THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN WITH DOWN SYNDROME

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ABSTRACT

• Since the passing of the Policy on Inclusive Education in South Africa in 2001, the Department of Basic Education has introduced numerous strategic steps to change the system so that all children can attend their local neighbourhood schools and be supported by teachers to access the curriculum.

• Key policy implementation guidelines such as the Guidelines for Inclusive Schools and the Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support as well as the National Curriculum Statement and Assessment Protocol, make it possible for children with Down Syndrome to attend an ordinary class in their local school. Parents, however play a central role in the support of their children and working in partnership with teachers.

• Changing of parents’ and communities’ perspectives on disability is one of the key challenges in the implementation of the policy. Teacher training is another critical component that needs to be addressed. The paper challenges the notion that implementation of the policy cannot happen before the whole system has been prepared for it. All children already have an intrinsic right to participate and be supported in terms of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
WHAT PARENTS FEEL

• “Really the child is not progressing at that school, even the doctors confirmed that he cannot be taught at such schools he needs special kind of education. This will enable him to learn at his own pace and to get teachers who are trained to train and take care of children like him.”

• “I don’t think she will have a good life, because she is not in school, maybe if we could afford those schools where they teach people like her, but I hear they are far and expensive”

Extracts of interviews conducted with parents in a rural province of South Africa by T. Thejane. (1999).
“The lives of many people with disabilities are restricted and diminished more by the negative attitudes, beliefs and prejudice of their neighbours and local community than by their own limitations (Buckley, Bird : 1992).
ONE RURAL ORDINARY SCHOOL

Mokgalabuye School in Vhembe, Limpopo, Fully accessible and inclusive
ATTENDING THE LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD SCHOOL
WHAT IS PREVENTING PARENTS TO ADMIT THEIR CHILDREN TO AN ORDINARY SCHOOL?

• Attitudes of the community
• Advice by professionals
• Assumptions about special schools
• Transport challenges
• Lack of trust in teachers’ willingness to be accommodating and supportive
• Lack of information on Education Policy
• Lack of empowerment
WHAT IS REQUIRED TO ENSURE QUALITY EDUCATION AND SUPPORT FOR ALL IN AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM?

• Laws – policy framework
• Advocacy – parents and supporters
• Educational innovation – in school and classroom practices

(Porter, Smith et al. 2011)
LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

• **Constitutional imperatives:**
  - Dignity, freedom of choice, non-discrimination, linguistic identity, access to basic education and incrementally to FET

• **Education White Paper 6:**
  - Qualitative improvement of special schools
  - Phased conversion of special schools into resource centres
  - Social rights approach to special needs education
  - Promoting access to local neighbourhood schools
  - Central role to be played by parents / caregivers

• **South African Schools Act:**
  - One system making provision for both public ordinary and special schools, reasonable accommodation and support in mainstream
  - Adhere to financial regulations, Governance structures

• **National Curriculum Statement Gr R – 12 and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS):**
  - One curriculum for all – effective differentiation and support ensuring that everyone can obtain meaningful qualifications
‘Education and training are basic human rights. The state has an obligation to protect and advance these rights, so that all citizens irrespective of race, class, gender, creed or age, have the opportunity to develop their capacities and potential, and make their full contribution to society.’


Section 5
(1) A public school must admit learners and serve their educational requirements without unfairly discriminating in any way.

Section 12
(4) The Member of the Executive Council must, where reasonably practicable, provide education for learners with special education needs at ordinary public schools and provide relevant educational support services for such learners.
(5) The Member of the Executive Council must take all reasonable measures to ensure that the physical facilities at public schools are accessible to disabled persons.

(South African Schools Act, 1996)
Article 24 - Education

This article recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to education on the basis of equal opportunity, ensuring an inclusive education system at all levels and the facilitation of access to lifelong learning.

Respect dignity of all learners and the right to develop their full potential

Equal access to inclusive schools in the communities in which they live

*reasonable accommodation* must be made for persons with disabilities
IDEALS OF INCLUSION

White Paper 6 proposed all the key approaches of the inclusion movement:

- School-wide approaches, belief that all children can learn
- Sense of community
- Services based on need rather than location
- Natural proportion
- Support provided in general education
- Teacher collaboration
- Curriculum adaptations
- Enhanced instructional strategies
- Concern for standards and outcomes

Lipsky and Gartner, 1999
WHO IS TARGETED BY INCLUSIVE EDUCATION?

Broad vision of inclusion seeks to remove barriers that prevent learners to benefit from education and achieve their full potential. Three groups of learners targeted:

1. Learners in mainstream schools that are failing to learn due to barriers of whatever nature (family disruption, language issues, poverty, inappropriate teaching).

2. Learners in special schools who have been placed in the school on the basis of their disability (disability is considered to be a barrier, although there may be many other barriers in addition).

3. Learners of compulsory school-going age who are out of school or who have never been enrolled in school due to barriers of whatever nature (multiple disabilities and poverty are two of the major barriers for this group).
Special schools increased from 375 in 2002 to 423 in 2011 enrolment from 77 700 to 104 633

More than 120 000 Children with disabilities in the mainstream

Estimated 400 000 Children with disabilities out of school

Unequal distribution of schools – mainly in urban centres

Neglect in some special schools in rural areas

Curriculum delivery not always up to standard

Teachers have little specialised training

Lack of assistive technology or inappropriate use and management

Inadequate transport

Incidents of abuse
POLICY ON SCREENING, IDENTIFICATION, ASSESSMENT AND SUPPORT

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PARENTS
• Acknowledging the pivotal role of parents/care givers is key factor in the early identification of barriers.

• Parents’/care givers’ observations and comments can lead the educator to find the exact nature of the barriers that a learner experiences.

• Parents/care givers should at all times be involved in the identification and assessment processes involving their child, and should be regarded as equal partners in this process.

• Parents/care givers should also be free to initiate contact with educators regarding their child’s progress.

• When choices have to be made about the learner’s enrolment into a site where additional support is available, parents/care givers need to have full information about all options so that they can make informed choices.
The unwillingness or inability of the system to support the learner in the current site should never be a primary motivation to move a learner, especially if it is necessary for the child to attend school far from home.

The financial situation of the family and their capacity to pay (especially in terms of transport) for the choice of school should be taken into account.
RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS

• Parents need to take responsibility for the support of their children in the most inclusive setting possible.

• Parents should be empowered to understand how the potential of their child can be optimally developed.

• They need access to information on the kinds of support needed by their child.

• They must know their rights in terms of accessing available support.

• Parents must make every effort to ensure that their child has access to an appropriate early intervention programme which is available in their area.
RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS

• Parents/caregivers who suspect that their child has additional support needs, but has not accessed early intervention programmes prior to the child turning 3 years old, must report to the local ordinary school as early as possible but no later than the age of 5 years.

• The local school must complete the relevant forms in consultation with the parent/caregiver.

• Parents/caregivers must play a meaningful role in forming a partnership with the educator to ensure that the support outlined in the Individual Support Action Plan is successfully implemented.

• Parent/caregiver participation in the SIAS process is not a matter of choice, but compulsory
GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM

WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW
RESPONDING TO DIVERSITY – SOME IMPERATIVES FOR TEACHERS

• Recognising bias and or stereotypes against certain learners
• Treating and respecting each learner as an individual
• Avoiding use of biased language that undermines certain groups
• Refraining from making assumptions about learner experiences
• Considering unique needs of learners during lesson / programme design
• Constantly re-evaluating methods of teaching and assessing
• Always varying approaches, methodologies and strategies
• Creating opportunities for all learners to participate in the learning process
CURRICULUM DIFFERENTIATION

• A key strategy for responding to diversity

• Takes into account differences in learners’ ability levels, interests, background etc.

• Modification, changing, adapting, extending and varying aspects of the curriculum

• Aspects of the curriculum to be Differentiated:
  - Content
  - Teaching methodologies
  - Learning environment
  - Assessment
DIFFERENTIATING ASSESSMENT

• As with Differentiated teaching, differentiated assessment is premised on the notion that needs of different learners cannot be met in only one way

• Purpose of assessment:
  ▪ To inform instructional planning
  ▪ To inform instruction
  ▪ To evaluate effectiveness of teaching for all learners
  ▪ To assess learning
  ▪ To identify learner needs and strengths
  ▪ To evaluate achievement against predetermined criteria for grading and reporting
DIFFERENTIATING ASSESSMENT
NATIONAL PROTOCOL ON ASSESSMENT

• The minimum requirements for achieving grades may not be compromised. However, within a flexible learner-based and learner-paced approach to the curriculum, all learners could be enabled to achieve their full potential irrespective of whether or not the end result will be a final certificate.

• There needs to be consistent representation of inclusive assessment practice across all grades. This needs to be dealt with in assessment, recording, reporting and promotion.

• Learners who experience barriers to learning in both ordinary and special schools need to be able to exit school with a recognition of competence.
THREE PROPOSED TYPES OF ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT (1)

1. Alternate Assessments Based on Alternate Attainment of Knowledge (content, concepts and skills) for learners with a significant cognitive disability. These assessments are based on the grade-level content covered by the general assessment, but at reduced depth, breadth, and complexity. These assessments describe achievement based on what is determined as a high expectation for these learners. Target learners can include learners with intellectual disability who are currently enrolled in special and ordinary schools.
ASSESSING DIVERSE LEARNERS

• All three types of assessment should, where possible be available in ordinary and special schools.
• Every learner should be assessed.
• There should be high expectations of all learners.
• All learners should have the opportunity to receive a school leaving statement.
EXIT LEVEL VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATION AT GRADE 9

• Currently a national task team is working on the development of a vocational qualification and curriculum which will be available in ordinary and special schools

• 50% academic

• 50% skills / vocational content

• Will include practical / vocational subjects in all subject fields

• Will accommodate learners across the spectrum from severe and profound to moderate intellectual disability

• Will ensure high expectations

• Will be aligned to needs of industry
THE ROLE OF FULL-SERVICE / INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS IN CHANGING ATTITUDES OF COMMUNITIES
With the introduction of the policy on Inclusive Education, as published in Education White Paper 6 of 2001, the Department of Education made a commitment to ensure that all children would be welcomed in all schools and that they would be supported to develop their full potential irrespective of their background, culture, abilities or disabilities, their gender or their race. The concept full-service/inclusive school was introduced to show how ordinary schools can transform themselves to become fully inclusive.

WHAT IS A FULL-SERVICE/INCLUSIVE SCHOOL?
WHAT ARE THE KEY FEATURES OF AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL?

• They are schools that welcome all learners and celebrate diversity;

• They are flagship schools that demonstrate best practice in inclusive education;

• They ensure that the curriculum is accessible to all learners through the way in which they teach and allow learners to learn;

• They provide support to all learners in a multitude of creative ways without necessarily referring them elsewhere;

• They promote team work amongst teachers and between teachers and parents;
They have a flourishing relationship with other schools and with all members of the community and send a message of tolerance, respect and acceptance towards all;

They are advocates for all learners who are at risk of becoming marginalised, including learners with disabilities, chronic illness, learning difficulties and social, emotional and behaviour problems;

They take every possible measure to ensure that the school is physically accessible, safe and equipped with the necessary equipment that individual learners might need; and

They demonstrate how all children of school-going age can attend their local school and achieve their full potential.
THE ROLE OF PRINCIPAL AND MANAGEMENT

- The Principal and members of the School Management Team (SMT) play a vital role in the implementation of inclusive education.
- The school management takes a lead in changing the attitudes of all stakeholders;
- They establish a school-based support team which coordinates support to all learners in the school by meeting regularly, giving guidance to teachers and tracking support;
- They encourage active parental participation in the school and learners’ education; and
- They form networks with existing community resources such as SGBs, caregivers, families, disability organizations, health and social services, NGOs and Higher Education Institutions.
THE ROLE OF TEACHERS

- They work in teams and find solutions through joint problem solving;
- They apply systems and teaching approaches that meet the needs of all children.
- They are flexible in how they implement the curriculum;
- They adapt their classroom methodology to ensure that all children receive attention;
- They continuously improve their skills to teach in inclusive classrooms;
- They have high expectations of all their learners and measure them against their own previous best achievements and not against their peers; and
- They respect disability and human rights.
• Parents know their rights and those of their children;
• Parents collaborate with teachers by staying informed and supporting their children with homework;
• Parents foster the independence of their children and have high expectations irrespective of their abilities or disabilities;
• Parents cannot be expected to pay for a classroom assistant to support their child in school.; and
• Parents are assisted by the school to approach Health services to obtain hearing aids or wheel chairs for their children.
CONCLUSION

- Can parents wait until the system is ready for their children?
- All policies are in place.
- Parents must claim their rights and those of their children.
- The end result will be that schools and society in general will become more tolerant and understanding.
- "In a pluralistic society all children must grow up with others who are different. Exposure and involvement from an early age will prepare all to function peacefully and constructively. More generations of adults who become "upset" and distracted when they see a person with a disability cannot be tolerated." (Brown et. al. : 1989).
Obtain information on latest policies on Inclusive Education at

www.thutong.doe.gov.za/inclusiveeducation
REFERENCES


• Department of Basic Education (2011a) Guidelines for Responding to Diversity in the Classroom. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.

• Department of Basic Education (2011b) National Curriculum Statement, Gr R – 12. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.


