



# Inclusive Education

**A policy statement**

**2006**

**Save the Children UK views inclusive education as a process of enabling all children, including previously excluded groups, to learn and participate effectively within mainstream school systems. Inclusive education challenges exclusionary cultures, policies and practices in education, removing barriers to children's participation and learning, and acknowledging individual children's needs and potential.**

**Inclusive education is essential to achieving quality education for all. Save the Children UK will pursue its commitment to the right to education through support and advocacy for inclusive education. We will work with schools to build capacity for developing inclusive cultures, policies and practice, and with national and local governments to advocate for the introduction of the necessary legislation, policies and resources. We will work with children to enable their experiences and priorities for inclusion to be heard by duty bearers, and will work with families and local communities to build their support.**

*This paper is a statement of Save the Children UK's understanding of inclusive education, laying out a framework and principles for Save the Children UK education programmes to work towards. It is also intended to clarify Save the Children UK's position on inclusive education to external stakeholders, supporters and other interested parties.*

## **Background**

Over 100 million primary school-aged children are unable to attend school<sup>1</sup>, and an estimated 98% of children with disabilities in developing countries cannot access formal education<sup>2</sup>. Discrimination is a factor in much of this exclusion. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has identified up to thirty different grounds on which children may face social exclusion, including gender, race, nationality, disability, child labour, poverty, and HIV/AIDS<sup>3</sup>.

Discrimination in society is reflected in schools and education systems. Furthermore, mainstream education often fits educators' idea of a 'standard' child, resulting in the exclusion of children who do not fit that template. Children with disabilities may be seen as 'ineducable' and denied a place at school. Children who do not understand the language used in class may drop out.



Even if girls can overcome the barriers to attending school that face them in some countries, they may receive little support from teachers<sup>4</sup>. In many contexts, children perceived to have special needs are placed in institutions which provide second-rate educational opportunities and leave them outside the mainstream of school and community life<sup>5</sup>, making it impossible for them to realise their potential.

The concept of inclusive education originated with the grassroots disability movement, campaigning for an end to discrimination and exclusion. The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) and was restated at the Dakar World Education Forum (2000).

Inclusive education efforts have often been focused around children with disabilities, and in some settings the term 'inclusive education' has been seen as 'education for disabled children'. However, inclusive education is not limited to children with disabilities. An emerging consensus can be found among policy makers, NGOs, educationalists and activists, that achieving quality education for all can only be achieved through the creation of inclusive educational environments which welcome and accommodate all children without discrimination.

## Principles of inclusive education

Inclusive education aims to significantly improve the educational opportunities of all children and young people who:

- Are not attending school, but could if families, communities, schools and education systems were more responsive to their needs;
- Attend school but fail to achieve adequately, due to poor quality or irrelevant education;
- Are required to attend segregated schools because the mainstream education system is not adapted to their needs.

**For Save the Children UK, inclusive education is underpinned by ten principles:**

1. Every child has the right to quality education: all children should have equal opportunity to access education.
2. All children can learn and benefit from education.
3. No child should be excluded from, or discriminated against within, education on the grounds of race, colour, sex, language, age, class or caste, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, poverty, disability, birth, or any other status.
4. Inclusive education promotes changes throughout the education system and with communities, to ensure that the education system adapts to the child, rather than expecting the child to adapt to the system.
5. Children's views must be listened to and taken seriously as active participants in school and in their own learning.
6. Individual differences between children are a source of richness and diversity, and not a problem.
7. The diversity of needs and patterns of development of children should be addressed through a wide and flexible range of responses.
8. Regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discrimination, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.<sup>6</sup>
9. Simply placing excluded children within a mainstream setting does not of itself achieve inclusion: reform of mainstream education is usually necessary to ensure that the needs of all children can be met.
10. All aspects of education, including the curriculum, teaching methods, school culture and environments, present opportunities for promoting inclusion.<sup>7</sup>



Making inclusive education a reality involves making these principles central when approaching how education systems are planned and resourced, how schools and classrooms are managed, and how teachers and children interact.

## Inclusive education in practice

Strategies towards inclusion should enable education structures, systems and methodologies to meet the needs of all children, particularly those who face the greatest barriers to achieving their right to education.

There is no fixed 'template' for what an inclusive school or education approach should look like. Interventions towards inclusive education can start with a particular group of excluded children (such as ethnic minority children or disabled children); with a school or group of schools; or with an education ministry or set of policies. Inclusive education interventions should lead to improvements in excluded children's access to and experience of school, and towards greater inclusion in education systems. All children should benefit from well planned and implemented inclusive education.

Governments are the primary duty bearers to make education accessible and beneficial for all: therefore national education policies and systems are often a key target for reform.

### The following approaches are key to developing inclusive schools and education structures<sup>8</sup>:

- Understand inclusion as a continuing process, not a one-off event.
- Assess how and why education systems are excluding children, both from access to education and within education. The attitudes of adults are a significant factor in this.
- Assess the roles and responsibilities of relevant duty bearers in fulfilling the right to education through an inclusive approach.

- Strengthen and sustain the participation of children, teachers, parents and community members in the work of each school.
- Identify and reduce barriers to learning for all children (rather than simply developing separate services for one group of children).
- Identify and provide support for teachers as well as students.
- Provide an accessible curriculum; appropriate teacher training programmes; and fully accessible information, environments and support for all students.

Action to promote and support inclusion should itself be inclusive, and needs to take place at several levels – with governments, with local authorities, with individual schools, with families and communities, and with children themselves. The emphasis placed on each of these levels will depend on the local political, social, economic and cultural context.

It is important to take account of where current thinking and practice on education is in a country and build up from there. In many countries, the mainstream education system will be unable to meet the needs of some marginalised groups of children, and there will be a transitional need for those children to be educated in alternative settings. Support to children in these situations must take place alongside efforts to make mainstream education more inclusive, and to break down barriers separating children from each other.

In order to help Save the Children programmes put these principles into practice, this paper is supported by resources to explore the practical issues in working towards inclusive education and to share approaches developed by Save the Children UK in a range of contexts<sup>9</sup>.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Education For All Global Monitoring Report 2005, UNESCO: [http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=36099&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=36099&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

<sup>2</sup>[http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.phpURL\\_ID=34371&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.phpURL_ID=34371&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

<sup>3</sup> Article 2, Hodgkin R and Newell P, Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF, New York, 2002 ([www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org))

<sup>4</sup> 'Gender Equality in Schools', Education and Gender Equality Series, Programme Insights, Oxfam, London, 2006

<sup>5</sup> Booth T, Lynch J, et al, Overcoming Exclusion Through Inclusive Approaches in Education: A Challenge and a Vision, UNESCO, Paris, 2003 ([www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org))

<sup>6</sup> Amended from the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, June 1994 [http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA\\_E.PDF](http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF)

<sup>7</sup> The primary focus of this document is on schools, but it is important to recognise that inclusive education can be provided in any context where people come together to learn – not only schools but kindergartens, evening classes, summer camps, out-of-school clubs, youth groups etc.

<sup>8</sup> Amended from the *Inclusive Education Report*, Bangladesh, Save the Children UK, 2001

<sup>9</sup> Forthcoming, Save the Children UK 2006