



Promoting the Right to Education  
for Children with Disabilities

## EDUCATION WHITE PAPER 6: THE PRIMARY SOUTH AFRICAN POLICY DOCUMENT ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

### What is White Paper 6?

In 2001, the Department of Education issued a framework policy document called White Paper 6: *Special Needs Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System*. The document was a response to the post-apartheid state of special needs and support services in education and training. Two main findings were that only a small percentage of learners with disabilities were receiving specialised education and support, usually on a racial basis, and that the education system had generally failed to provide services appropriate to the diverse needs of learners. For most learners with disabilities, this meant they were 'mainstreamed by default' or that they did not attend school at all. The number of children with disabilities out of school at that time was estimated at 280 000.

To address these problems, it was recommended that the system be changed to an inclusive one where all learners can access education and training no matter what their individual needs are. This change would permit all children, including children with disabilities, to 'develop and extend their potential and participate as equal members of society.'

White Paper 6 brings about new terminology such as a full service schools and district-based support teams. A full service school is an ordinary school which is specially equipped to assist students with barriers to learning within the mainstream school system. A district-based support team is to introduce strategies and interventions that will assist educators in the mainstream school system to cope with a diversity of learning and teaching needs.

### What is inclusive education?

As used in White Paper 6, 'inclusive education and training' means:

- Acknowledging that all children and youth can learn
- Acknowledging that all children and youth need support
- Enabling the education system to meet the needs of all learners
- Acknowledging and respecting differences in learners while building on similarities
- Acknowledging that learning is more than just formal schooling; learning happens in the home and in the community as well
- Fostering attitudes, behaviour, teaching methods, curricula and learning environments that meet the needs of all learners
- Maximising learner participation in educational culture and curriculum
- Uncovering and minimising barriers to learning

In the inclusive education system, the provision of education for learners with disabilities is based on the level of support that learner needs to address the specific barriers to learning he or she is experiencing. Learners requiring a low level of support would attend ordinary (or neighbourhood) schools, where educators are trained to be able to meet their needs. Learners who need moderate support would attend a full-service school, which is equipped and supported to provide for a greater range of learning needs than can be accommodated at an ordinary school. Each district is to have at least one full-service school. Learners who need a high or intensive level of support would attend special schools, which would also serve as resource centres for ordinary and full-service schools.

Education policy  
in South Africa  
provides for the  
increased capacity  
of ordinary  
public schools to  
include children  
with disabilities,  
but this has not  
been effectively  
implemented.



Promoting the Right to Education  
for Children with Disabilities

An education  
system that  
promotes the  
full participation  
and inclusion  
of children  
with disabilities  
maximises  
their personal  
development  
and enables  
their ongoing  
participation  
and inclusion in  
society.

## What does White Paper 6 call for?

To bring about the changes, White Paper 6 sets out various actions, including:

- Orientating management, staff, and governing bodies to the inclusion model; classroom educators are recognised as the primary resource needed to form an inclusive system
- Identifying learners experiencing barriers to their learning as early as possible
- Mobilising out of school youth to motivate them to return to school
- Converting 500 primary schools to full-service schools by 2021
- Setting up district-based support teams
- Making special schools into resource centres that work together with district-based support teams

White Paper 6 allows for Special Schools for learners with the most intense barriers to education. Most Deaf people see their primary barrier to education as a linguistic barrier, rather than a barrier of 'severe disability'. The World Federation of the Deaf holds that full inclusion for a Deaf learner means a totally supportive sign language environment. This permits the learner to develop to his/her full educational, social and emotional potential, including full literacy in at least one written language such as English.

The inclusive education system is to be fully implemented by 2021. Since 2001, the Department of Education issued a number of other documents about specific parts of the inclusive education system, such as guidelines for inclusive learning programmes, district-based support teams, full-service schools and special schools as resource centres (2005); guidelines to ensure quality education and support in special schools (2007); the National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (2008); and guidelines for full service and inclusive schools (2010).

## Implementing White Paper 6

White Paper 6 and the work that has been done since 2001 represent an important shift in South African policy toward education of children with disabilities. However, progress in making the policy a reality has been slow and not consistent across learner groups or geographic areas. As noted in White Paper 6 itself, belief in and support of inclusive education is not enough to ensure that it will work in practice. Effective implementation of all aspects of the policy is needed in order to ensure that by 2021, all South African children with disabilities can access the education and training they need and that White Paper 6 describes.

## For additional information, please consult these resources:

- Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (<http://www.info.gov.za/whitepapers/2001/educ6.pdf>)
- Thutong: South African Education Portal (<http://www.thutong.doe.gov.za/inclusiveeducation>)
- Inclusive education: status, accompanying challenges and strategic response (<http://www.pmg.org.za/report/20101109-briefing-department-basic-education-status-inclusive-education-accomp>)
- Expansion of access to Quality Early Childhood Development, Inclusive Education & Curriculum, Assessment Policy Statement (<http://www.pmg.org.za/report/20110614-expansion-access-quality-early-childhood-development-inclusive-educat>)