Inclusive Education

> *"Inclusive, good quality education is a foundation for dynamic and equitable societies."*
>
> *- Desmond Tutu*

1. Introduction

According to statistics quoted in a 2010 Department of Basic Education report[1], the total population of children between the ages of 5 and 18 was approximately 14.6 million – of which close to one million were disabled[2]. The report further estimates that the number of children with disabilities of school-going age, who are out of school, could be as high as half a million. The reasons why disabled children are not attending school are manifold, but chief among them is that their needs are not catered for. This, despite South Africa's comprehensive and progressive legislation and policies that protect the rights of children with disabilities.

This briefing paper will explore this legislative and policy framework, as well as the challenges of implementing an inclusive education system.

2. Legislation and Policy

According to the Constitution, the key values upon which our democratic state is founded are those of human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms. Furthermore, the Bill of Rights entrenches the right of access to basic education, including adult basic education; and to further education, which the State, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible to all.

The constitutional principles of human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms, although applicable to everyone, are especially important for people with disabilities. Accordingly, the Integrated National Disability Strategy was developed in 1997, and the Office on the Status of Disabled Persons was established to monitor its implementation. Other key pieces of legislation and policies include: the admission policy for ordinary public schools in the South African Schools Act; the Education White Paper 6 on special-needs education; free health care for persons with disabilities; the Mental Health Act; the Social Assistance Act; and the Disability Framework for Local Government 2009-2014. In 2009, the Inter-Departmental Technical Task Team developed a 'Strategy for the Integration of Services to Children with Disabilities'. The Children's Act, which came into effect in April 2010, places particular emphasis on the recognition of a child's disability and on the creation of an enabling environment to respond to the special needs of that child.

Furthermore, in 2007 South Africa ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability, which places an obligation on the State to recognise the right of persons with disability to education through the provision of an inclusive education system at all levels without discrimination.

2.1. The South African Schools Act

Section 5 of the SA Schools Act[3] (SASA) states that public schools must admit learners and serve their educational requirements without unfairly discriminating in any way. In determining the placement of a learner with special education needs, the head of department and principal must

take into account the rights and wishes of the parents, and of the learners, and uphold the principle of 'the best interests of the child' in any decision-making. Section 12 (4) and (5) further sets out how the State must provide for the educational needs of disabled persons. It obliges the Member of the Executive Committee (MEC), where reasonably practicable, to provide education for learners with special education needs at ordinary public schools by providing relevant educational support services for such learners, and by taking all reasonable measures to ensure that physical facilities at public schools are accessible to disabled persons.

2.2. Education White Paper 6

Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) on Special Needs Education: '*Building an Inclusive Education and Training System'* was gazetted in July 2001 in terms of the National Education Policy Act[4]. The White Paper defines 'inclusive education' as:

- acknowledging that all children and youth can learn and that all children and youth need support;
- enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners;
- acknowledging and respecting differences in learners, whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability, HIV or other infectious diseases;
- broader than formal schooling and acknowledging that learning also occurs in the home and community, and within formal and informal settings and structures;
- changing attitudes, behaviour, teaching methods, curricula and environment to meet the needs of all learners; and
- maximising the participation of all learners in the culture and the curriculum of educational institutions and uncovering and minimising barriers to learning.

EWP6 outlines six strategic levers for initiating the change which has to occur within the system as a whole. These are:

- Strategy 1: Within mainstream education, the general orientation and introduction of management, governing bodies and professional staff to the inclusion model, and the targeting of early identification of learners who experience barriers to learning (including learners with disabilities) and intervention in the foundation and intermediate phases.
- Strategy 2: Mobilisation of the large number of disabled and other vulnerable out-of-school youth.
- Strategy 3: Phased conversion of 500 primary schools into full-service schools over 20 years.
- Strategy 4: Establishing district-based support teams.
- Strategy 5: The qualitative improvement of special schools and settings for the learners that they serve and their conversion to resource centres that are integrated into district-based support teams.
- Strategy 6: Engaging in advocacy and development of educators and all other stakeholders to understand the new approach and programmes.

3. Implementation

The goal of EWP6 was that within the first five years all the necessary systems would have been put in place for the full-scale implementation of an inclusive education system. However, more than a decade after the EWP6 was gazetted this goal has not been adequately achieved.

The inclusive education policy, as envisaged by EWP6, was incrementally introduced, with the first stage of policy implementation occurring between 2002 and 2009. During this period 30 of the 81 districts in the country were targeted for development. Thirty 'ordinary schools' were selected in the poorest parts of the country for conversion into full-service schools[5] to serve as models of full-inclusivity. Furthermore, 34 'special schools'[6] were selected for upgrading and conversion into 'special schools resource centres'[7]. In all of the 30 districts, district-based support teams were established and trained to provide support services in an integrated way.[8]

3.1. Challenges

One of the biggest challenges to implementing a successful inclusive education system is ensuring that teachers have an understanding of "how to identify and address barriers to learning through differentiating the curriculum, assessment and classroom methodologies so as to address the diverse learning and teaching requirements of all

learners"[9]. According to Marie Schoeman of the DBE, the majority of teachers are not sufficiently skilled or "positively inclined towards minimising the barriers that are experienced by learners. . ."[10] This despite the fact that a number of teachers have received Advanced Education Certificates (ACEs) in the field of inclusive education. In addition, some higher education institutions have made inclusive education and learning support a component of their Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes, and a large number of school-based support teams and teachers have received some sort of training on the basic strategies of inclusive education.[11] While these efforts are encouraging, Ms Schoeman also points out that not nearly enough teachers are getting the necessary training to perform in an inclusive education system. Furthermore, what is desperately needed is a mindset change for the majority of South African teachers with regard to inclusive education. Most teachers assume that it is not possible to include disabled children in a mainstream setting because their needs are different. However, the principle of inclusive education requires just the opposite approach, and teachers must be helped and encouraged to find ways to work in more inclusive environment.

The DBE has itself identified a lack of skills at three levels in the system. These are[12]:

- teachers in ordinary schools lack essential knowledge on how to identify and address barriers to learning in their subject, and about day to day classroom practice;
- teachers in special schools lack specialised knowledge in most of the key areas of disability, but most critically in the fields of education for visual impairment, deaf and hard of hearing, autism, intellectual disability, cerebral palsy and communication disorders; and
- district officials lack expertise to provide schools and teachers with the skills to manage and effectively implement inclusive education in schools.

The costs of converting ordinary schools to full-service schools also present a challenge to the successful roll-out of an inclusive education system. According to a parliamentary briefing by the DBE, 553 ordinary schools have been converted to full-service schools at a cost of R52 million. This challenge is highlighted if one considers that the total inclusive education and special needs budget for 2012/13 was R5.5 billion. The current National Treasury budget structure makes provision only for special schools, and only the Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, North West and Western Cape provinces had used the budget for both inclusive education and special needs. Only R463 million was budgeted for the expansion of inclusive education, and the fact that five provinces did not receive appropriate funding for inclusive education meant there were serious backlogs[13].

The funding problem is further exacerbated by the fact that the 512 district level DBE officials responsible for the implementation of EWP6 are not sufficiently skilled to do so. The successful implementation is also dependent on the establishment of 'District-based Support Teams' (DBSTs); however most provinces do not have the necessary skills to draw on to establish these teams. A DBST should ideally comprise curriculum experts; inclusive education officials; psychologists; therapists; social workers; learning support educators; school governance and management officials; infrastructure officials; and circuit managers. Provinces like the Eastern Cape and Limpopo are struggling to establish DBSTs because they do not have the necessary skills to draw on.[14]

4. Looking Ahead

Implementing EWP6 – especially the ideal of an inclusive education system – was never going to be easy, because it is happening in an education system beset with a multitude of challenges, from lack of infrastructure to the provision of quality education. Thus, for EWP6 to be successful it would require an extraordinary effort from the State. Unfortunately, its track record so far suggests that the State is not renowned for doing the extra-ordinary – especially with regard to education.

To its credit, the DBE has mounted a gallant effort, and has identified some priorities as a response to the challenges. On top of its list is a dramatic improvement in the quality of teaching – especially in an inclusive environment. In its *Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025* the DBE will be focusing, among other things, on increasing the number of full-service schools to at least one per district; increasing the percentage of schools in which at least one teacher has received specialised

training in the identification and provision of support to special needs; ensuring that school-based support teams are functioning; and training at least 700 teachers for visually-impaired learners, and 1000 for hearing-impaired learners, in specialised skills.[15]

To tackle the challenge of inadequately trained teachers, Ms Schoeman suggests that Initial Teacher Education courses should provide training on the psychological principles of teaching and learning; and that there should be a more consistent and sustained approach to training all teachers and district officials in inclusive education concepts and methodologies as required by the *Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications* and the *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South*

Africa. Both these policy documents incorporate inclusive education as a cross-cutting principle of ITE and Continued Professional Teacher Development (CPTD).

5. Conclusion

The South African education system is failing too many children with disability – robbing them of the right to education as espoused by the Constitution. While the policy and legislation framework has laid the foundation for an inclusive education system, implementation is still happening far too slowly.

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Additional sources:
Department of Basic Education (2009): *Guidelines for Full-Service/Inclusive Schools*
Department of Basic Education (2010): *Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning*
Department of Basic Education (2010): *Status of Inclusive Education: Accompanying Challenges and Strategic Response.* Presentation to the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education. November 2010

[1] Department of Basic Education (2010): *Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Education.*

[2] The number is based on Statistics South Africa surveys which use the 'international classification of functionality, disability and health' approach where respondents are asked about 'difficulty' with various activities rather than disability, with a continuum from 'no difficulty' to 'not able'. This approach tends to result in a very wide definition of disability.

[3] Act 84 of 1996

[4] Act 27 of 1996

[5] These are ordinary schools which are specially equipped to address a full range of barriers to learning in an inclusive education setting. In addition to their ordinary learner population they are accessible to most learners in an area who experience barriers to learning and provide the necessary support.

[6] Schools equipped to deliver education to learners requiring high-intensity educational and other support either on a full-time or a part-time basis.

[7] These are special schools which have been transformed to fulfil a wider function of accommodating learners who have high-intensity support needs, as well as providing a range of support services to ordinary schools, full-service schools as part of the District-based Support System.

[8] Department of Basic Education (2010): *Report on the Implementation on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability in Education.*

[9] Department of Basic Education (2001): *White paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System*

[10] Marie Schoeman (2012): *Developing an inclusive education system: Changing teacher's attitudes and practices through critical professional development.* Paper presented at the National Teacher Development Conference at the University of Pretoria.

[11] *Ibid.* By 2012 there were 8 696 schools (out of 26 000) with school-based support teams, 1 415 Learning Support Educators, 13 000 teachers, 7 148 district officials and 16 672 institution-level support teams members who received training.

[12] Marie Schoeman, *op cit.*

[13] Department of Education (2012): *Inclusive Education and Integrated Quality Management Systems.* A briefing to the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education. November 2012. Available online at http://www.pmg.org.za/report/20121106-basic-education-integrated-quality-management-systems-inclusive-educa

[14] *ibid*

[15] Department of Basic Education (2011): *Inclusive Education: A Response to Action Plan 2014.* Presentation to the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education. June 2011.