



Inclusive Education: Are We There Yet?

"Inclusive education is not something which has to happen in addition to education transformation in South Africa. It is the means through which education transformation will be achieved."
Tony Booth¹

1. Introduction

Three years ago the Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office produced a briefing paper² on the state of inclusive education in South Africa. We argued then that while the Department of Basic Education (DBE) had mounted a gallant effort to realise the implementation of White Paper 6, progress was at a snail's pace. In August 2015, the CPLO hosted a roundtable discussion with speakers from the DBE and Inclusive Education South Africa (IESA) in order to ascertain what progress has been made more recently.

This briefing paper will focus on the DBE's *Report on the Implementation of Education White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education* (hereafter referred to as the EWP6 Report), juxtaposed with the experiences of Inclusive Education South Africa and the comments of participants at the roundtable. The briefing paper will also make reference to the Human Rights Watch report "*Complicit in Exclusion*" - *South Africa's Failure to Guarantee an Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities* that was released a few days after the roundtable.

2. South Africa's Commitment to Inclusive Education

South Africa was one of the first countries to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007. It is also a signatory to five key international human rights treaties; and two African treaties protecting and guaranteeing children's economic and social rights. In 2001, South Africa further strengthened its commitment to inclusive education by gazetting the Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) on Special Needs Education: 'Building an Inclusive Education and Training System'. The goal of the 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. Furthermore, Chapter 9 of the National Development Plan states,

"inclusive education should be provided that enables everyone to participate effectively in a free society. Education provides knowledge and skills that people with disabilities can use to exercise a range of other human rights, such as the right to political participation, the right to work, the right to live independently and contribute to the community, the right to participate in cultural life, and the right to

raise a family. Ensuring that all children with disabilities have access to quality education will help South Africa meet its employment equity goals in the long run.”

3. Progress in Implementing EWP6 Since 2013

The DBE provides some useful statistics to indicate progress in the implementation of EWP6. It argues that access to education for children with disabilities has steadily improved. For example, the enrolment of learners between 0 – 4 increased from 28.3% in 2009 to 43.7% in 2013; in the 7 – 15 age group it increased from 90.2% in 2009 to 92.5% in 2013; and in the 16 – 18 age group, from 53.3% in 2009 to 70.3% in 2013. There was also an increase in the number of full-service schools³ and special schools⁴. The DBE reports that it has built 28 new special schools at a cost of R569m, and converted 197 special schools to resource centres which fulfil a wider function of accommodating learners who have high-intensity support needs. These resource centres also provide a range of support services to ordinary schools and full-service schools as part of the District-based Support System.

Other progress highlighted at the roundtable (and which is contained in the DBE progress report) includes the following⁵:

- the promulgation of the Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) in December 2014. SIAS will capacitate schools to identify learners with learning disabilities early by standardising the procedures for identifying, assessing and providing programmes for learners who require additional support.
- the commencement of the CAPS curriculum for South African Sign Language(SASL) to 2 277 Foundation Phase and 353 Grade 9 learners by training 250 teachers and deaf teaching assistants in 38 schools for the deaf. A national catalogue for SASL

Learner Teacher Support Material (LTSM) has also been developed;

- the development of a draft General Education and Training Certificate (GETC) for skills and vocational education, and 26 skills learning programmes for learners with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities;
- the development of a policy framework and learning programme for learners with profound intellectual disabilities;
- the development of draft funding norms and a framework for post provisioning for an inclusive education system; and
- improving teacher qualifications in Braille and in SASL.

4. Is This Real Progress?

Despite the progressive policy and legislative commitments, and the progress made (as reported by the DBE), many challenges still persist after 14 years of the proposed 20-year implementation trajectory. With commendable honesty, the Department lists in the EWP6 Report a litany of challenges that bedevil implementation. These challenges include:

- incoherent conception and understanding of the strategic intent and approach;
- disparities across provinces in resourcing inclusive education, including personnel provisioning and finance;
- limited access to specialist support services, particularly in public ordinary schools, resulting in too many learners referred out to special schools or remaining in mainstream schools without any appropriate support;

- the fact that the improvement of learner performance requires early identification and intervention, including remediation and multi-level teaching, to meet the needs of learners experiencing barriers to learning; and
- special schools and district offices not having adequate specialist professional support staff, or suffering from a shortage of mid-level workers such as therapy assistants and non-teaching staff to provide support.
- more than half a million children with disabilities are not in school, especially in the rural areas;
- children with disabilities continue to face discrimination when accessing all types of public schools;
- many disabled learners in mainstream schools face discriminatory physical and attitudinal barriers;
- children with disabilities who attend special schools pay school fees that children without disabilities do not, and many who attend mainstream schools are asked to pay for their own class assistants as a condition of staying in mainstream classes;
- children with disabilities in many public schools receive low-quality education in poor learning environments; and
- children with disabilities generally are not prepared for life after basic education.

Some of the statistics in the EWP6 Report have been challenged by IESA, which argues that the “data accuracy is highly questionable” because some of the data were not available in many cases. IESA also argues that the data is questionable because there is generally a lack of uniform understanding about what inclusive education is. Because of this lack of a common understanding, the ordinary local schools and early childhood (ECD) centres do not respond, or lack the capacity to respond, to the needs of all learners, including those requiring extra support because of learning or physical disability, social disadvantage, cultural difference or other barriers to learning⁶. IESA also points out that some of the other implementation challenges are due to inadequate budget planning and an inconsistent utilisation of the budget across the provinces.

IESA is not the only organisation that has questioned the progress statistics of the DBE. Human Rights Watch was scathing in its report on the status of inclusive education in South Africa. The report questioned “whether the government of South Africa has prioritized children with disabilities’ access to a quality, inclusive education—as it committed to do 13 years ago in its Education White Paper 6,” and highlights “numerous forms of discrimination and obstacles that children with disabilities face in trying to access such education that fosters inclusion, not segregation or integration”.

According to the report:

All of these issues highlighted in the report were also points raised by participants at the roundtable. Thus, while the DBE highlights the progress it has made, many argue that this progress is dwarfed by the many challenges that still persist, especially the number of disabled children not in school.

5. The Way Forward

To its credit, the DBE has identified the implementation challenges and possible corrective measures needed to advance a speedier EWP6 implementation agenda. The biggest challenge is ensuring that all disabled children are placed in a school. Here the DBE argues that the provincial departments must radically transform their approach towards inclusive education by creating integrated outreach support systems, providing accessible transport systems, making more effective use of scarce human resources,

strengthening ordinary schools to change attitudes (this will be the biggest challenge), differentiating curricula, and establishing the necessary support services in all schools. The implementation of a policy framework for the profoundly intellectually disabled is also essential.

Other measures would include:

- the establishment of transversal teams⁷, particularly at district level, by creating awareness of inclusive education responsibilities and filling of posts for specialist staff, e.g. therapists;
- clear delineation of the roles and responsibilities for the implementation of CAPS for South African Sign Language, with proper budgeting for resources;
- provincial departments to ensure that all teachers at special schools have the requisite specialist training, especially in Braille, SASL, Autism, Intellectual Disability, etc.
- provincial departments to monitor curriculum delivery, implement the SIAS policy, create access to specialist support services, and centrally procure accessible LTSM;
- strengthening the collaboration with Social and Health Services to ensure seamless access to scarce support services, especially in rural settings;
- provincial departments to set aside budgets for travel and accommodation of teachers, deaf teaching assistants, and home language subject advisors for Intermediate Phase and Grade 10

CAPS for SASL implementation in 2016.

While the DBE has gone some way in responding to the challenges, the Human Rights Watch report recommends, amongst other things, an amendment to the South African Schools Act to bring it fully in line with the country's international obligations. This would mean making primary education in all public schools free and compulsory for all children, ensuring meaningful access to quality education for children with disabilities, and enforcing the right to access adult basic education and skills programs for people with disabilities who have not completed basic education.

6. Conclusion

The Department of Basic Education should be commended for the progress it has made in implementing Education White Paper 6. However, as was evident at the roundtable discussion, and from the Human Rights Watch report, not nearly enough is being done; half a million disabled children are still not enjoying their full right to education. This figure includes those who remain entirely outside of the education system, as well as those in it who are not receiving a quality education. At this pace of implementation we will still ask in 2021⁸: "Are we there yet?"

Kenny Pasensie
Researcher

¹ Professor Booth has taught, researched and written about issues of inclusion and exclusion in education for the last thirty years.

² Kenny Pasensie (2012): *Inclusive Education*. Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office BP 314.

³ 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.

⁴ Schools equipped to deliver education to learners requiring high-intensity educational and other support either on a full-time or a part-time basis.

⁵ Marie Schoeman (2015): *Progress Report on the Implementation of Education White Paper 6*. Presentation delivered at the CPLO roundtable on Inclusive Education, 17 August 2015.

⁶ Robyn Beere (2015): *Inclusive Education in the South Africa context – where have we come from and where are we going?* Presentation delivered at the CPLO roundtable on Inclusive Education, 17 August 2015.

⁷ These are District Based Support teams comprising occupational therapists, speech therapists, audiologist, etc.

⁸ The Education White Paper 6 has a 20 year implementation schedule. By 2021 the EWP6 should be fully implemented.

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