

## **The inclusion challenge**

Inclusion may seem a 'hot' topic but how to successfully implement an inclusive policy has actually been discussed over a number of years by both policy makers and educationalists. It is therefore worth looking into the background of the current general shift from exclusion to inclusion in education.

## **The global perspective**

In 1994 the United Nations conference representing 92 Governments and 25 agencies adopted the Salamanca Statement 'Reaffirming the right to education of every individual, as enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and renewing the pledge made by the world community at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All to ensure that right for all regardless of individual differences'.

Decisions taken at Salamanca included:

- i) Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning;
- ii) Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning' needs;
- iii) Education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs and those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs,
- iv) Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.

## **The British Council perspective**

We have created an inclusion strategy that is based on the British Council's Diversity Strategy 2011 with this strategy focused specifically on teacher development. This teacher development strategy is also based on our British Council specific needs policy for young learners.

Greater inclusion is an important diversity outcome. Our work in special needs education is directed primarily at a mainstream school audience where all learners on the mild to moderate end of the SEN spectrum can feel included and given the maximum possibilities to achieve their full educational potential. Our approach is fundamentally based on human rights and equal opportunity in education where every child matters.

## **The teacher's perspective**

As educators, we want to ensure that all the children are given the maximum possibilities to achieve their full educational potential. Throughout our careers, we will come across children with special educational needs who need additional learning support. Although, we do not need to be experts in this field we do need to know when and where to get additional support; both for ourselves and for

the children. Inclusion can be seen as a challenge unless teachers receive adequate training and support.

### **Special educational needs**

For inclusion to be successful children with special educational needs should firstly be identified so that the right kind of support is being provided. Children have a learning difficulty if they have a much greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age. Or they have a disability which stops, or even hinders them from making use of the general educational facilities provided for children of the same age. Special educational needs fall into the following four broad areas:

- Communication and interaction, e.g. autism spectrum disorder
- Cognition and learning, e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia
- Behaviour, emotional and social development, e.g. attention deficit disorder
- Sensory and/or physical, e.g. hearing, visual or physical impairments

One important point is that not all children with a disability have a special educational need. These children may not require additional support. Also, not all children with special educational needs have a disability. Special educational needs can also be used as a term for children who need extra provision because they have abilities significantly ahead of their peers and these children fall under the category of gifted and talented.

Teachers and parents are most likely to notice when a child has an additional learning need although only a professional will be able to identify the specific need and to give advice on how it should be managed. As some learning difficulties can be a sign or more than one special need it is vital to get a professional assessment.

### **Preparing for inclusion**

There needs to be a strong dialogue between the child, parents and the school to ensure that the child gets an appropriate level of support.

Inclusive teaching strategies and well-planned lessons with clear aims are beneficial for all students. Good classroom behaviour management should encourage learners to take an active part in the lesson and any discrimination shown by other learners needs to be addressed and highlighted. It could be beneficial to educate the child's classmates on their special educational need although sensitivity to the child's feelings should come into play here. There needs to be a positive classroom atmosphere that gives all learners a general sense of security.

Recycling language and reviewing learning at the end of each lesson will help with learner motivation as they will be able to track their own progress.

It may be necessary to differentiate learning by content (for example a shorter reading text), by task (the same reading text but simpler comprehension questions) or by response (checking boxes rather than writing sentences). The teacher should present this kind of differentiation as a positive adaptation rather than as just a simpler task. Using different resources and activities with different groups of learners during a class or project work may help the learner to feel more comfortable with being given a different task.

The behaviour of some children can be very difficult to deal with and teachers need to be aware of their own feelings. It should always be clear to the learner that the teacher has a problem with their

behaviour rather than the learner per se. The learner's behaviour is unlikely to improve if the child feels that the teacher dislikes them and this will also encourage a negative classroom atmosphere.

The topic of inclusion is so diverse and each child unique which means that teachers may need to try a number of strategies before they find the right ones to ensure their learners show progress. Exploring new techniques and activities will generally aid teachers with their professional development and keep their learners engaged in lessons. There are a range of resources that teachers can access online including online courses to update their skills and webinars. In the UK, and many other countries, there are educational websites focussed on the management of children with special educational needs.