Cook Islands Ministry of Education

TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

THE COOK ISLANDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY, 2011

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A BEACON OF HOPE FROM EVERYDAY STRUGGLES IN THE COOK ISLANDS

Inclusive Education Policy, 2011

November, 2011

Inclusion is a process. Inclusive Education is not merely about providing access into mainstream school for pupils who have previously being excluded. It is not about closing down an unacceptable system of segregated provision and dumping those pupils in an unchanged mainstream system. Existing school systems [in terms of physical factors, curriculum aspects, teaching expectations and styles, leadership roles] will have to change. This is because inclusive education is about the participation of all children and young people and the removal of all forms of exclusionary practice.

(Barton, 1998, p.85)

Preparation does not necessarily mean textbook knowledge of various physical and mental conditions...The most important preparation are to meet and get to know the child. No matter what physical or mental challenges the child presents, he or she has the same basic needs as all other students- the need for understanding and respect, the need to be listened to and appreciated, and the need to learn in his or her own style. If teachers address these needs competently, everything will fall into place.

(Murray, 1991, p.175)

The vertical band on the cover is a contemporary artwork, based on Cook Islands Tatau, by Ian George, the Visual Arts Adviser, at the Cook Islands Ministry of Education, 2011. The design is made up of two patterns that depict an underlying principle of this policy - Inclusivity- where everyone in the community feel that they belong- a community that works together, united, that cares for each other and the partnership that we can all enjoy as a crucial part of our life- long journey as learners.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

PREAMBLE

The Cook Islands Inclusive Education Policy is a policy to ensure that our education system is inclusive, equitable, fair and just and that the teaching curriculum of the MOE is accessible by ALL children of the Cook Islands.

FOREWORD

The Cook Islands Education Master Plan (2008-2023) provides the strategic direction for education across four key focus areas: Taku Ipukarea Kia Rangatira; Learning and Teaching; Learning and the Community; and Infrastructure and Support. The Master Plan recognizes that education is not the sole responsibility of any one group, but it is the collective responsibility of everyone across all sectors of the community. Through a process of consultation and collaboration we can jointly create opportunities for success and excellence for all.

Within this context, an important area that requires a concerted effort, co-operation and dialogue is Inclusive Education. If we are to genuinely aspire to the seven key principles that underpin the Education Master Plan, it is critically important that our programmes and curriculum delivery in schools reflect quality, equity, efficiency, partnership, relevancy, sustainability and excellence. Inclusive Education recognizes the *inclusivity* of all learners, where *ALL* are *valued and truly belong*. To this end, it is critically important that we all engage collaboratively in a re-thinking and re-conceptualization process to ensure that access to equitable and quality opportunities produces success and excellent for all learners.

It is important that we acknowledge those who pioneered the education of children with special needs in the Cook Islands. This policy has built on the initial work carried out by Ken Matheson (former Secretary of Education) and his team, including the former Special Needs Advisor, Jason Court. Their original Special Needs Education Policy (2002) formed the basis for the review which has culminated in this new-look Inclusive Education Policy, 2011.

We acknowledge PRIDE *(Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of Basic Education)* for their support in funding the production of this Policy and all those who participated in the preliminary consultation, particularly representatives from the islands of Mangaia, Mitiaro, Atiu, Aitutaki, Mauke, Manihiki and Rakahanga. The many representatives from community organizations, parents, teachers, other government departments especially the Ministry of health and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Non-Government Organization, representatives from the Cook Islands national Disability Council and Disability Action Team and, of course, the Inclusive Education Advisor, who wrote the policy, Mr. Laisiasa Merumeru, are all to be congratulated.

It is my hope that this policy will guide the future direction of Inclusive Education in the Cook Islands so that it truly is all encompassing and targeted to best meet desired outcomes.

Kia Manuia

Sharyn Paio
Secretary of Education

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1.0 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION CONTEXT

The concept and practice of Inclusive education has gained importance in recent years. The term is increasingly understood, the world over, as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners (UNESCO, 2009). Another increasingly popular Global view is that Inclusive education is a process that involves the transformation of schools and other centres of learning to cater for ALL children- including boys and girls, abused children, displaced children, religious minorities, migrants, poverty stricken children, child domestic workers, ethnic minorities, linguistic minorities, children in conflict/war zones, indigenous children, child soldiers, street children, children from rural or isolated populations, nomadic children, children suffering from HIV/AIDS and orphans and children living with disabilities (UNESCO, 2009).

While the net drifts wide and the intention of this policy seems idealistic given the wide range of children that other countries of the world are trying to include in their educational framework, the Cook Islands embraces the fact that there are "tamariki o te Kuki Airani" all over the world with different educational needs and it is therefore imperative that an intent of the new Inclusive Education policy, 2011 is to continually mould our education system by bringing about changes that will prepare us for the future to cater for the needs of all children of the Cook Islands as and when they decide to return to their country.

This document is a culmination of wide consultation workshops throughout the Cook Islands and it carries the voices of the people who were represented by heads or reps of societal interests groups and stakeholders to education in the Cook Islands. The policy focuses on the rights of ALL children to have a successful education and on developing understanding of inclusivity and how to promote inclusive practices within classrooms and schools in the Cook Islands to ensure the needs of ALL children are met.

This policy also takes account of the findings of recent relevant educational research, which promotes the concept of inclusion. It is developed on the premise of research-based successful educational practice to provide educational stakeholders with the necessary skills, knowledge and understandings to assist them to become professionally equipped to address the learning and developmental needs of students at both ends of the spectrum: from those with learning difficulties to the exceptionally able or gifted child as they are encountered in the classroom.

The policy ensures that all school aged children (as defined by the Education Act) will be educated with their peers in mainstream ECE centers, Primary and Secondary schools and no one should be exempted from school due to their ability or the lack of.

It is a working document that provides a guideline for schools in the Cook Islands and their stakeholders to re-look at their current policies and practices and to ensure that ALL children are included and that their learning needs are met.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

2.1 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive Education is a process of change. Within this process, all education stakeholders will work together to strengthen the capacity of our education system to reach out to ALL learners. All schools and learning institutions will need to make changes in order to recognise the diversity that all children as well as all members of the school community bring with them to a school setting. Inclusive Education is about changing the system to suit the needs of all children.

2.2 SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS

Students with special learning needs are those students who for various reasons are not developing to their full educational potential or are at risk of not achieving the major achievement objectives of the Cook Islands Curriculum. This refers to those students who are at risk of underachieving including those with specific learning and behavioural difficulties as well as those gifted and talented students who may not be realising their full potential. Students with "Special Learning Needs" also include those that have been previously referred to as students with "Special Needs" that include the following:-

2.2.1 Students with sensorial impairment- (auditory or visual disabilities).

2.2.2 Students with developmental delay (PDD- pervasive developmental delay; GDD – Global Developmental Delay etc)

2.2.3 Students with Intellectual impairment (ranging from Cognitive delay to Gifted and talented Students).

2.2.4 Students with Physical impairment (where mobility or functions requiring motor movements are affected).

2.2.5 Students with Behavioural differences (differences in social, emotional or spiritual domain of development due to various environmental external or internal factors such as childhood trauma or victims of bullying, Attention Deficient Disorder (ADD) / Attention Deficiet Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), child abuse victims etc).

2.2.6 Students with Communication difficultie (e.g. delayed speech, difficulties in language acquisition or other communication disabilities, children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Aspergers' syndrome).

2.2.7 Students with chronic health ailments or injuries that is either congenital or acquired

2.2.8 Students with Specific Learning Disabilities(SLD)such as the difficulty in reading due to Dyslexia or difficulty in expressing thoughts in writing and graphing due to Dysgraphia or other conditions that affect learning.

2.2.9 Students with Multiple disabilities (combination of one or more of the impairments e.g. a child with visual and hearing impairment is unable to see and hear).

2.2.10 Students *at risk* because they are functioning well below their peers academically either in literacy or numeracy or across subject areas. There may be some students who are "at risk" also because of the geographical location of their schools [example children from Northern Group Schools] or due to other 'risk factors' either within or out of the school community.

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2.3   PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Key principles of Inclusive Education include:-

2.3.1   Humility: - in order to value all students, staff, parents and other stakeholders equally.

2.3.2   Belief: - that ALL children have a right to education

2.3.3   Acknowledging the right of students to an education in their locality. Schooling is in partnership with wider community of stakeholders

2.3.4   Recognising individual potential and respecting differences- where differences are valued as a resource to support learning rather than problems to be overcome.

2.3.5   Restructuring school cultures, policies and practices to meet the needs of ALL students in their locality.

2.3.6   Personalized educational programmes negotiated between community/parents/stakeholders.

2.3.7   Inclusivity: - a spirit of working together that ensures that everyone including ALL students and stakeholders (parents, caregivers, teachers, management, PTA etc) feel that they belong and their views and values are respected. Where no one should be discriminated or segregated by school policies and/or organisation methods/rules that are based solely on one or a combination of the following:- gender, geographical location, economic background, level of ability, religious beliefs, impairment or disability.

2.4   INDIVIDUAL FAMILY SUPPORT PLAN (IFSP)

A multidisciplinary[1] plan that specifies support for family of children that have been identified as "at risk" due to a diagnosed or identified disability.

2.5   INDIVIDUAL EDUCATIONAL PLAN (IEP)

An IEP identifies the things that are most important for the students to learn, how they will be taught and who is responsible for teaching them. These priority goals are developed by the student and the people who support the student e.g. parents, teacher, teacher aide. Etc.

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[1]   A multidisciplinary team is made up of reps from government departments (Health, Education and Internal Affairs) and Non Government Organizations (NGOs). This team meets when a child has been identified as having a disability as part of the Early Identification and Early Intervention Approach taken by the Cook Islands Government.

3.0 OBJECTIVE

3.1   What is the purpose of this policy?

A.   The overarching aim of the policy document is aligned with the definition of Inclusive Education and the spirit (Principles) of this document and that is to ensure that stakeholders continually engage in dialogue and processes that will bring about changes in school settings to ensure that the school culture is promoting principles of Inclusivity that builds a system where everyone is "valued and does belong"

B.   While the policy document guarantees and promotes inclusivity for ALL children, it recognises that there are children and their families who are currently marginalised due to an unfair system that is unable to meet their educational needs. This policy therefore, sees the need to focus and recognise these children as having "Special Needs" due to any one of or a range of differences or deviation from the biomedical definition of "norm": - as defined in 2.2 → 2.2.10 above.

C.   The policy also ensures that all children categorised as having special learning needs or "at risk" are identified and as part of pre-enrolment procedures or at the principal's discretion, a multidisciplinary team is engaged in an IEP process that will ultimately see the production of an IEP working document that specifies priority goals and intervention plans that will include, monitoring and evaluation procedures and a review date. The IEP document is a guide to be used by teachers, specialists and other stakeholders to the child with special learning needs within a culture of tolerance and acceptance.

4.0   RATIONALE

There are a proportion of children who may not be developing or achieving to their potential within the current education system. All children and students have a fundamental right to education and must be given the opportunity to achieve to their full potential. All students need an education system that is fair and equitable. Equity needs to apply at all levels of the education system and across all islands. Inclusive schools are effective in maximising learning outcomes and in developing positive attitudes towards others, creating acceptance and achieving beneficial education through a system that is fair and equitable.

It is noted that this policy is written so that stakeholders can recognise the diversity that all children bring with them to the fore especially children with disabilities who are still the most marginalised in the Cook Islands but there are also some children who are "at risk" and have been disadvantaged by their geographical isolation (e.g. children in the outer islands especially children in the northern group). We need a policy that will ensure that the educational needs of all children from disadvantage or marginalised groups, are properly diagnosed and an IEP is written for students "at risk" of failing with a clear exit point for intervention and a clear pathway to reintegration if the IEP team feels that segregated/exclusive setting is in the best interest of the child. This policy will also clarify some contentious issues of debate that arose from the review of the special needs policy of 2002.

We need this policy to guide the move towards inclusivity in the Cook Islands and to ensure that our education system will ultimately be equipped to cater for the needs of all our children and be a tool for achieving the global Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and Education For All (EFA) goals as well as to protect the rights of all children to a successful education free of all forms of exclusionary and segregational practices.

The ultimate aim of an Inclusive education system is an inclusive Cook Islands society where all can feel that they truly belong. The migration of families and individuals from outer islands to Rarotonga as well as on to New Zealand or other countries is a pressing issue for government and as raised in the consultations, one of the reasons could be the inability of our mainstream schools to cater for children's educational needs especially children with disabilities or those whose differences pose major challenges to our education system because of their special learning needs, thus the aims of this policy:-

5.0   POLICY AIMS

This document aims to:

5.1   Outline the responsibilities of the Ministry of Education, schools and key stakeholders to ensure the continuous engagement in inclusive processes that promotes inclusivity in all that we do.

5.2   Provide schools with guidelines for developing procedures that cater for students with special learning and teaching needs and those children "at risk" as defined in 3.1 above.

5.3   Ensures that the Cook Island Education system is ready to cater for the learning needs of returning Cook Islander students who have special Educational needs.

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6.0 POLICY DIRECTIONS

6.1 Support Services shall be provided through the:

6.1.1 Employment of a Teaching and Learning Adviser (Inclusive Education) with the School Support Division of the Ministry of Education in Rarotonga and, where possible, an Education Adviser in the northern group to oversee and supervise the implementation of this policy in the northern group as well as overseeing other special projects such as literacy and numeracy up north and other functions of the ministry of education.

6.1.2 Employment of an Inclusive Education Coordinator to manage the satellite unit specified in 6.1.10 below)

6.1.3 Employment of (where necessary and possible) a full time educational psychologist and or a team of specialists or the sharing of specialists with other government ministries e.g. educational psychologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, ophthalmologist, dentists, audiologists, doctors and nurses etc.

6.1.4 Maintenance of a resource centre at the School Support Division OR a section in the MOE Library which:

    a. Houses a range of up to date inclusive education materials including articles and books on inclusion, tips for teachers and parents of children with disabilities or special learning needs as defined in 3.1 above, teaching pedagogies and teaching learning process and related topics, and other resources- including assistive devices, equipment, computers and computer software or programmes available for use by teachers and stakeholders. Where necessary and relevant, if these can be available on MOE's website to be accessed by the public.

    b. Contains a registry of local, national and international resource people and specialists.

    c. Contains a registry of stakeholders in special/inclusive education to facilitate communication and provide a means of ongoing support;

    d. Outlines procedures for procurement, accessing and inventing resources which need to be defined and made available on MOE's website for ease of access OR standard template designed and distributed to schools.

    e. Contains all Flyers/cards on tips on all facets of inclusive education to be made available also where necessary and relevant, on the web or in hard copy as part of the collection of materials for resources for advocacy work in schools or in community.

    f. Contains took kit for inclusive schools index and other useful resources to enable schools to build inclusive settings and self-regulate how inclusive their school and classrooms are becoming.

    g. Contains a range of psychometric and diagnostic assessment tools ranging from the early years through to secondary schools for assessment purposes and planning. [e.gs. Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ); The Carolina Curriculum; PM Benchmark, PROBE, Ashton index, etc]

6.1.5 Supply of trained teacher aides are working in schools to support teachers in the education of children with special educational needs who have been ascertained, after an IEP Multidisciplinary meeting, as having high support needs.

6.1.6 Provision of additional resources and assistive devices for students with special learning needs where necessary and possible and agreed to by stakeholders in an IEP meeting.

6.1.7 Appointment of (where necessary and possible) school based Inclusive

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Education coordinators or principals nominee with designated management points to coordinate the schools learning support programmes and supervise teacher aides.

6.1.8 Empowering of Advisers across the Curriculum Key Learning Areas (KLAs) to ensuring the strengthening of inclusivity across subject areas so they can in turn encourage the teachers' preparation and planning for children with special Educational Needs and strategies and connective pedagogies needed to ensure that the curriculum is accessible to ALL learners.

6.1.9 Appointment of an Inclusive Education Advisory council or subject reference group of stakeholders to supervise these policy directions.

6.1.10 The setting up and development of a satellite Inclusive Education Unit complete with resources and user friendly environment within a college(currently at Nukutere College) for intake of students from Primary schools from throughout the Cook Islands with special educational needs who have high support needs who can be transitioned into college.

6.1.11 Funding made available for principals or principal's nominees as Inclusive Education Coordinators to have work attachment in inclusive schools in NZ or Australia in order to see best practices in Inclusivity being modelled.

6.1.12 The resourcing of and staffing of the creative centre as a vocational centre and recognising it as a learning institution for post-secondary adult learners being transitioned into society and into independent living.

6.2 Teacher Education programmes shall be provided including the:

6.2.1 provision of professional development in inclusive education best practices and approaches, for in-service teachers through school based professional development sessions.

6.2.2 ensuring that inclusive education practices are an integral part of teaching and learning advisory support.

6.2.3 training of teacher aides to support teachers in the education of students with Special learning and teaching needs.

6.2.4 preparation and development of course materials aimed at up skilling in-service teachers on special Topics such as :-
The Inclusive Education Policy and school based policy development;
The Inclusive Classroom; Focused observation and critical Reflection;
Child Development- understanding how children learn in the early years;
Early Identification and Intervention;
The Effective Inclusive Teacher;
Effective Classroom Management;
Remedial Teaching Strategies;
Strategies for teaching children with Disabilities;
Strategies for planning for students with high support needs;
Certificate in Teacher Aiding- NZQA Level 3 OR Level 4

6.2.5 Exploration of different modes of delivery for the above courses e.g. Distance and Flexible learning mode and Stages or Cycles of training Modules for in-service teachers and teacher aides.

6.3   Identification and Assessment programmes shall be provided through the:

6.3.1   Development and implementation of procedures for the early assessment and identification of preschool children and students with special learning and teaching needs (early identification and intervention system are being developed at the time this policy was being written);

6.3.2   Use of a multi-disciplinary approach to identifying and assessing children of concern to schools ; (use of health, education and other professionals in assessing and identifying student need)

6.3.3   Referral of cases to health and education professionals or specialists where needed and necessary;

6.3.4   Maintenance of confidential records of identification procedures, assessments and results and reporting of this information to the principal, MOE, parents/caregivers and the students themselves.

6.3.5   Formulation and development of a Memorandum of understanding between MOE, MOH and MOINTAFF for the sharing of resources and personnel for identification, assessment and diagnostic tests and processes and the sharing of a common central data base for children with disabilities or high support needs.

6.4   Educational Strategies shall include the:

6.4.1   Provision of altered assessment and teaching procedures to ensure that students with special learning and teaching needs are not disadvantaged;

6.4.2   Enrolment of all students;

6.4.3   Promotion of students with special learning needs through the compulsory part of the education system with their peers;

6.4.4   Provision of a learning environment where children are safe, valued, respected, encouraged, free from verbal and physical threat and where they experience success;

6.4.5   Modification of teaching programmes for students with special learning and teaching needs so that they can take part (as far as possible) in the regular classroom programme; and

6.4.6   Provision of alternative programs for the education of students who are not able to be included in the regular classroom [Note: *this should only be done after deep and careful consideration of all issues and challenges posed on a case by case bases and as a result of inclusive consultations with stakeholders to the case in question through IEP meetings case conferences and where the child needs to be taught in a special needs support unit, after due process have been exhausted, IEP programme outcome of IEP meeting with stakeholders has taken place and where , child (where applicable) , parents, teachers, school (principal),MOE (represented by principal's nominee or IE Advisor), teacher aide (where applicable) have all agreed and their signatures on the form to prove this agreement, only then will a child be pulled out of the classroom and a timetable of these one to one out of class session be prepared completed with the review date on when this separation will be reviewed and child is transitioned back into the classroom. The ultimate decision on the placement and programme of a child with learning needs or disabilities for longer periods (e.g 2-6 months or more) will rest with the Secretary of Education who will make a final decision based on recommendations from the Teaching and Learning Adviser(Inclusive Education) or where applicable a multidisciplinary IEP Team*]

7.0   RESPONSIBILITIES

Every section of the education system has a role to play in the education of students with special learning needs. Together we can build an inclusive education system that meets the diverse needs of all students within a culture of acceptance and understanding.

7.1   The Ministry of Education is responsible for:

7.1.1   Making school buildings physically accessible to children and students with special needs;

7.1.2   Informing the community of new development and initiatives in the education of young children and students with special learning and teaching needs;

7.1.3   Ensuring a supply of trained teacher aides are working in schools to support teachers in the education of students with special learning needs;

7.1.4   Ensuring that alternative provisions are made for the education of students who are not able to be included in the regular classroom;

7.1.5   Upholding a memorandum of understanding with the ministries of Health and Internal Affairs for providing a multi-disciplinary approach to the inclusion of children with special learning needs.

7.1.6   The setting up of an Inclusive Education Advisory Committee or subject reference group and its functions, to oversee and direct the implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy.

7.2   The Policy, Planning and Review Division (PPR) is responsible for:

7.2.1   Providing guidelines to ensure that students with special learning needs are not discriminated against by assessment and other teaching procedures; and

7.2.2   Monitoring the implementation and evaluation of the Inclusive education policy within schools.

7.2.3   Researching more inclusive pedagogies of planning and assessment for ALL children especially considering the needs of children with Special Learning needs or children "at risk".

7.3   The Teaching and Learning Advisor (Inclusive Education) is responsible for:

7.3.1   Guiding schools in the implementation of the Inclusive Education policy

7.3.2   Providing advisory services to schools to enhance the development of individual and school wide intervention programmes (including the development of IEP's) for students with special learning needs;

7.3.3   Sourcing external assistance in the form of funding, expertise, Inclusive education project proposals or minor initiatives and resources where necessary;

7.3.4   Liaising with other agencies and stakeholders to assist schools to provide services to students with special learning needs;

7.3.5   Taking a lead in the development of Inclusive Education policy review and strategy;

7.3.6   Maintaining an updated Inclusive Education Register of the special learning and teaching needs of students in the Cook Islands; and

7.3.7   Maintaining a resource centre(where possible one for each Island/cluster of schools on Rarotonga) that

    a.   Houses a range of special education materials and resources available for use by teachers and stakeholders;

    b.   Contains a registry of local, national and international resource people; and

    c.   Contains a registry of stakeholders in special education to facilitate communication and provide a means of ongoing support.

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7.3.8   Facilitating the training of teacher aids.

7.3.9   Facilitating the implementation of the Cook Islands early Identification and Intervention Multidisciplinary system of referral guided by the existing MoU between the MOE, MOH and MOINTAFF

7.3.10   Ensuring that teachers receive professional development in Inclusive education practices throughout their career. Professional development may include in-service training, personal study and school based courses on Inclusive Education with the following learning outcomes for teachers:-

    7.3.10.1   Demonstrate a sound understanding of the principles of inclusive practices.

    7.3.10.2   Value the importance of being a practicing reflective researcher using inclusive action research approach in order to explore and change school practices, policies and traditions/cultures that are exclusionary in nature.

    7.3.10.3   Demonstrate positive attitudes towards teaching children with a range of abilities within the context of the mainstream classroom.

    7.3.10.4   able to understand and implement a range of assessment and diagnostic tools and data gathering processes.

    7.3.10.5   able to use the assessment data to plan effectively to meet the learning needs of students with a range of abilities and/or learning difficulties.

    7.3.10.6   Demonstrate the ability to assess needs and adapt the classroom curriculum to meet the learning needs of students "at risk" in their classrooms.

    7.3.10.7   Recognize obvious signs of atypical development and know where to seek advice and support.

7.4   School Principals are responsible for:

7.4.1   Implementing the Inclusive Education policy;

7.4.2   Enrolling *ALL* students;

7.4.3   Ensuring that students with Special Educational Needs are not discriminated against by assessment and teaching procedures;

7.4.4   Referring cases to the Teaching and Learning Adviser (Inclusive Education), and/or health and education professionals/specialists where necessary at the beginning of the school year for assessment and planning purposes.

7.4.5   Ensuring truancy is monitored and the requirements of the education act in regard to truancy are implemented;

7.4.6   Informing the community and the Ministry of Education about the programmes in place and the achievement of students with special learning needs;

7.5.1   Liaising with other agencies and stakeholders in providing services to students with special learning needs;

7.5.2   Supporting and Guiding the development and implementation of procedures for the early assessment and identification of preschool children and students with special learning needs (early intervention programme).

7.5.3   Promoting students with special learning needs through the education system with their peers;

7.5.4   For high school principals- Ensuring that high school students with special learning needs are supported in the careers education programme;

7.5.5   Ensuring that accommodations and modifications to the teaching programmes are made for students with special needs so that they can take part in the regular classroom programme.

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7.5.6   Reporting to the school committee when special conditions or resources are necessary to ensure equal educational opportunities exist for all students.

7.5.7   Overseeing the development and implementation of IEP's and monitoring the effectiveness of special education provisions in the school.

7.5.8   Organising and chairing the Individual Educational Planning (IEP) meetings For students who require IEPs

7.6   Teachers are responsible for:

7.6.1   Producing and implementing educational plans for ALL children under their charge with the input of parents and caregivers and other stakeholders[2] which meet individual students' needs (IEP's) and are consistent with Ministry of Education guidelines and national curriculums;

7.6.2   Maintaining confidential records of identification procedures, diagnostic assessments and results. Reporting this information to the principal, MOE, parents/ caregivers and the students themselves where applicable;

7.6.3   Promoting students with special learning needs through the education system with their peers (dual responsibility with principal);

7.6.4   Regularly monitoring in terms of outcomes, the effectiveness of programmes for student with special learning needs;

7.6.5   Ensuring that children learn in an environment where they are safe, valued, respected, encouraged, free from verbal and physical threat and where they experience success;

7.6.6   Reporting to the principal where special conditions or resources are necessary to ensure equal educational opportunities exist for all students; and

7.6.7   Encouraging the active participation of parents to work with teachers in developing individualised programmes.

7.6.8   Ensuring that the planning for children with special educational needs is done in consultation with Teacher Aides [Note: *teachers must bear in mind that the ultimate responsibility and duty of care for ALL children remains with them rather than the Teacher Aide whose sole responsibility is to Aid the teacher. At no time must the teacher aide be left alone with a child or a whole class unless approved by the principal and a supervising teacher(nominated by the principal) is close by to oversee the class in the absence of the teacher in-charge of that class*]

7.6.9   Keeping a Journal with entries of consistent critical reflections and evaluations of their teaching and work processes, learning highlights or issues. The Journal can also be used to log-in the extra help and interventions that have been attempted with students with special learning needs or students "at risk".

7.7   Teacher Aides Role Definition

Notwithstanding 7.6 above, Teachers have prime responsibility for the education of all students in their class., i.e., the planning, provision, monitoring and evaluation of learning. Teacher aides work under the supervision of a teacher/teachers and in accordance with defined school procedures to support teaching programmes and student learning.

Educational outcomes for students are defined in an Individual Education Programme (IEP) developed by the key team working with the student including teachers, teacher aides, parents care givers and specialists. Where appropriate, the student is also involved in developing the programme.

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[2]   Health department (Health nurse, doctor or rep), welfare officer/internal affairs or rep, church rep, disability officer or rep, parents and or rep, specialists (where necessary), MOE (principals' nominee or IE Advisor), subject teachers, form teacher, principal or VP, teacher aide or helper.

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When a teacher is allocated teacher aide time, the teacher should write a weekly plan based on the specific learning outcomes of the IEP. This plan provides direction for teacher aide support.

The weekly plan also provides opportunity for feedback about the student's achievement and also input into future plans by the teacher aide and other relevant members of staff.

The roles and responsibilities of a teacher aide vary from class to class, school to school and primary to secondary settings.

7.7.1 The Professional Requirements of Teacher Aides are to:

1. Work in partnership with students, teachers and specialists
2. Work effectively as a member of a team
3. Be flexible (e.g. working where the teacher requires so that at times the teacher can work with specific students)
4. Maintaining confidentiality except where withholding information is likely to be harmful to the student

7.7.2 The Role of a Teacher Aide may include:

1. Participating in Individual Education Programme planning
2. Following the programme prepared and supervised by the teacher
3. Supporting group and/or one to one learning
4. Following programmes provided by specialists
5. Contributing information to support assessments
6. Liaising with parents and appropriate professionals where requested by teacher
7. Providing direct support to students in a range of areas e.g., self care, building self esteem, personal safety, mobility, medication
8. Helping to build students' skills
9. Promoting independence in the students supported

7.7.3 The Responsibilities of a Teacher Aide may include:

1. Contributing to and monitoring records of students' daily progress
2. Participating in the use of agreed appropriate behaviour management strategies
3. Giving praise and encouragement to students
4. Using age appropriate language and activities

7.7.4 To undertake these responsibilities successfully the teacher aide will need to:

1. Be well prepared
2. Communicate regularly with the teacher about the student's progress
3. Know who to talk to about what
4. Attend meetings
5. Work within the framework of the school policies
6. Participate in the wider life of the school

8.0 GUIDELINES

These guidelines are to assist schools to develop procedures for the identification, education and assessment of students with special learning needs. There are seven key areas which should form the basis of planning and procedures for students with special learning needs. The key areas are:-

- Identification
- The school curriculum
- Partnerships in education
- The learning environment
- Evaluation and improvement
- Reporting
- Professional development

8.1   Identification

To be accurate in the identification of students with special needs, assessment must be regular and across all years of schooling. Each student who has been identified as having special needs must have a portfolio tagged with a Student profile which has details of Bio data, and specifications on the conditions affecting the child and includes diagnosis by specialists and previous intervention plans or IEPs. Students' needs should be continually monitored, as should changes in their achievement level, rate of progress and if their behaviour differs noticeably from past performance or that of their peers. Special needs students are of all ages and their needs can change at different times due to a range of situations and circumstances.

8.1.2   Outcome

Students with special learning and teaching needs are identified and assessed in their early years and throughout their schooling.

8.1.3   Schools achieve this by:

8.1.3.1   Regularly assessing students at all levels using classroom assessments, teacher observations and student achievement profiles and portfolios;

8.1.3.2   Analysing results of standardised assessments such as diagnostic tests and other curriculum based assessments to identify students who may have special learning needs;

8.1.3.3   Analysing other information such as attendance, participation and behaviour; and

8.1.3.4   Monitoring and recording changes in students', rate of progress and if their behaviour differs noticeably in a sustained manner from past performance or that of their peers.

8.1.3.5   Making request to the Ministry of Education through the Inclusive Education Teaching and Learning Advisor to request for assistance in assessment and identification of children of concern to them that have not been previously identified or cases that are new to the Cook Islands and unknown to the Ministry of Education.

8.2   The School Curriculum

The planning and implementation of school-wide and classroom programmes, units and lessons must reflect the requirements of the Cook Islands Curriculum Framework, be relevant and challenging for students and be flexible in meeting the needs of students with special learning needs. The topics of study, activities students do and the way classrooms are organised overall, determine how effective learning is for all students. [Note: The integrated/thematic Unit plan with differentiated activities is a friendly version for ALL children especially for children with Special Learning Needs]

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8.2.1 Outcome

Whole school activities, learning programmes, units of work and lessons are planned and delivered in ways sensitive to the needs of or developmentally appropriate for all students.

8.2.2 Schools achieve this by:

8.2.2.1 Providing opportunities for and encouraging all students to participate in school activities to the best of their abilities;

8.2.2.2 Providing developmentally appropriate resources for students with special learning needs;

8.2.2.3 Ensuring all students have access to appropriate learning materials and resources;

8.2.2.4 Identifying and catering for individual learning styles through delivery of the curriculum in a variety of ways and strategies;

8.2.2.5 Planning and implementing education programmes, which teach children to accept and include people who are different; and

8.2.2.6 Actively promoting non-discriminatory language and by teachers role modelling appropriate language when referring to individual differences and diverse groups.

8.3 Partnerships in Education

Effective education takes place when all key stakeholders are included: the student, the parent/caregiver and school personnel. Each stakeholder is able to provide important information and support in educating students with special needs.

8.3.1 Outcome

Education plans that most effectively meet the special learning needs of students.

8.3.2 Schools achieve this by:

8.3.2.1 consulting with parents and caregivers at an early stage when children are identified as having special learning needs;

8.3.2.2 Involving parents, caregivers and the students themselves in planning, implementing and reviewing programmes for students with special needs; and

8.3.2.3 Collaborating where appropriate and necessary with relevant government departments and non-government organisations and specialists to provide quality services and support to children with special learning needs. [Notes: Relevant government departments include Ministries of education, health and internal affairs. NGO's include Punanga Tauturu, Disabled Persons International, deaf and blind societies, Disabilities Committees, The National Disabilities Council, Autism Association, Te Vaerua, etc and specialists- physio therapists, occupational therapists, paediatrician, etc,.]

8.3.2.4 Establishing in-school support groups as a first step for providing advice and support to teachers who require assistance to meet the needs of students they are concerned about with who has been identified as is "at risk"

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8.4 The Learning Environment

Students learn best in an environment that is safe and stimulating. Students need to be valued, respected and encouraged. They need to experience success in school in order to build confidence and achieve to their full potential. Students with special needs often do not experience success and lack confidence in their abilities. The learning environment (the classroom and the school as a whole) plays a crucial role in the educational development of students with special learning needs where they must feel respected and feel that they do belong.

8.4.1 Outcome

The learning environment meets the needs of ALL learners

8.4.2 Schools achieve this by:

8.4.2.1 Ensuring students learn in an environment free from verbal and physical threat;

8.4.2.2 Making the school buildings and facilities [in consultation with MOE and Cook Islands Investment Cooperation (CIIC)] accessible to students with impaired mobility;

8.4.2.3 Providing an attractive, clean and functional school environment;

8.4.2.4 Providing opportunities for all students to work with children with learning needs and people with disabilities with appropriate support, resources and information; and

8.4.2.5 Providing guidance and counselling to students in need of emotional support.

8.5 Evaluation and Improvement

Programmes designed to cater for students with special learning needs, must be evaluated regularly and adjusted when necessary to ensure their success. Information such as attendance, participation, behaviour and academic performance is important in reviewing programmes and planning changes.

8.5.1 Outcome

Schools use student development information to evaluate the success of programmes and to plan for improvement.

8.5.2 Schools achieve this by:

8.5.2.1 Regularly recording and assessing students' academic progress in relation to stated goals, achievement objectives and outcomes in work plans and individualised education plans (IEP);

8.5.2.2 Analysing other information such as attendance, participation and behaviour to determine changes in student performance; and

8.5.2.3 Using all information to review programmes and make changes where necessary.

8.6 Reporting

Currently all schools have procedures in place for the reporting of student progress and achievement. Parents, caregivers and other stakeholders must be notified as soon as teachers identify that a student's achievement level, rate of progress or behaviours differ noticeably in a sustained manner from past performance and his/her peers. Stakeholders must be given regular feedback regarding the progress of students with special learning needs.

8.6.1 Outcome

Stakeholders regularly receive meaningful and accurate information about student progress.

8.6.2 Schools achieve this by:

8.6.2.1 Regularly providing information to stakeholders through a range of means including work samples, written reports, interviews or telephone conversations.

8.6.2.2 Ensuring that teacher aides and teachers keep Journals of critical reflections and evaluation where they have logged all work that they have covered with students including dates, duration and time of and a clear anecdote or description of work, assessment and evaluation.

8.6.2.3 Ensuring that IEP documents are completed and distributed to relevant stakeholders

8.7 Professional Development

Schools have procedures in place whereby teacher professional development needs are established and recommendations made. Appropriate professional development for teachers is essential in improving educational outcomes for students with special learning needs.

8.7.1 Outcome

Teachers have the skills to meet the special learning and teaching needs of ALL students.

8.7.2 Schools achieve this by:

8.7.2.1 Working cooperatively as a school staff to meet the learning needs of ALL students;

8.7.2.2 Identify professional development needed to support the teaching of students with special learning needs; and

8.7.2.3 Meeting identified professional development needs using available resources locally, nationally and internationally.

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