

POLICY ON SPECIAL AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Ministry of Education, Heritage & Arts

approved by the honourable minister for education,

heritage & arts, dr. mahendra reddy 29/01/16

1.0 POLICY OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework that will ensure and strengthen access to quality education for all persons with disabilities in all schools throughout Fiji. Quality education reflects the spirit of equity, inclusion, access, progress and achievement of educational outcomes that will guide and direct the journey of one's lifelong learning and the opportunity to enjoy one's quality of life. While all children should be given the opportunity to learn together wherever possible in mainstream schools close to their homes regardless of difficulties, disabilities or differences, it is recognised that for some students, Special Schools are an important option. This policy will reflect on the rights of persons with disabilities according to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

2.0 POLICY

With the implementation and monitoring of this policy, the Ministry of Education, Heritage & Arts (hereinafter referred to as MoEHA) shall:

- Strengthen and support the Special and Inclusive Education Unit (hereinafter referred to as SIEU) for improved coordination and effective service delivery.
- Screen students in all schools to identify functional limitations / disabilities, and develop intervention and management plans to maximize learning outcomes.
- Provide necessary supports to all schools to enable adequate staffing, teaching / learning resources and infrastructure to support inclusion of students with disabilities.
- Implement and strengthen Early Intervention Programs in Special Schools and Early Childhood Centres to strengthen and support the early years of foundational learning as a basis for success and further learning.
- Support the strengthening of pre-service and in-service teacher education within Teacher Training Institutions to provide the necessary human resource support to mainstream as well as Special Schools.

- Strengthen and support Vocational Training Programmes in Special Schools and Vocational Training Centres in order to improve access to employment opportunities and livelihoods, and to support lifelong learning of persons with disabilities.
- Review the existing curriculum so that it is inclusive, flexible and adaptable, and reasonably accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities.
- Improve access to quality education for all persons with disabilities at Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary, Vocational Training and Technical College levels, as well as at Special Schools as appropriate.
- Provide educational outreach programmes in the communities as a means of sharing information and awareness on the rights of and opportunities for persons with disabilities to attend school.
- Monitor and evaluate the implementation of the special and inclusive education policy and programmes in schools through the Special and Inclusive Education Unit (hereinafter referred to as SIEU).

3.0 BACKGROUND

Introduction

Inclusive education has been in existence in Fiji since the 1960's, when many of the Catholic Church schools such as St Joseph's Secondary School and Marist Brothers High School enrolled students with disabilities. However, students with severe or less visible disabilities such as hearing impairment and intellectual disability were often excluded.

In 1967, Fiji's first Special School, Hilton Special School, was established by the Fiji Crippled Children's Society to provide education for students with severe physical and hearing impairments. Later, more Special Schools were established around the country; to date there are Special Schools and two Vocational Training Centres specifically for persons with disabilities.

The policy for the education of students with disabilities was first endorsed in 2010. This policy was reviewed for the second time in 2016. An implementation plan is drawn for 2017 – 2020 after an extensive consultation with the key representatives from the MoEHA, Disabled People's Organisations, Teacher Training Institutions and schools, with support from the Australian government funded Access to Quality Education Program. The Special and Inclusive Education Policy Implementation Plan 2017 - 2020 was developed to support a realistic, staged approach to implementing the Policy.

Rationale

Special Schools in Fiji are located only in the main town areas. Access to education for children who live in the outer islands and rural areas is therefore very limited. Including students with disabilities in mainstream educational options, known as inclusive education,

is therefore vital, as it allows children to be educated within their neighbourhood schools, close to home.

Inclusive education is based on the following key principles:

- All children should experience a sense of belonging within their local school.
- All children can learn – if they are provided with an enabling learning environment, appropriate equipment, and parental support. Learning that takes place may differ according to students' abilities, however, learning of all students can be nurtured and developed by teachers and other school staff in school settings.
- All children have the right to fully participate in all school activities and their communities alongside their peers.
- The process of education is a lifelong journey beginning from prenatal development right to one's twilight years, involving children, families, and teachers, school communities, local communities, non-government and Government organizations.
- While inclusive education is a key directive of this policy, special schools are crucial environment for students with particular disabilities, in that they enable students to learn key skills such as sign language or braille which complement their education in a mainstream environment, and provide important educational support options for students with severe or complex disabilities. Thus, this policy promotes the development of both special and inclusive education options.

4.0 DEFINITIONS

Behavioural Difficulty: Behavioural difficulties are characterised by difficulty controlling behaviour; and/or focusing and concentrating; and/or accepting changes to routine.

Disabled Person's Organisations: Disabled Person's Organisations (DPOs) are representative self-advocacy groups of persons with disability, which are controlled by a majority of people with disability (51%) at the board and membership levels.

Early Intervention: Early intervention services are provided to young children with disabilities generally aged from birth up to six years. The earlier the children's needs are identified and appropriate intervention measures taken, the better opportunity there is for the child to succeed in the next phase of learning.

Emotional Difficulty: Emotional difficulties are characterised by high levels of sadness and/or anxiety.

Hearing Impairment: Hearing impairment is a partial or total inability to hear.

Inclusive Education: Inclusive Education occurs when mainstream schools accept, enrol and provide quality, appropriate educational support to persons with disabilities alongside all other students.

Intellectual impairment: Intellectual impairment is characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning (reasoning, learning, problem solving) and in adaptive behaviour, which covers a range of everyday social and practical skills.

Person with disability: Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Physical impairment: Physical impairments are difficulties in moving parts of the body, including difficulties with large movements such as walking, bending, reaching, sitting and standing, as well as smaller movements using the hands.

School: For the purposes of this Policy, schools include Early Childhood Education Centres, Primary Schools, Secondary Schools, Special Schools, and Vocational and Technical College Campuses.

Specific Learning Disability: Specific Learning Disabilities refer to problems the brain has in receiving, remembering, understanding, organizing and using verbal and/or non-verbal information, and may affect listening, thinking, speaking, writing, reading, spelling or mathematical calculation.

Special Education or Special Needs Education: Special Education or Special Needs Education is the education of persons with disabilities in a way that addresses their individual differences and needs, in a specific educational setting designed exclusively for persons with disabilities, such as a Special School.

Speech impairment: Speech and language impairments are communication disorders such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language or voice impairments.

Vision Impairment: Vision impairment is a limitation of one or more functions of the eye.

5.0 RELEVANT LEGISLATIONS AND AUTHORITIES

- Constitution of the Republic of Fiji -2013, Chapter 2 Section 42 (1)-(3)
- Fiji Human Rights Commission Act (1999)
- Fiji National Council for Persons with Disabilities (FNCDP) Act 1994
- Ministry of Education Strategic Plan - 2015-2018
- National Policy on Persons living with Disabilities 2008 -2018
- Peoples Charter for Change, Peace and Progress: Pillars 4 and 9 (2008)
- Social Justice Act -2011
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific

6.0 PROCEDURES

Strengthening the Special and Inclusive Education Unit (SIEU) within the MoEHA

Strengthening of working relations between the SIEU and the District Officers shall be undertaken, including through capacity building in all education districts and schools.

Collaboration towards the achievement of this Policy shall continue across and between line Ministries, Non-Government Organizations and Disabled People's Organisations.

Provision of necessary support to all schools on adequate staffing, teaching / learning resources and infrastructure towards the inclusion of students with disabilities.

Appropriate sanctioned support staff including but not limited to teacher aides, equipment and educational resources shall be provided to schools to assist learning and teaching. School infrastructure, including classrooms, walkways, water and sanitation facilities shall be made accessible to persons with disabilities, including wheelchair users.

Staffing at Special Schools shall be determined by the formula in 6.3.4 / 6.3.5 and shall be revised prior to the review date of this policy. Teaching one child with moderate disability is equivalent to teaching four children without disability (1:4). A person with moderate disability has a lot of difficulty with functioning in one or more domains.

Teaching one child with severe/profound disability is equivalent to teaching six children without disability (1:6). A person with a severe or profound disability has very limited functioning domain, a lot of difficulty with functioning in two or more domains, or cannot do at all in at least one functional domain.

Strengthening of Early Intervention Programmes in all Special Schools

Early intervention programmes in all Special Schools and Early Childhood Centres shall be affirmed and strengthened, linking with existing community-based programmes.

Teachers shall be appropriately trained to support the provision of early intervention services.

Strengthening Teacher Education in the area of Special and Inclusive Education

All teachers teaching in both regular and special education schools shall receive quality special / inclusive pre-service and in service training that is responsive to the needs of all students in all schools.

In-service and Pre-service Teacher Education at all teacher training institutions shall include screening and referral of students with disabilities, as well as the provision of reasonable accommodations to facilitate inclusion.

Flexible and appropriate teaching instructions shall be used for effective learning.

Strengthening of Vocational Training Programs and courses at Technical College Campuses to support the transition into employment and life skills for persons with disabilities.

Current vocational training programs in special schools and secondary vocational centres shall be reviewed to identify and address challenges faced by persons with disabilities.

Vocational Training Centres and Technical College Campuses shall be strengthened to enable equitable participation by persons with disabilities.

Adapt curriculum and assessment processes to reasonably accommodated the needs of persons with disabilities

A relevant, flexible and adaptable curriculum shall be designed to meet the needs of all students. All persons with disabilities shall participate in standardised assessment.

Reasonable accommodations to enable the participation of persons with all types of disability will be made, including provision of practical alternative assessments for persons with disabilities that affect learning at the same level as others (e.g. intellectual disabilities).

Effective teaching strategies and techniques shall be used to optimise learning and teaching.

A disability friendly learning environment, that is conducive for learning and teaching, shall be provided.

Improve access to quality education for all persons with disabilities at Early Childhood Centres, Primary, Secondary and Special Schools, and Vocational Training Programs and Technical College Campuses

The MoEHA shall ensure that the Head of special and mainstream schools are familiar with their roles and responsibilities towards the implementation of this policy.

Scholarships and grants shall be lobbied to assist students with disabilities to access school.

Where possible and appropriate, persons with disabilities shall be supported to progress from special to mainstream schools, and from primary, to secondary and tertiary institutions.

Partnerships between mainstream and special schools shall be maintained in order to accommodate and support referrals of students with disabilities.

Provide and support educational outreach programmes in all communities as a means of sharing information and awareness on the rights of and opportunities for persons with disabilities to attend school

A positive image for persons with disabilities shall be promoted through:

- Publications such as a website and a quarterly newsletter;

- The development and strengthening of a biannual school based poster design, essay writing and oratory competition

Monitoring and evaluation on the implementation of the special and inclusive education policy and programmes in schools

A committee shall be established to monitor implementation of this policy where SEIU takes the lead role.

The Head of School shall operationalise and closely administer the implementation of the FEMIS disability disaggregation package to enable monitoring of enrolment and attendance of persons with disabilities in school. She/he shall also schedule teacher professional development programmes and improve school infrastructure to measure progress against other indicators outlined within the jurisdiction of the Policy Implementation Plan.

The school head shall undertake a quarterly evaluation and review of the policy implementation plan through which the relevant recommendations to the MoEHA Senior Staff will be made based on the findings.

Student Placement

Where possible, students shall be enrolled in age-appropriate classes. However, at times persons with disabilities will require flexible learning options, and reasonable accommodations may need to be made to enable students to be placed in classes with younger children, according to their learning needs. The basic corresponding ages for Year levels are as follows:

- a. Birth to 8years: Early Childhood Education
- b. 6 years – 10 years: Junior Class
- c. 10 years – 14 years: Intermediate Class
- d. 15 – 18 years Senior Class
- e. 19 years – 30 years Vocational Studies