



Promoting the Right to Education
for Children with Disabilities

OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

Defining the concepts

For a range of reasons hundreds of thousands of children of school going age in South Africa are NOT attending school. The majority of these children are experiencing more than one serious barrier to learning. Many of these children have disabilities, in 2001 White Paper 6 on inclusive education estimated the number of children with disabilities who were out of school was 280 000.

What is a barrier to learning?

A barrier to learning is anything that stands in the way of a child being able to learn effectively. A learner may experience one or more barriers to learning throughout his or her education. A child with a disability may experience barriers to learning due to an environment that does not cater to their specific needs. Barriers to learning can be intrinsic for example a child with an intellectual disability or ADHD, but can also be societal/environmental barriers. For example extreme poverty, abuse or neglect will all act as barriers to a child's learning. Systemic barriers to learning are barriers created by the education system itself. Most often in South Africa, children with disabilities bear the most severe consequences of an inadequate, under resourced education system not able to cater for their specialized support needs with the consequence that many end up out-of-school and being denied their constitutionally protected right to basic education.

The position of White Paper 6 with regard to out-of-school children.

White Paper 6, the policy document informing an Inclusive South African Education system, recognizes the problem South Africa faces in addressing the large number of children with disabilities that are not accessing any education setting and calls for measures to mobilize these children. However, ten years on, the same number of children, if not more, remain out-of-school.

Why are so many children with disability out of school?

- Children with low levels of support needs could and should be accommodated in mainstream schools, this has not happened.
- Special schools are full, with exhaustive waiting lists. Children with high levels of support needs who are not able to be accommodated in mainstream schools and who are on waiting lists at Special Schools have nowhere to go!
- Special Schools are themselves often restrictive or exclusive in terms of their admissions policies for example if a child is not able to go to the toilet on their own or is incontinent this may be used as a reason for not admitting them to a special school.
- Assessment is a requirement for admission into a special school. Unless children are in mainstream schools already they do not have access to the Department of Education's Educational Psychologist for assessment. Waiting lists for assessments can also take up to 2 years! This is valuable time that the child is missing out on learning opportunities.
- Many children with disabilities remain out-of-school simply because they do not have transport to take them to Special Schools which are often a far distance from their homes. Many special schools do not have adequate hostel facilities either.
- Children with multiple disabilities often fall "through the cracks" and are not deemed suitable candidates for admission into specialised Special Schools.

Children with disabilities who are out of school are being denied their right to basic education.



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

Suggestions/Recommendations

- Special Schools as Resource Centres should be able to provide some interim service to out-of-school children to ensure their continued stimulation and development whilst awaiting admission to an appropriate education setting as part of their outreach function and mandated obligation to address the issue of out-of-school children in their area.
- Improved funding to Special Schools for suitable transport arrangements.
- The effective and adequate training of mainstream educators so that they are equipped to teach children with low levels of support needs so as to avoid the unnecessary referral of children to Special Schools.

Re-examination of the admissions requirements of special schools

Additional Resources

1. Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education - Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (July 2001)
2. www.included.org.za