

NECIC Dialogue with Ketua Pengarah Pelajaran Malaysia (MOE) Focus: School & inclusion issues for children with disability

Introduction: Types of Children with Disability Requiring Support

There are a large proportion of children which have special education needs, which can come in many different forms. Data and experience show that, if children who reach the primary school going age (6 years) are not school-ready, they enter school with problems and are difficult for schools and teachers to handle. The gap then continues to widen as they grow. Children can be roughly divided into three groups in terms of their education ability/needs.

1. 70-80% of children usually do not have not much barrier to learning. These are however the children who received most of the educational resources in our country.
2. 3-5% of children have a major disability and are identified early by health professionals, usually at birth or before the age of 5 years (example: Cerebral palsy, severe Autism, Down Syndrome (with moderate-severe ID), Moderate-severe intellectual disability, deafness, etc). These include children with multiple or severe disabilities who would need specific special education. Generally there is some provision for them in our education system, although the quality and distribution (access) of the services is questionable.
3. 10-15% of children have more subtle problems. These children have milder disabilities or problems specific learning disorders (example: ADHD, high function Autism, specific learning disorders like Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Down Syndrome and Cerebral Palsy with "normal" IQ, etc). They are children with a normal intelligence with many barriers to education. They are often identified at school entry or a little later. They often present as behaviour problems, poor school performance, school failure, etc. Early and meaningful help and educational support for this group of children is limited.
4. We are also increasingly seeing a lot of borderline children (slow learner), often complicated with poor social economic background or language disorder who struggle with the current difficult syllabus, and they are being pushed to be registered for the special class. These children need smaller class, and one or twice weekly remedial class for them is insufficient.

	Issues	Key Concerns & Suggestions
1.	<p>Inclusive education for all children.</p> <p>The National Education Blueprint targets 75% inclusion for all children with disability by the year 2025.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanism to make this happen all over the country in all schools. • HMs & teachers need to be aware on and supportive of the rights of children with special needs to inclusive schooling, as well as be aware of the special considerations surrounding children with special needs e.g. The right for parents to apply for school deferment up to 2 years; Special concessions during exams (extra exam time, provision of an aide), Monthly RM150 allowance, etc. • Eligibility criteria should not be based on diagnosis, but rather their ability (e.g. bright ASD, Down syndrome and Cerebral Palsy should get IE too). • Parental involvement in decision making for inclusion. • Children with physical disabilities require funds for the school to develop their physical environment (ramp, classroom toilet, etc) and a general policy to allow the HM to keep these children on ground floor class. • De-centralise and give schools the autonomy for implementing inclusive education. This will encourage schools to be creative and innovative and allows for flexibility in implementation • Give annual special allocation to inclusive schools – depending on the number of children with special needs. • Need to share & implement PEMANDU lab output on special needs.

2.	Shadow Teachers/Teacher Aides & Smaller classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is urgent to have a clear policy & SOP on teacher aides to enable support for high functioning children with disability in inclusive environments (normal class). • If the Education Department is not initially able to do this at least allow the policy to be in place and allow others (i.e. mother, family member) as aide for the child. Right now at the “budi bicara” of the HM and rarely happens. • Long term the need to move towards 1 session school system (no afternoon class) and smaller classes of less than 25. • Increase staffing at the 3PK centres so that they can help support inclusion in schools (discussed at Pemandu Lab).
3.	Individual education plan & sharing with parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IEP should not be an academic exercise but a real, recurrent dialogue with parents to set targets/goals. • Frequent complaints from parents about the lack of a focused education plan, no baseline assessment, no target skills/objectives and no review to see if objectives have been met. • There is a need to implementation a realistic and functional Individual Education Plan (IEP) for every child. • Focus on language and mathematics, not the long list of subjects school children have to do now. • Need teachers trained and understand problems in Specific Learning Disorders (SLDs).
4.	Training of special education teachers and quality of classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variable quality of teacher in special education classes. Some appear to be interested but many seem unable to cope with the children. • Need for more educational psychologists to support both teachers and students in schools. • Allow schools to collaborate with parents, government/NGO/private practitioners and their surrounding community to create an effective support system for inclusion in school.
5.	KPIs & OKU impact on children & teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The currently process appears to victimise than rather than support children with learning disabilities. Recent literacy MOE KPIs linked to career advancements has resulted in teachers in the main stream education system “unloading” children with learning disabilities to special education in large numbers. • Do not let children with special needs be a “performance liability” to the schools that accept them. Examination or assessment results of children with special needs should not affect the overall student performance of the school – revamp the existing mechanism. • Make inclusion one of the KPIs for schools – schools that practice inclusion should be given extra points in their overall performance. • Recognise, award and promote schools and teachers that implement innovative measures in their inclusive practices. • Incorporate inclusive education as one of the index in head teachers’ KPI. • One of the KPIs of the SENCO (Penyelia Pendidikan Khas) is to mainstream children with special needs – be it partial or full inclusion. The SENCO and general classroom teachers must come up with positive awareness programs to educate

		typically developing peers about their friends with special needs.
6.	Appreciation of good teachers & monitoring for those that do not work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professionals, NGOs, Parents need a mechanism to praise & complain to MOE, not the press. This must involve some real listening to legitimate concerns with clear follow up plan. Include parents with children with special needs in the Parents Teacher Association.
7.	Easier move to home schooling and between	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With limited MOE inclusion many private (“home school services” have mushroomed. Some of these private organisations are good. Require a clearer mechanism to enable parents to move to these services if the school cannot offer the services the child requires.
8.	Early start to Inclusion practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusion must begin from the early years (It is also easier to include when the children, with or without special needs, are still young). Start by making inclusion compulsory at least at the preschool level. For pre-schoolers who need to be placed in special class (i.e. due to extremely challenging behaviours, high dependency needs), make it compulsory for teachers to provide daily opportunities for inclusion (e.g. conduct joint snack time, play time, music lessons and other joint activities where appropriate).

There are many more issues to discuss regarding inclusion and children with special education needs but we recognise that time is required to formulate policy and implement it. We have already proposed many measures in the 2012 Memorandum and much has been suggested at the Pemandu SEN Lab especially on assessment and teacher training for the National Education Blueprint. But we have yet to see tangible realities on the ground.

We would like to suggest three immediate measures that MOE could implement:

1. Have a directive to all schools (HMs & teachers) that MOE encourages inclusive education and want them to facilitate it. Not to reject children with special needs but work with parents, NGOs, professionals to include them.
2. Remove the pressure from teachers to achieve literacy KPIs. Stop the abuse of the OKU registration occurring all over the country to meet this KPI.
3. Include parents in decision making for education choices for their children. Include paediatricians & other professionals as part of a regular joint panel at district and state level to support assessments & decision making regarding children with special needs.

The Unit Pendidikan Khas should be changed to Unit Pendidikan Inclusive.

It is important to modify the system to meet the children’s needs, not adjust the children to fit the system.

Sincerely

Dato’ Dr Amar-Singh HSS (President & Consultant Paediatrician)
 Ms Khor Ai-Na (Vice-President & Therapist)
 Dr Wong Woan Yiing (Secretary & Consultant Paediatrician)
 Dr Toh Teck Hock (Member & Consultant Paediatrician)
 Dr Lim Boon Hock (Executive Officer & Special Education Consultant)

National Early Childhood Intervention Council (NECIC)
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