Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education
Recommendations for Policy Makers

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European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

The first report in the *Key Principles* series was published by the Agency in 2003. The title of this report was 'Key Principles for Special Needs Education – Recommendations for Policy Makers' and it was based upon Agency work published until 2003.

As with the previous edition, this document has been prepared by educational policy makers in order to provide other policy makers across Europe with a synthesis of the main policy findings that have emerged from the Agency thematic work supporting the inclusion of learners with different types of special educational needs (SEN) within mainstream provision. This edition draws upon Agency work from 2003 to date and covers the following publications:

- Special Education across Europe (2003);

- Special Needs Education in Europe: Thematic Publication (Volume 1, 2003 and Volume 2, 2006);

- Inclusive Education and Classroom Practice in Secondary Education (2005);

- Young Views on Special Needs Education (2005);

- Early Childhood Intervention (2005);

- Individual Transition Plans (2006);

- Assessment in Inclusive Settings (2007 and 2009);

- Young Voices: Meeting Diversity in Education (2008);

- Development of a set of indicators – for inclusive education in Europe (2009);

- Multicultural Diversity and Special Needs Education (2009).

All of these publications are available in up to 21 languages from the Agency website: http://www.european-agency.org/publications

It is hoped that these Agency key principle recommendations will contribute in a positive way to the work of policy makers across Europe who are in different ways endeavouring to support the processes involved in inclusive education in their countries.

Cor Meijer

Director: European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

1. INTRODUCTION

As with the previous edition in the *Key Principles* series, the intention of this report is to highlight recommendations regarding key aspects of educational policy that seem to be effective in supporting the inclusion of learners with different types of special educational needs (SEN) within mainstream provision. These recommendations essentially underpin the principles of promoting educational inclusion and a school for all. Within all countries in Europe there is a recognition that inclusive education – or as termed in the Charter of Luxembourg (1996) *A School for All* – provides an important foundation for ensuring equality of opportunity for learners with different types of special needs in all aspects of their life (education, vocational training, employment and social-life). A main assertion of the first edition of *Key Principles* has been used in the preparation of this document: '*Inclusive education requires flexible education systems that are responsive to the diverse and often complex needs of individual learners*' (p. 4).

The target audience for this document remains educational policy makers. However, it is recognised that, even more so than in the previous edition, the focus of key principles for inclusive education at this time must present recommendations that are of use for mainstream as well as SNE specific policy makers if the impact on inclusion in its widest sense is to be maximized. It is recognised that there is a need for debate among mainstream policy makers across different sectors and phases that will take mainstream educational provision forward. This current report presents recommendations based on the findings of Agency studies completed between 2003 and 2009, relating to what policy makers should do in order to support inclusion. (For full details of the Agency work covered, please refer to Section 4: More Information).

This work has been conducted through different types of thematic projects, usually involving all Agency member countries [1].

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[1] As of 2009, the Agency member countries are: Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French speaking communities), Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales).

Agency projects are identified by member country ministerial representatives as they reflect areas of priority and concern to them. These projects use a variety of methodologies (analysis of country information collected via surveys or questionnaires, reviews of literature, or face to face exchanges involving country experts) and result in a range of outputs (printed documents, electronic reports and resources).

All of the thematic projects used in preparing this document have focused on different aspects of inclusion that support learners to access education within their local community. Whilst the Agency findings being used in the work focuses mainly on compulsory school education, the principles outlined are those that support lifelong learning and the ultimate goal of social inclusion for people with SEN. As with the situation presented in 2003, it must be emphasised that there are different national contexts for inclusion and that: '*All countries are at … different points of the journey to inclusion*' (Watkins, 2007, p. 16).

As in 2003, the percentage of pupils in compulsory education officially recognised as having SEN across the countries ranges from below 1% to 19%. The percentage of learners with SEN in special schools and classes also varies widely, with some countries placing less than 1% of all learners in separate provision and others more than 5% (2009). The continuing situation is that such data reflects differences in assessment procedures, financing structures and policies for provision rather than differences in the actual incidence of special educational needs across countries.

Also as in 2003, countries still take very different approaches in structuring provision of pupils with SEN. Across countries, it is possible to identify approaches aimed towards full inclusion in mainstream settings; approaches involving a 'continuum of provision' aimed at meeting diverse needs; and approaches with clearly defined and separate systems for mainstream and special schooling. It is however, also possible to see that: '*conceptions of, policies for, and practice in inclusive education are constantly undergoing change in all countries*' (ibid).

Despite these on-going differences in national contexts for inclusion, it is still possible to highlight key principles of inclusive policies agreed upon by Agency member countries emerging from more recent Agency thematic projects; these are set out in Section 3.

These key principles are themselves underpinned by a developing understanding of inclusive education as being concerned with a far wider range of learners vulnerable to exclusion than those identified as having special educational needs. This is linked to an acknowledgement that quality education for learners with SEN in mainstream schools must mean quality education for all learners.

This conception of widening participation in mainstream education as a means of ensuring quality education for all learners is reflected in the title of this current edition of the series: *Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education.*

Such a conception of inclusive education is also clearly outlined in a number of international reports and statements – these documents are summarised in the following section as an introduction to the evidenced based key principles emerging from Agency work.

2. A EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL APPROACH TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

At the International as well as European Union level, there are a number of conventions, declarations, statements and resolutions relating to disability, inclusion and special education that underpin all countries' national policies and provide a frame of reference for their work[2]. These documents are also used as guiding principles by the Agency. To put the Agency studies used in drafting this current document into a wider context, the key International and European texts are outlined below.

2.1 European level guiding principles

At the European level, there are a number of documents that outline member states' objectives in relation to supporting learners with special needs that imply a degree of commitment on the part of EU countries to implementing agreed priorities. Many of these are statements of Council priorities relating to education generally – for example the Report from the Education Council to the European Council *The concrete future objectives of education and training systems* (2001) and the Communication from the Commission *A coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks for monitoring progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training* (2007).

However, there are also a number of key documents that focus specifically on learners with special educational needs and their inclusion in mainstream education. The first of these dates from 1990 with the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of Education concerning *Integration of children and young people with disabilities into ordinary systems of education.* Following this, EU member states ratified the United Nations *Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* (1993).

Subsequently, in 1996, the Council published the *Resolution on the human rights of disabled people* and the Commission published a Communication (a statement asking for Council action) on the *Equality of opportunity for people with disabilities.* 2001 saw the

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[2] The full references for all the documents referred to here are given in section 4.

European Parliament Resolution *Towards a barrier-free Europe for people with disabilities.* The 2003 Parliament resolution *Towards a United Nations legally binding instrument to promote and protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities* was followed by the Council Resolution of 2003 on *Promoting the employment and social integration of people with disabilities* as well as the Council Resolution, 2003, on *Equal opportunities for pupils and students with disabilities in education and training.* These are two of the main EU level statements that guide member states policies for special education.

The views of learners with special educational needs are presented in the *Lisbon Declaration: Young People's Views on Inclusive Education* (2007), which outlines a number of proposals agreed upon by young people with special educational needs from 29 countries attending secondary, vocational and higher education. The young people state in the Declaration that: '*We see a lot of benefits in inclusive education … we need to have and interact with friends with and without special needs … Inclusive education is mutually beneficial to us and to everyone.*'

In 2007, the European Council of Education Ministers identified special needs education as being one of the 16 priority objectives to be considered within the Lisbon 2010 Objectives work (European Commission, 2007). Within the proposals for the 2020 European Community objectives for education, learners with special educational needs are again seen as a priority (2009).

2.2 International level guiding principles

At the international level, the key legal frameworks impacting on inclusive education are outlined within the UNESCO *Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education* (2009) beginning with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), moving to the *Convention against Discrimination in Education* (1960) the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Diversity in Cultural Expressions* (2005). Most recently, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006), specifically Article 24, is highlighted as being crucial as it advocates inclusive education. It is argued that these and other international documents: '*… set out the central elements that need to be addressed in order to ensure the right to access to*

education, the right to quality education and the right to respect in the learning environment' (p.10).

Most European countries have signed the convention and the majority of these have also signed the optional protocol and are in the process of ratifying both the convention and protocol. [3]

All European countries have ratified the UNESCO *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action in Special Needs Education* (1994). This collective statement is a major focal point for special needs education work in Europe – it is still a key element in the conceptual framework of many countries' policies. All European countries agree that the principles encompassed in the Salamanca Statement should underpin all education policies – not just those specifically dealing with special needs education. These principles relate to equal opportunities in terms of genuine access to learning experiences, respect for individual differences and quality education for all focused upon personal strengths rather than weaknesses.

The Conclusions and Recommendations of the 48th session of the International Conference On Education (ICE) (2008) called *Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future,* presented a number of key recommendations including:
- Policy makers should acknowledge that: '*inclusive education is an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all*';
- Education policy and provision should aim to: '*Promote school cultures and environments that are child-friendly, conducive to effective learning and inclusive of all children*' (UNESCO, 2008).

The UNESCO Policy Guidelines (2009) document suggests that: '*Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners … An "inclusive" education system can only be created if ordinary schools become more inclusive – in other words, if they become better at educating all children in their communities*' (p. 8).

This document goes further by saying that: '*Inclusion is thus seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating*

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[3] See: http://www.un.org/disabilities/countries.asp?navid=17&pid=16 for updated information.

exclusion within and from education … Promoting inclusion means stimulating discussion, encouraging positive attitudes and improving educational and social frameworks to cope with new demands in education structures and governance. It involves improving inputs, processes and environments to foster learning both at the level of the learner in his/her learning environment and at the system level to support the entire learning experience' (UNESCO, 2009, p. 7-9).

The Policy Guidelines highlight the following propositions regarding inclusive education:

- Inclusion and quality are reciprocal;

- Access and quality are linked and are mutually reinforcing;

- Quality and equity are central to ensuring inclusive education.

These propositions are fundamental to the key principles evident within the Agency's thematic work and which are presented in the following section.

3. KEY PRINCIPLES FOR PROMOTING QUALITY IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The key principles presented in this section centre upon aspects of educational systems that appear, from the Agency's work, to be crucial in promoting quality in inclusive education and supporting the inclusion of learners with different types of special educational needs (SEN) within mainstream provision. These aspects range from national legislation to school level work, each of which must be considered within policy frameworks for promoting quality in inclusive education.

Whilst the majority of Agency materials used to identify these key principles focussed upon the compulsory sector of education, it is argued that these key principles are applicable to all sectors and phases involved in lifelong learning.

Seven inter-connected areas of key principles are apparent from examining the Agency's work from 2003 to date. These are presented below along with specific recommendations that appear to be necessary for their effective implementation.

The ultimate goal of these key principles is to *promote participation in inclusive education by ensuring quality educational provision*. With this in mind, the key principle of widening participation is presented first and all other key principles can be seen to work towards this goal.

> ### *Widening participation to increase educational opportunity for all learners*
>
> The goal for inclusive education is to widen access to education and to promote full participation and opportunities for all learners vulnerable to exclusion to realise their potential.

When considering the promotion of quality in inclusive education, it is necessary to underline a number of key factors in relation to this goal:

- *Inclusion concerns a wider range of learners than those identified as having special educational needs.* It is concerned with any learners who are at risk of exclusion from educational opportunities, resulting in school failure;

- *Access to mainstream education alone is not enough.* Participation means that all learners are engaged in learning activities that are meaningful for them.

The *promotion of positive attitudes in education is crucial for widening participation*. Parental and teacher attitudes towards the education of learners with a wide range of needs appear to be largely determined by personal experiences; this fact needs to be recognised and strategies and resources introduced/implemented to address attitudinal factors. Effective strategies to promote positive attitudes include:

- *Ensuring all teachers are trained* and feel able to assume responsibility for all learners, whatever their individual needs;

- *Supporting the participation of learners and their parents in educational decision-making*. This includes involving learners in decisions about their own learning and supporting parents to make informed choices for their (younger) children.

At the level of an individual learner's educational career, the following aspects appear to make a significant contribution to achieving the goal of widening participation:

- *A view of learning as process* – not content based – and a main goal for all learners being the development of learning to learn skills, not just subject knowledge;

- *Developing personalised learning approaches for all learners*, where the learner sets, records and reviews their own learning goals in collaboration with their teachers and families and is helped to develop a structured way of learning independently in order to take control of their own learning;

- *The development of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or similar individualised teaching programme*, for some learners (possibly with more complex learning needs) who may require a more focused approach for their learning. IEPs should be developed to maximise learners' independence and involvement in goal setting and also collaboration with parents and families.

An approach to learning that aims to meet the diverse needs of all learners without labelling/categorising is consistent with inclusive principles and requires the implementation of educational strategies and approaches that will be beneficial to all learners:

- *Co-operative teaching* where teachers take a team approach involving learners themselves, parents, peers, other school teachers and support staff, as well as multi-disciplinary team members as appropriate;

- *Co-operative learning* where learners help each other in different ways – including peer tutoring – within flexible and well-thought out learner groupings;

- *Collaborative problem solving* involving systematic approaches to positive classroom management;

- *Heterogeneous grouping* of learners and a differentiated approach to dealing with a diversity of learners' needs in the classroom. Such an approach involves structured goal setting, reviewing and recording, alternative routes for learning, flexible instruction and different ways of grouping for all learners;

- *Effective teaching approaches* based on targeted goals, alternative routes for learning, flexible instruction and the use of clear feedback to learners;

- *Teacher assessment that supports learning* and does not label or lead to negative consequences for learners. Assessment should take a holistic/ecological view that considers academic, behavioural, social and emotional aspects of learning and clearly informs next steps in the learning process.

Strategies for widening participation within mainstream classrooms cannot be implemented in isolation from the context of the wider school and home situation. In order to increase educational opportunities for all learners, a number of inter-connected factors must be in place to support the work of individual teachers. These are outlined in the following sections.

Education and training in inclusive education for all teachers

For teachers to work effectively in inclusive settings, they need to have the appropriate values and attitudes, skills and competences, knowledge and understanding.

This means *all teachers should be prepared to work in inclusive education* in their initial training and then have access to further, in-service training later in their careers in order to develop the

knowledge and skills to enhance their inclusive practice in inclusive settings.

Training for inclusion involves the acquisition of knowledge and skills in:

- *Differentiation and meeting diverse needs* that allows a teacher to support individual learning in classrooms;

- *Working collaboratively with parents and families*;

- *Collaboration and teamwork* that facilitates teachers working effectively in teams with other teachers as well as a range of educational and other service professionals working within and outside of the school.

Alongside training for all teachers for inclusion, teacher-training systems should provide opportunities for:

- The *training of specialised teachers* in order to maintain and develop specialist resources for supporting all teachers in inclusive settings;

- *Shared training opportunities* for professionals from different services and sectors in order to facilitate effective collaborative working;

- *Training for school/educational organisation leaders* in developing their leadership skills and vision in line with the promotion of inclusive values and practice;

- *Training routes and possibilities for teacher trainers in inclusive education* in order for them to deliver the initial and in-service teacher education programmes that promote quality in inclusive education.

Organisational culture and ethos that promotes inclusion

At the level of the school, or other educational organisation, a shared culture and ethos based upon positive attitudes towards welcoming a diversity of learners in classrooms and meeting diverse needs in education is crucial.

Such a shared culture:

- *Includes all stakeholders*: learners, their families, teachers and educational staff and the local community;

- Is guided by school/educational organisation leaders with a vision for inclusion that includes clear thinking regarding school development, accountability and responsibility for meeting a diverse range of needs.

Organisational cultures that are supportive of inclusion result in:

- Practice that avoids segregation in all forms and promotes a school for all, providing equality of educational opportunity for all learners;

- A culture of teamwork and openness to partnership with parents as well as inter-disciplinary approaches;

- Educational practice to meet a diverse range of needs being seen as an approach to developing quality education for all pupils generally, rather than as being focused upon specific groups.

Support structures organised so as to promote inclusion

Support structures that impact upon inclusive education are diverse and often involve a range of different service professionals, approaches and working methods. Established support structures can act as a support to, or as a barrier to inclusion.

Support structures that promote inclusive education are:

- Composed of a range of different specialist services, organisations and resource centres, and professionals that reflect local level needs. Support structures should be able to respond flexibly to a range of organisational, as well as individual professional and family level needs;

- Co-ordinated both within and between different sectors (education, health, social services etc.) and teams of support personnel;

- Co-ordinated so as to support in the best way possible successful transitions of all learners between different phases of their lifelong learning (pre-school, compulsory, post-compulsory and employment related education).

Such support structures employ an inter-disciplinary approach that:

- Integrates the knowledge and perspectives of different areas of professional expertise in order to consider learners' needs holistically;

- *Uses a participatory approach* that requires a change in the locus of control for support and input from support specialists. Decision-making regarding support not only involves, but also becomes increasingly led by mainstream class teachers, learners and their families, working in partnership with inter-disciplinary professionals. This requires a major attitudinal shift on the part of specialist professionals, as well as changes to their practice.

> ### *Flexible resourcing systems that promote inclusion*
>
> Funding policies and structures remain one of the most significant factors determining inclusion. Limited or no access to certain facilities and provision may actually hinder inclusion and equality of opportunity for learners with SEN.

Mechanisms for the funding and resourcing of education that promote – rather than hinder – inclusion are guided by financing policies that:

- Are *geared towards providing flexible, effective and efficient responses* to learners' needs;

- *Promote inter-sectoral collaboration* from relevant services;

- *Ensure co-ordination* between regional and national level funding structures.

Flexible resourcing systems can be seen to facilitate:

- *Decentralised approaches to the allocation of resources* that enable local organisations to support effective inclusive practice. Decentralised funding models are likely to be more cost-effective and more responsive to the needs of local populations;

- *Opportunities for financing preventative approaches* in education, as well as effective support for learners identified as having specific needs;

- Possibilities for *resourcing inclusion work in schools or other educational organisations based on a range of factors and not solely based upon diagnosis of individual learners' needs*. Such approaches provide flexibility in using financial resources according to identified organisational needs and requirements within the context of local or national policies.

> ### *Policies that promote inclusion*
>
> The promotion of quality in inclusive education requires a clearly stated policy. The goal of the school for all should be promoted in educational policies as well as supported via school ethos and leadership, as well as teachers' practice.

Policies that aim to promote quality in inclusive education:

- *Take account of international level policies and initiatives*;

- Are flexible enough *to reflect local level needs*;

- *Maximise the factors supporting inclusion* – as outlined above – for the individual learner and their parents at the teacher and educational organisation levels.

To implement inclusive education, the goals of the policy should be effectively communicated to all members of the educational community. Educational leaders at all levels – national, regional, community, as well as organisational – have an essential role in translating and implementing policy that promotes quality in inclusive education. Policies that promote quality in inclusive education need to address attitudes towards learners with diverse needs, as well as propose action to meet their needs. Such policies:

- *Outline teacher, school/educational organisation and support structure/service level responsibilities*, as well as,

- *Outline the support and training that will be provided* for all stakeholders in order for these responsibilities to be fulfilled.

Policies for promoting inclusion and meeting individual learners' needs within all educational sectors are 'integrated' across sectors and services. Such policies should be multi-phase and trans-sectoral and actively encourage inter-sectoral co-operation ensuring that:

- At national and local levels, *policy makers from the educational, health and social sectors need to work co-operatively* to devise policies and plans that will facilitate and actively support a inter-disciplinary approach in all phases of lifelong learning;

- *Flexible frameworks of provision that support inclusive practice are applied to all sectors of educational provision*. The inclusion of learners with diverse needs within the secondary sector, transition from school to employment phase, post compulsory, higher and adult

education needs to be given the same degree of focus as within the pre-primary and primary sectors;

- Policies aim to *facilitate sharing of good practice and support research and development* for new educational approaches, methods and tools.

Whilst in the short term there should be a recognisable separate action plan or strategy for inclusive education within general policies, in the long term, inclusion in education should be 'a given' within all educational policies and strategies.

Arrangements for monitoring the implementation of policies should be agreed upon at the policy planning stage. This involves:

- *Identifying suitable indicators* to be used as a tool for monitoring developments in policy and practice;

- *Promoting partnerships* between schools, local policy makers and parents to ensure greater accountability for the services provided;

- *Establishing procedures for the evaluation* of the quality of provision for all learners in the educational system and in particular,

- *Evaluating the effect of policies* in relation to their impact upon equality of opportunity for all learners.

Legislation that promotes inclusion

All legislation that potentially impacts upon inclusive education within a country should clearly state inclusion as a goal. Consequently, legislation across all public sectors should lead to the provision of services that enhance developments and processes working towards inclusion in education.

In particular, there should be:

- *'Integrated' legislation across sectors* leading to consistency between inclusive education and other policy initiatives;

- *One legal framework covering inclusive education* in all educational sectors and levels.

Comprehensive and co-ordinated legislation for inclusive education that fully addresses issues of flexibility, diversity and equity in all educational institutions for all learners. It ensures that policy,

provision and support are consistent across geographical areas of a country/region. Such legislation is based upon:

- *A 'rights approach'* where individual learners (along with their families or carers as is appropriate) can access mainstream education and necessary support services within all levels;

- The *alignment of national legislation with international agreements* and statements concerning inclusion.

Concluding comments

In considering the main messages evident across the Agency's work, it can be seen that the continuing commitment of countries to promoting inclusion will be indicated by a decrease in the number of learners in fully separate (segregated) provision across Europe.

It is argued that the necessary systemic changes in policy and provision aimed at promoting quality in inclusive education can be guided by the inter-related and mutually supporting key principles outlined in the sections above.

4. MORE INFORMATION

All of the information referred to in this document can be found on the *Key Principles* area of Agency website:
http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/key-principles

This includes:

- A 'matrix' of evidence from Agency studies supporting each of the key principles outlined in section 3;

- Links to, or file downloads of all Agency documents and other materials referred to in this document.

Specific references to all the materials used in drafting this document are given below.

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All of these publications are available to download in up to 21 languages from the publications section of the Agency website: http://www.european-agency.org/publications

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The first report in the Key Principles series was published by the Agency in 2003 and was based upon Agency work published until then. This latest edition draws upon Agency work from 2003 onwards.

As with the previous edition, this document has been prepared by educational policy makers in order to provide other policy makers across Europe with a synthesis of the main policy findings that have emerged from the Agency's thematic work.

The aim is to highlight recommendations regarding key aspects of educational policy that seem to be effective in supporting the inclusion of learners with a diverse range of needs within mainstream provision.

A main message of this report is that these key principle recommendations essentially underpin the principles of promoting quality education for all learners.