



# Education for all. Diversity as an opportunity for school education.

Position Paper

## A Position Paper on Education

*"Inclusive schools must recognise and respond to the diverse needs of students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organisational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities." (UNESCO-Salamanca Statement)*

Learning is crucial in life. We learn and develop from the very beginning. Schools are a key place of learning, offering a wide range of individual support in an organised way. A good education provides all children and young people, with or without intellectual disability, with the power to reflect and to make choices. As recognized by the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, education offers opportunities for each child or young person to maximise his or her potential in intellectual and social development. Schools are also social environments, providing children and young people to meet their peers and learn different kinds of things from them. And, of course, to have fun. Inclusive education is thus essential to children and young people with intellectual disabilities. It is also essential to creating an inclusive society.

Education is therefore recognised worldwide as a fundamental human right and has been enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 24 clearly establishes inclusive settings as the first choice for education. It reiterates the right of children with disabilities to education, but furthermore explicitly sets the goal of full inclusion in the regular education system. To enable inclusion in the regular system, States are obliged to provide the necessary support.

Article 24 also states that education systems should become inclusive at all levels. It encourages disabled children and adults with disabilities, who lacked those opportunities when they were young to attend schools at all levels on an equal basis with others. Children with disabilities should attend quality and free primary education. The article states that an inclusive system should provide reasonable accommodation, as well as a range of effective individualized supports that meet the needs of all students.

Inclusive Education implies that children and young people, who require additional support for special needs, should be included in the educational arrangements made for the majority of children and young people. Children and young people with intellectual disability need education at school, maybe even more than others: a lack of adequate education raises the risk for poverty and exclusion.

### **Inclusion Europe**

Galleries de la Toison d'Or  
29 Chaussée d'Ixelles #393/32  
B-1050 Bruxelles  
Tel.: +32-2-502.28.15  
Fax.: +32-2-502.80.10  
secretariat@inclusion-europe.org  
www.inclusion-europe.org

This Position Paper deals with what the members of Inclusion Europe believe to be important for persons with intellectual disability related to school education, proper learning and society.

### **Objectives for children and young people**

For children and young people with intellectual disability the same things are important as for any other. For several reasons the following 'normal' things are of special interest to them.

- **Close to home:** attending a school in their own neighbourhood prevents travelling, and the resulting costs of energy, time and money. Children and young people then have greater opportunities for social contacts and other opportunities in non-school hours.
- **Growing up among peers:** for children and young people with intellectual disability it is important to grow up among peers with and without disability. They have role-models. They have more opportunities for personal development, contacts, integration in community and socialisation.
- **Security:** children and young people with a disability are more vulnerable than others. An environment that is physically, socially and emotionally safe is therefore even more important for them than for others.
- **Adequate and adaptive education:** children and young people with intellectual disability often have a greater need than others for an individualised education plan which meets their specific methodological, didactic and educational needs. These concern pace, sequence of subjects, coherence, concentration, working together, maximising potentials and having a choice of lifestyle similar to peers.
- **Choice for children and young people:** students with intellectual disability have the right for current information in order to choose, like their peers: e.g. the subjects they want to study.
- **Choice for parents:** parents should be enabled to make a real choice between regular schools or special classes attached to mainstream schools. They need adequate and enforceable legal rights.
- **Life-long learning:** in today's society everyone needs life-long learning. Persons with intellectual disability need this even more to keep their competences and learn new things.

### **Objectives for schools**

Schools and their staff should be obliged to cater for the requirements and needs of children and young people with intellectual disability and their parents.

- **Physical aspects:** children and young people with intellectual disability can have different associated disabilities, e.g. physical disabilities. School facilities should be adapted from a physical point of view and all rooms should be large enough to accommodate children and young adults who might also use wheelchairs and other mobility aids.
- **Technical aids:** disabilities can often be more or less compensated by technical means. Schools should ensure that these means are accessed.
- **Social support:** schools are not only a place to learn, they are also a place to meet. Schools should support an atmosphere and a way of organising that is inviting for children and young people to meet and establish relationships and friendships.
- **Knowledge and methods:** schools have the responsibility and obligation to offer specific knowledge and differentiated methods needed for a child or young person with a disability. Individual education plans should be needs-based rather than resource-based.
- **Support for children and young people:** Schools have the obligation to provide accessible information for all students. Schools must promote the active participation of intellectually disabled students in everyday school life.

- **Willingness:** schools should pay regular attention to the ability and willingness of staff to educate and support children and young people with a disability. Teachers should be supported and enabled to teach children and young people with significant learning or behavioural difficulties.
- **Manage expectations:** schools should be realistic and explicit in what they can offer. They should be clear about that towards parents. They should agree in a written document about what will be done and how this will be evaluated.
- **Care, pedagogical and medical support:** in many European countries schools have the obligation to organise specific care, educational and medical support that children and young people need. This might also be required for the specific development of other children to learn in order to reach their full potential.
- **Schools as a community:** All members of the school community – staff, parents, children and young people -- should be encouraged and expected to be inclusive of people with intellectual disabilities.

### Objectives for governments

Governments have the responsibility to provide education for all children and young people. In this respect governments have extra obligations in relation to children and young people with a disability.

- **Obligation and right to education:** all children and young people, including those with a disability, have the right and obligation to education. Governments must facilitate this in law, financing, building and organising other necessary means.
- **Legal obligations for schools:** every school should by law have the obligation to educate all children and young people, with or without a disability.
- **Networks of knowledge, technical aid, and educational aids:** specific curricula, knowledge and aids are needed to educate children and young people with a disability. Governments have the responsibility to develop this knowledge and aid schools in such a way that schools can easily access such supports for their pupils.
- **Financial support:** educating children and young people with a disability often costs more than educating others. There should be a fair system of payments to schools assisting with these extra costs. These can be for physical aspects, technical aids, care or support or educational needs.
- **Support of children and young people:** The government have the obligation to provide accessible information so that people with intellectual disability know their educational rights and how to access them.
- **Support of parents:** education will only be successful with the support of parents as equal partners in the educational process. In order to achieve this, parents have the right of support and the right of appeal to an independent authority.
- **Life-long learning:** governments should provide financial and organisational support, so that people with an intellectual disability have, and make use, of the opportunity of 'life-long' learning. This should extend from the early years, through compulsory education, to adulthood.