic National Curriculum for preschools and inclusion policy. Múlaborg's curriculum has five main aims:

1. to work for the equality of all children;
2. to meet every child's needs;
3. to work for co-operation among all professions;
4. to strengthen children's social development and work for tolerance and consideration for others;
5. to strengthen children's general development and thus prepare them for life and the future in a responsible way.

The school curriculum states that its aims are to 'enact/carry out the ideology of inclusive education by meeting every child's and parent's needs.' Meeting every child's needs is understood as meeting every child where they are and working on this basis with each child's needs as a principle. This is also understood as organising



the preschool surroundings to meet every child's needs. The preschool's policy and work plan also states that in the preschool, equality is understood in a broad sense. Human rights are emphasised and multiculturalism and equality of viewpoints are implemented in every respect. The staff's role is to meet the needs of every child and ensure that all children enjoy and use their preschool years for growth and development. Co-operation of staff with diverse professions and teams is considered necessary for achievement.

According to the preschool curriculum, collaboration with parents should be based on respect and trust. To achieve this, various methods are employed to reach all parents. For ethnic minority parents, interpreters are employed in all meetings, and methods such as 'communication books' are used on a daily basis. A ministry evaluation report from 2011 ([Elíasdóttir and Jóhannsdóttir, 2011](#)) states that parents are generally very pleased with the preschool and confirms that there is good collaboration between the parents, staff and principal. Parents are particularly satisfied with the individual curricula for each child, which are developed in co-operation by parents and the preschool.

The means of achieving the aims are as follows:

- Choice of activities
- Organised workshops
- Co-operative learning
- Close educational partnerships with parents
- Good organisation and firmness
- Positive atmosphere and imaginative staff
- Good flow of information
- Diverse and open resources.

A ministry evaluation report from 2011 ([Elíasdóttir and Jóhannsdóttir, 2011](#)) – built on interviews with principals, division heads, teachers, social educators, other staff members, parents and children – states that the school has a clear policy and aims which adhere well to the national curriculum guidelines and the municipal policy for preschools. It also states that the school's management is very purposeful and loyal to its stated policy. The principal is furthermore a strong advocate of the stated policy and works tirelessly to promote equality and social justice. The school is described as having a very positive atmosphere and showing clear ambition to implement a policy based on inclusion and equality.

The children make choices during group work based on their interests and abilities, but are also encouraged and supported to choose subjects they are hesitant or



reluctant to try. The children have an active role in everyday activities at the school, helping out during lunch or snack time, as well as assisting and supporting less able friends. The staff members encourage them to be independent decision-makers and to be supportive and broadminded members of the school community.

The children in Múlaborg are supported in various ways that cover all aspects of the daily activities. In Múlaborg the teachers and other staff have extensive experience and knowledge, combined with a positive attitude toward inclusion. In observing and assessing the children's learning, the staff focuses on finding and identifying the children's different needs. There is good co-operation with the special education department for preschools in Reykjavík and other preschool professionals who provide services to children with special needs. Meetings are held regularly on how the child is developing, involving all professionals who are working with the child. The objectives of these meetings are to get a good overview of the development progress from all relevant experts and to co-ordinate inputs and methods used. An individual plan and goals are prepared with the participation of parents and in co-operation with other professionals involved in the work with the child. Reassessment of goals takes place once a month. Emphasis is placed on ensuring that the child gets the assistance that they need in the preschool so that they can actively take part in the activities carried out and enjoy their preschool education.

### **3. Inclusive highlight**

As a testimony to Múlaborg's inclusive nature, parents from other parts of town, among them same-sex parents, specifically choose this pre-school because of its inclusive practices and ideology. They claim that it teaches their children a valuable lesson about diversity and inclusion, elements that in their view are important for active participation in a modern democratic society. They want their children to have the best preparation possible and therefore they choose this school.

The children in Múlaborg are diverse in many aspects; some have disabilities, some have severe disabilities, and there is also diversity as regards ethnic, racial and linguistic backgrounds. Diversity among staff is also extraordinary, with a relatively high number of men, staff with various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and of different ages.

### **4. Other evidence of quality IECE**

In the ministry evaluation report ([Elíasdóttir and Jóhannsdóttir, 2011](#)), the preschool's strengths are stated as follows: it has a clear pedagogical policy; a strong professional leader; awareness and active participation of the well-educated staff regarding school policy and participation in varied development work and projects;



and good collaboration with parents on pedagogical issues. Its main weaknesses are described as a lack of coherence in the reception and training of new staff and the fact that the building needs maintenance.

Múlaborg is recognised by universities of education in Iceland and sought after in research projects and for co-operation between researchers and the preschool's staff.



## INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (IECE) PROJECT

### EXAMPLE OF IECE PROVISION: ICELAND (2 OF 2)

#### 1. Abstract

Sólborg preschool in Reykjavík, Iceland, opened in the spring of 1994. It has room for 88 children aged from one-and-a-half to six years of age, at which point they start primary school in Iceland. The children can attend the preschool from four to nine hours per day. The children are divided into five areas or departments in the preschool.

#### 2. Inclusive features

Iceland's educational policy that appears in the national Curriculum Guide is based on six fundamental pillars on which the curriculum guidelines are based. These fundamental pillars are:

- Literacy
- Sustainability
- Health and welfare
- Democracy and human rights
- Equality
- Creativity.

Each of the fundamental pillars derives from laws on preschool, compulsory school and upper-secondary school. The fundamental pillars refer to social, cultural, environmental and ecological literacy so that children and young people may develop mentally and physically, thrive in society and co-operate with others. The fundamental pillars also refer to a vision of the future and the ability and will to influence and be active in maintaining society, changing it and developing it.

On the municipal level, Reykjavík preschool policy on inclusive education states that the special assistance and stimulation of children with special educational needs in the form of special education must always take into account the objectives and guidelines defined for all children in the Icelandic National Curriculum for preschools. Furthermore, the Reykjavík preschool policy aim is that children's special educational needs are met within the group in daily activities and that play is respected as the child's main learning path. Preschools in Reykjavík have also formulated a policy on issues of multiculturalism. These include a focus on the children's language and cultural aspects and the provision of voluntary interpreters



for parents. Sólborg is operating according to the teachings and practices of this inclusion-based strategy. The staff's goal is to develop a preschool of equality and respect for the individual, where all children's needs are met in co-operation with the parents.

### ***The context***

Sólborg includes children with severe disabilities and non-disabled peers. The school works according to international conventions such as the *Salamanca Declaration*, adopted in Spain in 1994, and Reykjavík city's school inclusion policy. Sólborg is registered as a specialised preschool and its goal is to educate deaf and hearing-impaired children and children with other disabilities. The teachers use iPads for the children with special needs. Sólborg is seen as a role model in inclusive preschool education in Reykjavík. It provides other preschools with consultancy on how to meet children's different needs.

### ***Diversity of children served***

The preschool's main objective is to develop a school that meets all children's needs in an inclusive environment. The methods and techniques used in the preschool aim to achieve this goal and to enable all the children to learn academic and social skills with their peers. Usually 12 to 15 children with special needs attend the school. Last year, Sólborg had 17 children with special needs. The children have defined disabilities in the fields of hearing impairment, visual impairment, autism, Down syndrome, language and behavioural problems. These children were assigned 12 support teachers. The main focus in the teaching of these children was teaching sign language to deaf children, behavioural training for children with autism, training and education of children with integrated visual and hearing disabilities (deaf-blindness), as well as a systematic organised training of children with other developmental needs regarding motor development and self-help. Most of the children with special needs attending Sólborg are deaf, so all children learn sign language.

### ***The workforce at Sólborg***

Many in the workforce at Sólborg have extensive knowledge. One of the employees' goals is to develop early childhood education based on professional co-operation and promote shared responsibility among all employees in the care and education of all children. Many professionals work together at Sólborg, such as preschool teachers, primary school teachers, educationalists and assistants. Collaboration among these professionals is very important in developing an education that suits children both with and without disabilities in a shared environment. Given the importance of good co-operation among the teachers in Sólborg, there is special emphasis on communication and information. The workforce has planning days,





staff meetings, department meetings and daily information meetings. All departments have a weekly planning meeting to divide responsibility for all of the children. Heads of department and the management team also meet once a week. The workforce attends various courses to improve and expand their knowledge. There are occasionally deaf employees in the workforce as well.

### ***Curriculum***

Sólborg's main objectives are based on international conventions, preschool law in Iceland, the Icelandic National Curriculum for preschools and inclusion policy. Sólborg's curriculum outlines the aims of the activities and provides information about the preschool. It has three main objectives:

1. to promote equality, value and respect for the individual child;
2. to meet the needs of a diverse group of children;
3. to develop activities based on professional co-operation and shared responsibility of staff and children.

Inclusive practices and methods are used to achieve these goals. The work is based on three main factors:

- The goals and priorities of the Bank Street programme. The main objective is to 'stimulate the overall development of the child'. Special emphasis is placed on enhancing the child's skills, their uniqueness and identity, and to promote the child's socialisation and maturity in play.
- Dr Howard Gardner's teachings on Multiple Intelligences. Teachers should spend less time sorting children and more time helping them to realise their innate talents and interests.
- The right of children to grow up together and to learn from each other and with each other. Children's rights are supported in the international conventions to which Iceland is a member and in Icelandic laws and regulations.

### ***Accessibility***

In Reykjavík, the preschools are located in residential areas. Each preschool is accessible for the children in the neighbourhood. Some 20% of the children in Sólborg have special needs. They do not all live in the neighbourhood, but all of them live in Reykjavík. Parents apply via the [Reykjavík website](#) for the preschool of their choice.

According to the preschool office in Reykjavík, Sólborg shall have particular consideration of children with special needs. This refers to children who have



chronic problems and children who may need help to overcome temporary difficulties.

Sólborg operates according to the teachings and practices of Reykjavík's inclusion-based strategy. The staff's goal is to develop a preschool of equality and respect for the individual, where all children's needs are met in co-operation with the parents.

***How is each child supported to participate actively in the regular daily activities of the provision?***

The children in Sólborg are supported in various ways that cover all aspects of the daily activities. In Sólborg, the teachers and other staff have extensive experience and knowledge combined with a positive attitude toward inclusion. In observing and assessing the children's learning, the staff focuses on finding and identifying the children's different needs. There is good co-operation with the special education department for preschools in Reykjavík and other preschool professionals who provide services to children with special needs. Meetings on the child's development are held several times a year. All professionals who are involved with the child attend. These meetings have two objectives: to get a good overview of the development progress from all relevant experts, and to co-ordinate inputs and methods used. An individual plan and goals are prepared with the participation of parents and in co-operation with other professionals involved in the work with the child. Reassessment of goals takes place once a month. Emphasis is placed on ensuring that the child gets the assistance that they need in the preschool so that they can actively participate in the activities carried out and enjoy their preschool education.

The three basic points of the preschool activities are:

- play is an important way to promote the child's whole development;
- life skills are integrated into all activities so that the child learns self-respect and respect for others as well as tolerance;
- daily activities give the children the opportunity to build trust and independence and to fend for themselves.

In order to achieve the national curriculum objectives, Sólborg has put together a work schedule stating how and when to work with individual subject areas.

Play is a fundamental mode of learning in all organised activities. The daily schedule allows the children to participate in play. In the so-called 'choice time' that takes place twice a day, the children have the opportunity to choose a play area and/or play content. In the outdoor area the children enjoy spontaneous play. The staff is committed to participate in the play on the children's terms. The teachers are



always available; they closely monitor the game and assist.

### ***How the curriculum addresses the holistic development and learning needs of all children***

The key factors in Sólborg's practice are:

- Children have the moral right to grow up together, learn from each other and with each other regardless of their intellectual or physical condition. It is believed that non-disabled employees and children with disabilities have the right to know and experience each other as people, and not as a child with disabilities. Emphasis is placed on the need to respect the diversity of the children in the school and meet their different needs. With the support of parents, staff develop an environment where all children are active participants.
- Well-organised and targeted early childhood education for all children is desirable and necessary for children with disabilities. Staff systematically pursue these objectives in all activities. It is important that activities are well-organised and take into account the needs of the group as well as its individuals. That is especially important for children with disabilities.
- Each child has talents and interests to be nurtured and cultivated. The preschool staff respects each child, seeks to identify their skills and uses methods and approaches that can best lead to increased development. Staff with diverse education and different backgrounds makes this teaching possible.
- In Sólborg, the teachers try to meet children's individual needs in an inclusive environment. No single theory or method of education is used, but rather a combination of elements from different academic theories and methods. The focus is on practices with defined aims (objectives), how the work is done (methods) and the time of day the intervention takes place.
- Diverse education and knowledge among the staff is necessary in Sólborg. Their expertise is crucial for implementing the methods and philosophy of inclusion. Well-educated staff is the key to effective work in Sólborg and there are high demands on the staff. Education and experience are important in meeting these requirements.
- Co-operation and collaboration with parents is important for every child's well-being and success. Attention to the needs of each child and their family is essential. The teaching and training of children in Sólborg is carried out in co-operation and consultation with the parents.



### **3. Inclusive highlight**

Many professionals work together at Sólborg, such as preschool teachers, primary school teachers, educationalists and assistants. Collaboration among these professionals is very important in developing an education that suits children both with and without disabilities in a shared environment. Given the importance of good co-operation among the teachers in Sólborg, there is special emphasis on communication and information.

### **4. Other evidence of quality IECE**

The preschool is registered as a specialised preschool and its goal is to educate deaf and hearing-impaired children and children with other disabilities. The teachers use iPads for the children with special needs. Sólborg is seen as a role model in inclusive preschool education in Reykjavík. It provides other preschools with consultancy on how to meet children's different needs.