

# Common Questions Families Have About Inclusive Education

## Frequently Asked Questions on inclusive education

### What is inclusive education?

“Inclusive education is central to achieving high-quality education for all learners, including those with disabilities, and for the development of inclusive, peaceful and fair societies.”

United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

“Inclusive education entails providing meaningful learning opportunities to all students within the regular school system. It allows children with and without disabilities to attend the same age-appropriate classes at the local school, with additional, individually tailored support as needed. It requires physical accommodation – ramps instead of stairs and doorways wide enough for wheelchair users, for example – as well as a new, child-centred curriculum that includes representations of the full spectrum of people found in society (not just persons with disabilities) and reflects the needs of all children. In an inclusive school, students are taught in small classes in which they collaborate and support one another rather than compete. Children with disabilities are not segregated in the classroom, at lunchtime or on the playground.” This definition comes from UNICEF’s State of the World’s Children<sup>23</sup> report.

There is also a clear description of what inclusion in education means and how an inclusive education system works in **Inclusion International’s Inclusive Education Position Paper**.

It is also important to know what is not inclusive education – some of these things get called “inclusive education” but are not true examples of inclusion:

- Placing students with disabilities in regular classes but without support is NOT inclusion.
- Grouping students with disabilities in a resource room in a regular school is NOT inclusion.
- Providing all of a child’s education at home is NOT inclusion.
- Focusing on only life skills instead of academic outcomes is NOT inclusion.
- Guiding secondary students with disabilities into vocational/professional programmes is NOT inclusion.

### Is inclusive education really better for everyone?

Yes! Research evidence is clear that when teachers know how to teach students who learn in different ways and promote cooperation between students everyone benefits!

Inclusive education is a strategy to strengthen the education system, and ensures all children (with and without disabilities) are able to live, learn, and play together. It provides all children with opportunities to learn and accept one

## Common misconception

Many parents fear that having learners with disabilities in their child's classroom will impact the amount of time their child gets with the teacher or will impact their learning. This is not true! Research shows that the presence of children with higher support needs in mainstream classrooms does not negatively impact the time that typical students spend on learning and instruction.

another's abilities, talents, personalities, and needs. Research evidence is clear that when teachers learn to teach students who learn in different ways and promote cooperation between students everyone benefits.

### Benefits of inclusive education for students *with* disabilities:

- Children who have been included in school are more likely to continue to be included in their community later in life
- Learners with disabilities in inclusive education have higher academic gains than children with disabilities in segregated settings
- Learners with disabilities get access to a wider, more flexible curriculum and higher academic expectations than what is usually available in segregated settings
- Learners with disabilities in inclusive schools are more likely to get employment and access to recreational activities

### Benefits of inclusive education for students *without* disabilities:

- Students without disabilities who provided peer support to children with disabilities in cooperative lessons performed at the same level as the other students without disabilities who are not in inclusive classes – having children with disabilities in the classroom does not impact achievement for the students without disabilities.
- Students without disabilities who have friendships with children with disabilities were often exposed to new knowledge and motivation
- There is a depth of knowledge and skills that is acquired by students without disabilities who act as tutors for children with disabilities which most typical students do not get out of passive learning.

### Benefits for others

Teachers:

- have higher expectations of their students with disabilities when they are in inclusive settings (vs. segregated settings)
- have better knowledge and skills related to the inclusion of children with disabilities, including inclusive instructions and teaching methods
- positively impact the learning outcomes of all students when they use inclusive teaching methods

Social impact:

- development of essential social-emotional skills for life-long independence for all children can only be acquired in inclusive settings
- children are more likely to have increased positive interactions, a better understanding of socially acceptable behaviours

and norms and higher social-emotional competencies when educated in inclusive classrooms

Economy:

- Reduces loss of GDP of approximately 5–7% (output and income loss) & social welfare burden
- Reduces cost of education – costs to educate a student in segregated settings can be as much as 7–9 times higher; special education per capita costs are 2.5 times higher than those in regular education.

**What is the difference between an inclusive education system, an inclusive school and inclusive classroom/practices?**

Examples of inclusive classrooms/practices exist almost everywhere in the world. Every time a teacher ensures all students in the class are participating equally in a given activity they are engaging in an inclusive practice.

Inclusive schools are those in which all teachers ensure that all of their students are participating equally, all of the time.

An inclusive education system is more than a collection of inclusive schools and practices. It is a long-term, national or regional commitment to upholding the rights of all students by ensuring that all school-aged children are in school and that the system responds to the strengths and needs of every child without discrimination. This means that schools welcome all children and respond to their individual needs, and administrators, teachers, and support staff receive the assistance they need to help every child succeed in school.

**What is the difference between accessibility and reasonable accommodation?**

Accessibility addresses barriers and obstacles in the environment which may prevent some people from participating (such as making a ramp that multiple people can use - in a wheelchair, with a suitcase, with a baby carriage, etc). Accessibility benefits groups of people – these measures are things everyone can use. Generally accessibility is based on a set of standards.

Accommodation (or reasonable accommodation) is a modification and adjustment made to address a person's specific obstacle or barrier. It is fit-for-purpose and individualised (such as providing a personal assistant).

The right to accessibility means that students have the right to attend schools available to others, without discrimination. "Reasonable accommodation" as defined in the CRPD means that schools have the resourcing to provide the individual support a student may require in order to fully participate, without placing a disproportionate or undue burden on the school, and is complementary to accessibility. Examples are a modified curriculum, additional assistance for the classroom teacher, additional time for taking tests, or moving a class from the second story to the ground floor for a student with a mobility impairment.

### What is the “twin-track” approach to investing in inclusive education?

Often the term “twin-track” is misused to describe special education running parallel to the regular system. Operating segregated programmes as an alternative to inclusion is NOT a twin-track approach. It is segregation.

Successful inclusion requires investment in transforming the existing education system PLUS investing in individualised supports. A true twin-track approach includes systemic investment in building accessibility, teacher training and development and modifying curriculum, as well as providing individual personalised support such as accessible computer programmes, materials, etc.

### Is inclusive education more expensive than segregation?

No, inclusive education is NOT more expensive. In fact, an inclusive system is economically effective and efficient because instead of taking resources out of the regular system to educate groups of students with particular needs, all of the resources stay in the system. The UN CRPD Committee asserts that “no country can afford a dual system of regular and segregated education delivery.”

In countries where most students with disabilities are currently in school, transferring the resources currently supporting segregation and moving those resources to support inclusion helps to strengthen the system for all students by creating a culture of inclusion and training teachers to better meet the needs of all students.

In countries where many young people with disabilities are not in school, more investment is needed in order to provide them with an education. But as of 2017, half of the world’s 93 million school-age children with disabilities are out of school. That means that new resources are needed in order to provide an education to the 32.5 million children with disabilities currently completely excluded from education.

<sup>23</sup>See: <https://www.unicef.org/sowc2013/>

<sup>24</sup>Inclusion International’s Inclusive Education Position Paper

<sup>25</sup>Duhaime’s Law Dictionary defines undue burden as “an obligation which is not in proportion to the reciprocal cost or benefit.”