

## **The principles of inclusive education.**

Inclusive education provides education for exceptional children together with other 'normal' children in a regular classroom.

Every child in the world has the right to a primary education: this lies at the heart of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed by every country in 2000. Although disability was not originally included in the MDGs, this was rectified in September 2010 when disability was officially acknowledged with regard to the MDGs. In most countries, attending the local, mainstream school is not just the best, most equitable option for disabled children, it is the only option. Often there simply are no appropriate or affordable special schools or classes for children with disabilities. Making every school inclusive is the best way to reach and teach all girls and boys, disabled or not. The world has made great strides towards educating all children:

- Since 1999, the number of children out of school has fallen by 39 million to 61 million.
- In India, the number of children out of school fell by 15 million in just two years.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, total primary school enrolment stood at 124 million in 2007, up by 42 million since 1999. Yet children with disabilities are still disproportionately excluded from school. Worldwide, there are approximately 106 million children with disabilities. And, while roughly a billion children are in school globally, the UN estimates that of the 61 million children now out of school, a third have disabilities. Most out-of-school children live in Sub-Saharan Africa (43%) and South and West Asia (27%)

In some countries, the statistics for children with disabilities are even worse:

- In India, children with disabilities are five times more likely to be out of school than the national average, leading to an illiteracy rate among disabled people of up to 75%.

- Also in India, a 2007 World Bank study found that disability is a stronger correlate to non-enrolment than gender or class.

- In Nepal, almost 6% of school-age children are out of school. Of these, an estimated 85% are children with disabilities.

- In Malawi and Tanzania, having disabilities doubles the probability of children never having attended school.

This disproportionate exclusion means that disabled children miss out on education's lifelong benefits — a better job, more social and economic security, and more opportunities for full participation in society. For instance, a person's potential income can increase as much as 10% with each additional year of schooling.

How do we define inclusive education? Children learning together in the same classroom, using materials appropriate to their various needs, and participating in the same lessons and recreation: that is inclusive education. In an inclusive school, children with disabilities do not study in separate classes; instead teaching methods, textbooks, materials, and the school environment are designed so that girls and boys with a range of abilities and disabilities — including physical, sensory, intellectual and mobility impairments — can be included in the same class. By definition, inclusive education includes all learners, but it may be interpreted differently according to the context. At the same time, it is recognized that children may be affected by more than one issue. A disabled child may also speak the language of a minority ethnic group, or be a refugee, or, if she is a girl, her family and society may not value girls' education. It is believed that making schools inclusive for boys and girls with disabilities improves them for all learners, including students facing exclusion because of other challenges, or more than one issue.

In some Asian countries, the concept of inclusive education is still being defined. For instance in India, a government programme to provide useful and relevant elementary education for all children aged six to 14, promotes inclusive education; however there are no clear national guidelines on how it is to be implemented. State governments are responsible for drawing up their own inclusive education policy and strategy, with educational provision for disabled children mostly focused on allowances, accessibility and teacher sensitization. The governments of Bangladesh and Pakistan, however, do not have a mandate to provide inclusive education. It may be taken up on a school by school basis, resulting in some schools including disabled children while others choose not to. In these cases, inclusive

education relies in large part on the motivation of individual schools (management committees, head teachers and other teachers) which could leave the inclusive education approach susceptible to unpredictable changes in staff and local circumstance

“Exceptional” means children that are not like common children educated in usual classrooms. You need to implement special methods and technology to teach these children. The term comprises both mentally retarded, physically handicapped and gifted, talented children.

Inclusive education encompasses a continuum of educational services for children with exceptional conditions. The regular classroom now admits the vast majority of exceptional children to its roles. The regular classroom teacher helps provide the prescribed special education services according to an individualized education program. This instructional program is developed with input from a transdisciplinary team of specialists in the child’s area of exceptionality, with input from the regular classroom teacher, input from the family, and input from the child. It defines the nature of the child’s problem and long and short –term goals. Inclusion in the regular classroom does not mean that the regular classroom teacher provides all of the prescribed instructions alone. The continuum of services provides consultation to the teacher for the least disabled students and supplementary instruction and services for more disabled students. The supplemental instruction may be done by an itinerant specialist or a school-based specialist, in the regular classroom, in a resource-room or in a special class. Some children with disabilities are enrolled in a regular classroom (inclusive education) in order to have daily contact with nonexceptional children in extracurricular activities. They may, however, have the largest percentage of their educational curriculum provided in a special class with a special education teacher.

Inclusive education is now provided in some countries (e.g. in the USA) to children with disabilities from birth through age 21.

In an inclusive system, local, mainstream schools adapt so that they can provide a full education to every child. Inclusive education follows a rights-based model as stated in Article 24.2.b of the CRPD: ‘Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive,

quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live.’

The term ‘inclusion’ has been defined in many ways by many people. Generally inclusion is an educational philosophy based on the belief that all students are entitled to fully participate in their school community. Inclusion is most often used to describe programs for students with disabilities, but it also pertains to students from different cultures whose first language is not English, students at risk for failure because of alcohol or drug abuse, and other students with special needs. In the case of children with disabilities, the aim is to integrate them, with the support they need, into classrooms with nondisabled peers. When inclusion works, these children become members of their classroom communities, valued for their abilities and for who they are.

Mothers, fathers and other family members are also crucial to the success of an inclusive education project. They are the people who know their children, sisters or brothers with disabilities, and who may have the best understanding of both their problems and abilities. Some families will want to take an active role in their children’s education, while others will be happy to work with other people to get the child into school. Either way, an inclusive education project will communicate with and involve them in many ways

In an inclusive classroom, the arrangement between the teacher and the specialist (often a special-education teacher or a school psychologist or other support specialist) varies depending upon the students’ needs. In most cases, the specialists are in the classroom periodically, but in rare instances, some students with complex multiple disabilities may need full-time classroom assistance. The special-education teacher may also help the classroom teacher create behavior programs, adapt instructional strategies, or develop alternative curriculum.

A common misconception about inclusion is that it means that students with disabilities never leave the classroom for special help. But in fact, a student may have a need, such as physical therapy or a treatment that involves highly specialized equipment. Or a student may be moved to a special education setting if his or her

needs truly can't be met in the regular classroom. A child who is medically fragile or a child whose violent behavior cannot be managed should not remain in a regular classroom

However in an inclusive classroom, students do not leave just because they are learning at a different rate or with different materials than their classmates. Instead, instruction is adapted to meet their current needs.

Some pieces of advices are recommended below to prepare for inclusion and ensure that your move toward inclusion goes more smoothly:

- Inclusion takes time. Schedule regular planning meetings.
- Support from the principal is crucial. If you and other teachers feel that you need more support, do everything you can to get it sooner rather than later.
- Inclusion is about attitudes. It works when teachers focus on students' abilities, not their disabilities
- Be flexible, be ready to change. You have to do what's best, and not always be concerned with whether this follows the rules.
- Be willing to teach in a classroom with another teacher. Special-education teachers have to be willing to try to teach a whole class and to help other students too.
- Address logistical problems such as scheduling, and broader issues such as assessment, as they arise
- Visit and draw on the experience of other schools in which students with disabilities are already included in classrooms/

Though there exist some challenges to inclusive education.

Classroom size and the ratio of teachers to children

Large class sizes and a low student-teacher ratio are problems for all children and teachers in some countries, and can reduce enthusiasm for teaching what may be seen as even more diverse ability ranges in a class. This can be particularly true when class sizes are very large — in some countries they can include up to 100 children. Negative attitudes among teachers may then translate into negative teaching methods and frustration at the pace at which some children work. In some cases this leads to

labelling children as 'slow learners' and offering no encouragement to learn at their own pace. At worst it may lead to teachers physically punishing children for what is perceived to be 'poor performance'. Such attitudes can lead to further marginalisation of children with disabilities at school. Campaigning for improvements to funding and structuring of educational systems within countries can be one of the best ways to tackle this since it is usually the ministry of education that is responsible for hiring teachers.

Many children walk long distances to attend school, and a combination of a lack of adequate transportation, difficult terrain, poor quality roads and the associated cost to families make many schools inaccessible to girls and boys with disabilities. Girls in particular may be at more risk of exclusion if their parents keep them at home because of fears for their safety and security when travelling to and from school.

Mothers or fathers, or older sisters or brothers, may carry smaller children but this can eventually become too difficult. Building ramps and creating physically accessible schools is important, but so too is creating sustainable community transport solutions between home and school.