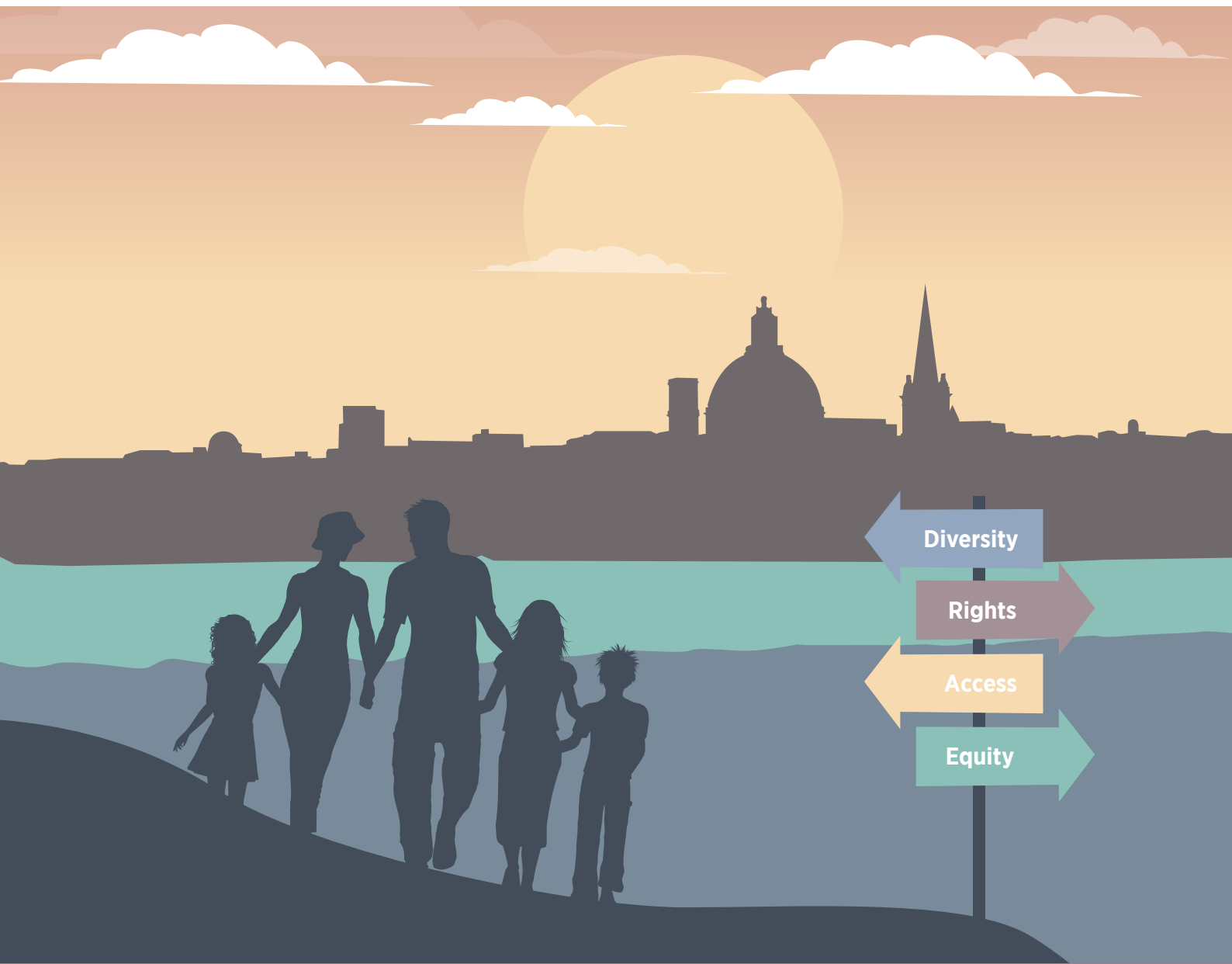


A National Inclusive Education Framework



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Published in 2019



MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

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Terminology and Acronyms

1.1 TERMINOLOGY

Barriers	Refers to factors in a person's environment that, through their absence or presence, limit functioning and create disability (WHO, 2001).
College	Refers to a cluster of primary, middle and secondary schools in the State Education Sector in Malta.
Continuous Professional Education	Refers to training of educators in order to update and enhance their knowledge and skills.
Disability	Refers to a long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which in interaction with various barriers may hinder one's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (Equal Opportunities Act, Act XXIV of 2016).
Diversity	Refers to differences or dimensions that can be used to differentiate groups and individual persons from one another, including body appearance, ethnicity, gender, age, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, social class, level of education, religion, work experiences, life styles and cultures and being sensitive to emerging diversities and needs.
Educators	Refers to members of the Senior Management Team (SMT), Teachers, Kindergarten Educators and Learning Support Educators (LSEs) working with learners in educational settings including Child Care Centres, Kindergarten, Primary, Middle, Secondary and Post-Secondary Schools, Resource Centres, Learning Support Centres, Alternative Learning Centres and any other educational institution.
Equity	Refers to ensuring that there is a concern with fairness, such that the education of all learners is seen as having equal importance (UNESCO, 2017.p.13).
High quality education	Refers to a system that serves all learners in such a way that it prepares them for their future. In so doing it makes provisions for a relevant curriculum, appropriate assessment, high quality teaching, collegial leadership and accountability to peers and families. High quality education has high expectations for all.
Inclusive education	Refers to the valuing and acceptance of diversity, to its value and the rights of learners to not only attend mainstream schools, but also to belong as valued members through active participation and the elimination of the barriers limiting the participation and achievement of all learners, respect diverse needs, abilities and characteristics.
Inclusive Learning-Friendly Environment (ILFE)	Refers to a learning environment which provides the optimal conditions for effective learning and teaching to take place. Such an environment welcomes, nurtures and educates all learners regardless of their gender, physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other characteristics (Unesco, 2015).
Individualised Education Plans (IEP)	Refers to the planning for individual learner needs and the process of planning, implementing and evaluating a curriculum programme as well as the holistic development of the learner.

Inter-cultural education	Refers to any form of education that acknowledges and fosters cultural pluralism, <i>i.e.</i> culture in the broadest possible sense, encompassing differences in ethnicity, gender, age, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, social class, religion and
Learners	Refers to all children who are attending Child Care Centres, Kindergarten, Primary, Middle, Secondary and Post-Secondary Schools, Resource Centres, Learning Support Centres, Alternative Learning Centres and any other educational institution. This policy uses the term “learner” because this term places a certain degree of responsibility for learning on behalf of the individual (Bray & McClaskey, 2014). However, there are many other factors that influence learning and the role of educators and learners together can lead to more effective outcomes.
Parent	Refers to the biological or legal guardians of the learner attending the school.
School	Refers to all State, Church and Independent Child care centres, Primary schools, Middle and Secondary schools, and other educational centres.
School community	Refers to the Senior Management Team, educators, support professionals and staff members who work in a school, the learners who attend the school and their parents and families, broader social community and organizations that have a stake in the education of learners.
School Management Team (SMT)	Refers to school leaders (Head of School and Assistant Head/s of School) working in a particular school, also in liaison with Head of Departments and Head of Department Inclusion. This term also refers to Learning Support Centre Coordinators.
Support structures and services	Refers to specialised settings and specialised professionals (college based or private) who offer services to learners through screening, early intervention and throughout compulsory schooling. Ideally, these services are offered in class with professionals in consultation with educators, working in transdisciplinary teams.
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	Refers to a concept that rather than adapting or changing learners to best fit curriculum (curriculum as defined by: goals, materials, methods and assessments), UDL focuses on how to build flexible learning environments that prioritise access for all, from the point of design, rather than as an afterthought, through multiple means of engagement, representation of content knowledge, action and expression. (Meyer, Rose & Gordon, 2014). UDL provides multiple means of engagement, representation and expression (Salend, 2011).
Whole-School Development Plan (SDP)	Refers to the procedure whereby schools implement and manage change to enhance quality. This planning emerges from a system of ongoing self-evaluation that enables schools to set priority targets in all areas of school life, set up a plan of action which is regularly reviewed and through it establish ways of consultation with, and involvement of different stakeholders.

1.2 ACRONYMS

CPD	Continuous professional development
HoD Inclusion	Head of Department Inclusion
HoD Prefect of Discipline	Head of Department Prefect of Discipline
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEP	Individualised Education Planning
IEN	Individual Educational Needs
ILFE	Inclusive Learning Friendly Environment
LSE	Learning Support Educator
LSZ	Learning Support Zone
MEDE	Ministry for Education and Employment
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NSSS	National School Support Services
SDP	School Development Planning
SEBD	Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
SMT	School Management Team
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time Specific
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UN	United Nations

Executive Summary

2

A National Inclusive Education Framework is designed over ten central themes and invites schools to embark on a journey towards the development of high quality inclusion. Schools will be invited to implement, review and commit towards inclusive policies and practices. Thus, providing high quality education for all learners to embrace social equity and achieve an inclusive society. This framework embraces the principles of Ownership, Diversity, Autonomy, Planning and Research.

1. Inclusive and Strategic Leadership

This theme enhances the role of the schools leaders in creating a nurturing and inclusive environment, which supports learning for all. It also encourages school leaders to respond to the diverse needs of learners at school and to build an effective learning community at school.

2. Whole School Development Planning

This theme focuses on priority targets that educators within an educational setting establish through whole-school development planning. This framework encourages shared participation in the setting up of priority targets that embrace the inclusion of and support towards all learners as well as a shared responsibility of putting said priority targets to practice.

3. Whole School Inclusive Environment

This theme proposes formation of an Inclusive Learning-Friendly Environment through the use of Universal Design for Learning, increased accessibility and removal of curricular, social and physical barriers towards inclusion. It also suggests periodic review of the school curricula, social climate and physical environment.

4. Collaboration with parents and community engagement

This theme encourages the role of the members of the community to engage in active participation in the school community. Parental involvement is also addressed through collaboration with the school to support the learners.

5. Individual Education Planning

This theme focuses on the planning, implementation and evaluation of Individual Education Planning (IEPs) for all learners who need support. It supports involvement of all stakeholders who work with the learner to be involved in the design and implementation of the educational programme for the learner.

6. Teaching and Learning

This theme proposes the need for meaningful, active and appropriately challenging learning and differentiated teaching. It also suggests the need for learner participation in the creation of a community of learners. Networking and collaboration projects are also suggested.

7. Learner and Staff well being

This theme proposes the need for support for both staff and learners. Mentoring and support for staff is encouraged. Support for learners' holistic development, support for diversity, enhancement of learners' rights and learners' voice through a good pastoral care system is provided.

8. Continuous Professional Development

This theme promotes continuous professional development and training as a tool to all educators to respond to the diversity of learner needs and in creating inclusive and equitable learning environments that enhance inclusive education practices in school. It sees continuous professional development as a tool for educators to share knowledge, enhance their skills, challenge exclusionary attitudes in teaching and learning and enhance collaboration among educators.

9. Positive Behaviour Management

This theme proposes the need for establishing positive behaviour management in schools through establishing a school-based behaviour policy, positive behaviour management strategies, behaviour modifications plans and disciplinary procedures based on the learners' rights.

10. Support Structure and services

This theme presents the need for support structures and services to give an effective service to learners, educators and parents so that learners access inclusive education. The delivery of service will focus on prevention, screening and early intervention as well as support in child care centres, early childhood settings and compulsory school years.

LINK OF BENCHMARKS TO THEMES

The ten overarching themes presented in this framework present a route for the implementation of the four benchmarks presented in *A Policy on Inclusive Education in schools: Route to Quality Inclusion* as illustrated.



Benchmark 1



All learners have access to opportunities for participation in educational systems and structures.

Benchmark 2



All educators employ effective teaching approaches that are more representative of and responsive to diversity that foster a Universal Design for Learning environment.

Benchmark 3



All schools are supported through well organised support structures that embrace shared cultures and ethos of diversity.

Benchmark 4



All educators have access to flexible education and training that supports their work in delivering quality Inclusive Education.

3

Introduction to the Framework

A National Inclusive Education Framework is designed to provide a clear direction to schools on their journey towards inclusion. In view of the realities of the local scenario, the most appropriate definition for inclusive education for the purpose of this framework was adopted from the conclusions of the Council of the European Union (2017, p3) explaining that inclusive education should cover all aspects of education and should be:

“Available and accessible to all learners of all ages, including those facing challenges, such as those with special needs or who have a disability, those originating from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, migrant backgrounds or geographically depressed areas or war-torn zones, regardless of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion of belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.”

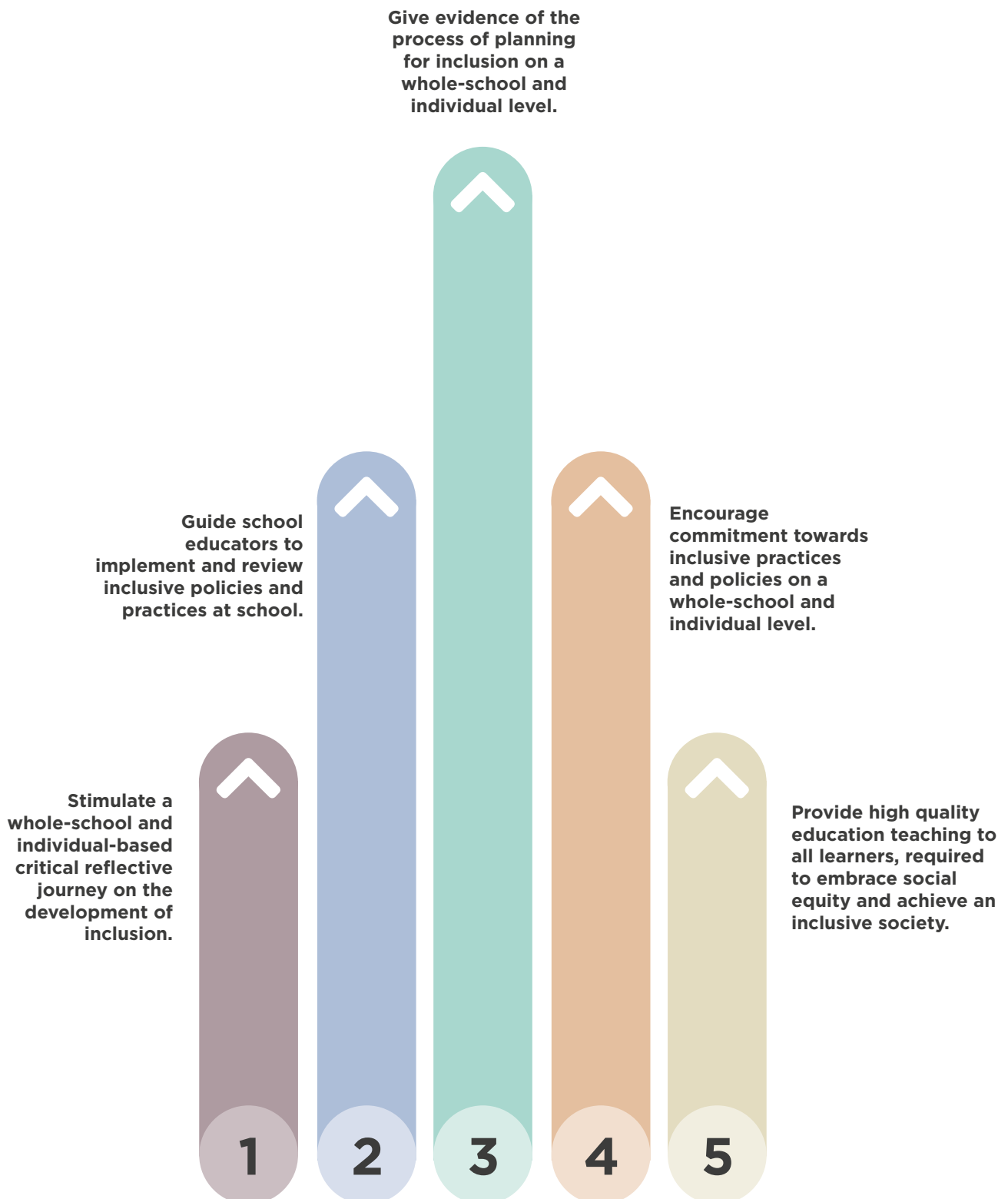
This framework celebrates the good work that has been ongoing in schools over many years. It aims at harmonising these good practices so as to provide an effective and efficient service to all learners, educators, parents and to the wider community. It is a hands-on resource that invites schools to embark on a reflective journey to critically engage on and evaluate the inclusive practices in the school community such that the education system is adapted to meet the learners' needs and not the other way round. This framework is built upon *A Policy on Inclusive Education in schools: Route to Quality Inclusion (2019)*.

This framework is in line with the education strategy of the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) as stated in the *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024* (MEDE, 2014) as it promotes the setting of an inclusive school environment that ensures that all learners have the opportunity to obtain the necessary skills and attitudes to be active citizens and to succeed at work and in society. Diversity should be celebrated in our schools and used as a learning opportunity to foster the inclusion of all learners. This framework can also be linked to *A National Curriculum Framework for all* (MEDE, 2012) as it promotes the principles of inclusion and diversity that underpin the NCF's commitment that all learners should experience success and by being given the necessary support to sustain their effort.

The framework is developed around ten structured themes related to inclusion derived following an intensive literature reviews and the recommendations given by the External Audit Report (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2014a). This framework has been designed to be used in all educational settings including childcare centres, mainstream schools, Learning Support Centres and Resource Centres. The characteristics of this framework are not setting specific, but is presented using a thematic approach. The following is a representation of the main aims of the Framework:

Five Key Principles were identified based on the international literature consulted. These key principles underpin this framework and should be the foundation of all decision making in schools.





Principles of the Framework



1. Ownership by all stakeholders

This framework invites the whole-school community on a reflective journey. It promotes communal understanding on inclusion for the diverse cohort of all learners and an engagement towards its development. Effective commitment with the framework is supported by a whole-school ownership of the process.

2. Respecting diversity

All learners have diverse needs, characteristics, learning preferences, diverse social and emotional needs. These learners are educated in early years educational settings, mainstream primary, middle and secondary schools, Resource Centres and Learning Support Centres or other alternative centres / units. These vary in size, enrolment and location. This framework respects school's autonomy and is presented under thematic headings which are not setting specific, but instead seeks to reflect the many forms of educational settings and the diversity of the learners they support.

3. Respecting school autonomy through flexibility

All schools have the responsibility to be inclusive in their policies and practices. Schools are encouraged to determine how best to use this framework, how to interpret the outcome and set their own priorities. The framework is designed to allow maximum flexibility for use across different settings and is non-prescriptive whilst keeping the learner's needs at the centre of it all.

4. Complementing school development planning and continuous professional development

Inclusion is seen as an ongoing and dynamic process which should be reflected in the SDPs and CPDs. CPD training related to inclusion coupled with a clear direction and goals of the SDP will enable educators to cater for diversity in inclusive settings. Basic diversity training skills should also be given to non-teaching staff who are also in contact with learners within the school.

5. Evidence and practice based

This framework is based on a comprehensive review of literature on inclusive education policy and practice. Also, it is based on ongoing site visits in schools in Malta and Gozo. A team of professionals from the field of inclusive education were involved in reviewing drafts and overseeing development.

5

Action on different forms of barriers

IBE-UNESCO (2016) specifies that barriers may take different forms such as the way that schools are organized, forms of teaching, learner assessment and monitoring of progress amongst others. When schools are committed to inclusion, evaluation of learner achievement, identifying abilities and participation to support those at risk of marginalization, exclusion or underachievement is necessary.

A National Inclusive Education Framework recognizes that the implementation of this concept in colleges and schools presents a number of barriers which are displayed in the tables that follow. These tables also indicate the paradigm shift needed in thinking and action.

5.1 ATTITUDINAL BARRIERS

	MOVING FROM...	TOWARDS...
ATTITUDINAL BARRIERS	Diversity viewed as a serious barrier to learning.	Shared belief that all learners can learn and achieve and that diversity is an opportunity.
	Stereotyping learners with disabilities or diverse background, assuming their quality of life is poor.	Listening to all learners and not make assumptions of what he/she can or cannot do.
	Dehumanizing learners by acting that everything in their life (e.g. emotions, sexuality, impaired intelligence) revolve around the condition or status.	Addressing directly the learner rather than talking about him/her to peers or educators.
	Generalizing and assuming that someone with disability or of a particular culture is representative of all the others.	Considering diversity aspects as a social responsibility in which everyone can be supported to live independent and full lives.
	Disempowering learners assuming they cannot know what is best for themselves and withholding the possibility of a learner to make his/her own decisions.	Enabling individuals to participate and be active in their learning experience.
	Learner viewed as someone that needs to be diagnosed and labelled.	Supporting the learner to overcome the challenge by providing learning opportunities based on his/her strengths and interests.

[Ainscow, 2000; Sutton, 2016]

5.2 LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL BARRIERS

	MOVING FROM...	TOWARDS...
LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL BARRIERS	Discourse focusing on learners' weaknesses, reinforcing 'deficit-integrative' and compensatory approaches.	Discourse based on high expectations which celebrates learners' differences, strengths, talents and diverse abilities.
	Language of instruction in schools not relevant with learners' culture and realities.	Language of instruction that is relevant, meaningful and rooted in learners' cultural realities.
	Challenging teaching and learning situations – due to different cultural backgrounds of the teacher and the learners.	Welcoming different language cultural communities through personal contact with the learner and learner's family.
	Learners being in a new cultural character in the classroom and they may be reluctant to participate in activities and group work due to issues such as understanding language or being fluent in that language.	Ensuring that curriculum takes into consideration the various cultures represented in the demographics of the school community.
	Learners and families of different language and cultural background finding it difficult to trust and be confident with educators due to the fact that they do not feel respected and safe with educators and peers.	Ensuring that throughout the lessons, the learners can relate to seeing images that reflect themselves and their cultures' traditions in order for learning to be more concrete and valid as well as enriching.
		Promoting home to school link by creating opportunities to connect families through activities, open days, projects <i>etc.</i> Such link must be inclusive, taking into consideration lack of access to technology.
		Honouring the various cultures of the learning community through literature chosen and sharing of traditions.
		Organising adult and children ESL (English as Second Language) lessons in order to increase participation.

[Ainscow, 2000; Ivey, 2011 ; Alsubaie,2015]

5.3 PHYSICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL BARRIERS

	MOVING FROM...	TOWARDS...
PHYSICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL BARRIERS	<p>Schools not adequately equipped to respond to students' diversity – lack of physical and human resources.</p>	<p>Consistent and robust investment to transform schools into safe, secure and conducive learning communities.</p>
	<p>Environments that are not physically accessible for learners with mobility impairments (e.g. entrance ways to buildings and classrooms), appropriate seating, restroom facilities, passageways, stairs and ramps, accessible labs, recreational areas and transportation to the educational facility.</p>	<p>Applying universal design principles to inform design even within existing goods, services, equipment and facilities such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accommodating a wide range of body sizes and abilities e.g. school desks appropriate in size and height adjustable, appropriate handles, handrails shaped and sized for learners, large sized buttons on switches and other operating devices; • equipment and facilities comfortable to use and within desirable limits of body function e.g. no step entry to buildings, ramps not too steep, doors not heavy to open, whiteboard within reach; • awareness in ensuring that important information is easily perceived in school environment e.g. signs incorporate high colour and tonal contrast, large signage, assistive learning systems; • understanding operation language and clear use of signs e.g. colour coding, pictograms; • contribution to health promotion, prevention of injury and wellness e.g. gender appropriate toilets, handrails on both sides of stairs and ramps, well ventilated classes; • social inclusion in the schools e.g. withdrawals from class for learners with disabilities are avoided; • personalisation through incorporation of opportunities for choice and expression of individual preference e.g. learning resources appropriate for individuals.
	<p>Environments that have facilities that are not safe or healthy for learners.</p>	

[Ainscow, 2000; UNICEF, 2014a]

5.4 TRAINING BARRIERS

	MOVING FROM...	TOWARDS...
TRAINING BARRIERS	Training opportunities for all educators and practitioners are sporadic and not addressing all educators' needs, realities and challenges.	CPD that is prioritized by school leadership, underpinned by robust evidence and expertise with a clear focus on improving and evaluating students' outcomes and achievements.
	Teacher training failing to address teaching methodologies to support inclusive classroom.	CPD includes also collaboration and hands-on practice which allows educators to implement new ideas and is sustained over time.
	Limited basic understanding of different groups of impairments and learners from various backgrounds and how to make adjustments to ensure that these learners can participate in regular education based on inclusive principles.	People with disabilities will be involved in training educators including planning and delivering courses.
	Student teachers have separated (optional) modules on inclusive education.	<p>Teachers who are still in training need experience in successful inclusive schools, where they can learn from experienced inclusive teachers who can model effective practice.</p> <p>Teacher trainers to have hands-on experience in inclusive education and model child-centred pedagogy and self-reflection in their teaching approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying learner's needs and barriers in class and how this will impact on the presence, participation as well as achievement; • Innovative methods to support learners to participate and learn in school community activities; • Effective collaboration with other educators, parents and community members; • Additional support and resources and how this can be utilised.

[Ainscow, 2000; UNICEF, 2014b, Lewis & Bagree, 2013]

5.5 SYSTEMIC AND ORGANISATIONAL BARRIERS

	MOVING FROM...	TOWARDS...
SYSTEMIC AND ORGANISATIONAL BARRIERS	A centralized system that inhibits changes and initiative. Focus very often orientated towards content-coverage rather than on ensuring quality teaching and learning.	Instructional and transformative school leaders who encourage rigorous, outcomes and evidence-based quality assurance systems to ensure quality teaching and collaborative practices.
	With centralized education systems initiatives that focus on employee compliance more than quality learning. The top levels of the organization may have little or no idea about the realities teachers face on a daily basis.	Support provisions which help to increase internal school inclusive capacities by encouraging preventive approaches based on early identification of needs.
	Support services which focus on compensatory approaches and aimed at fixing learners' differences to be able to fit in mainstream classrooms.	More flexible and responsive school communities specifically in their processes, timetable, content and monitoring.
	A system that is based on the identification of needs based on a compensation model.	Ongoing strategies and monitoring in order to identify and overcome exclusion and marginalization.
	Systemic challenges such as overcrowding in classrooms, inappropriate language of learning and teaching, waiting lists to receive services in specialised Resource Centres, insufficient training of educators to manage diversity in their classrooms, lack of funds for assistive devices, lack of learning support educators, long delays in assessment of learners.	Delivering the necessary quantum of time tabled instruction and time on task providing opportunities to work autonomously as well as in groups.
		A national commitment to a developmental, as well as inter-sectoral [health, education and social policy] approach to education and care of learners.
	Early allocation of support services that are beneficial for the learner as a preventative measure.	
	Coherent monitoring and evaluation processes in all school services and Ministry level work.	

[Ainscow, 2000; Lynch, 2001]

5.6 CURRICULAR BARRIERS

	MOVING FROM...	TOWARDS...
CURRICULAR BARRIERS: TEACHING PROCESSES AND ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES	Rigid and inaccessible curriculum. Content of curriculum is distant to the reality in which learners live, leaving little flexibility for differentiation or for teachers to experiment and/or try out new approaches.	The development of responsive teaching pedagogies and continuous assessment procedures which take cognisance of the needs, interests, aspirations and uniqueness of all learners.
	Separate curricula according to the different learner groups.	Teachers working as part of a collaborative team (professionals who are supporting the learner) that shares relevant information.
	Learners expected to adapt to the school curriculum.	Educators plan and respond variably in order for the learner to take an active part in decision making.
	Teaching which does not reflect the diversity of the learner diversity <i>i.e.</i> one size fits all.	Role of the class teacher is central within a supportive team.
	Teachers working in isolation.	Comprehensive assessment tools that allows educators to value diverse learning outcomes.
	Learner considered as the responsibility of someone else such as the LSE.	All learners working within the national curriculum and various learning outcomes are expected according to the learner's abilities and needs.
	Academic achievement viewed only as a measure of successful learning.	

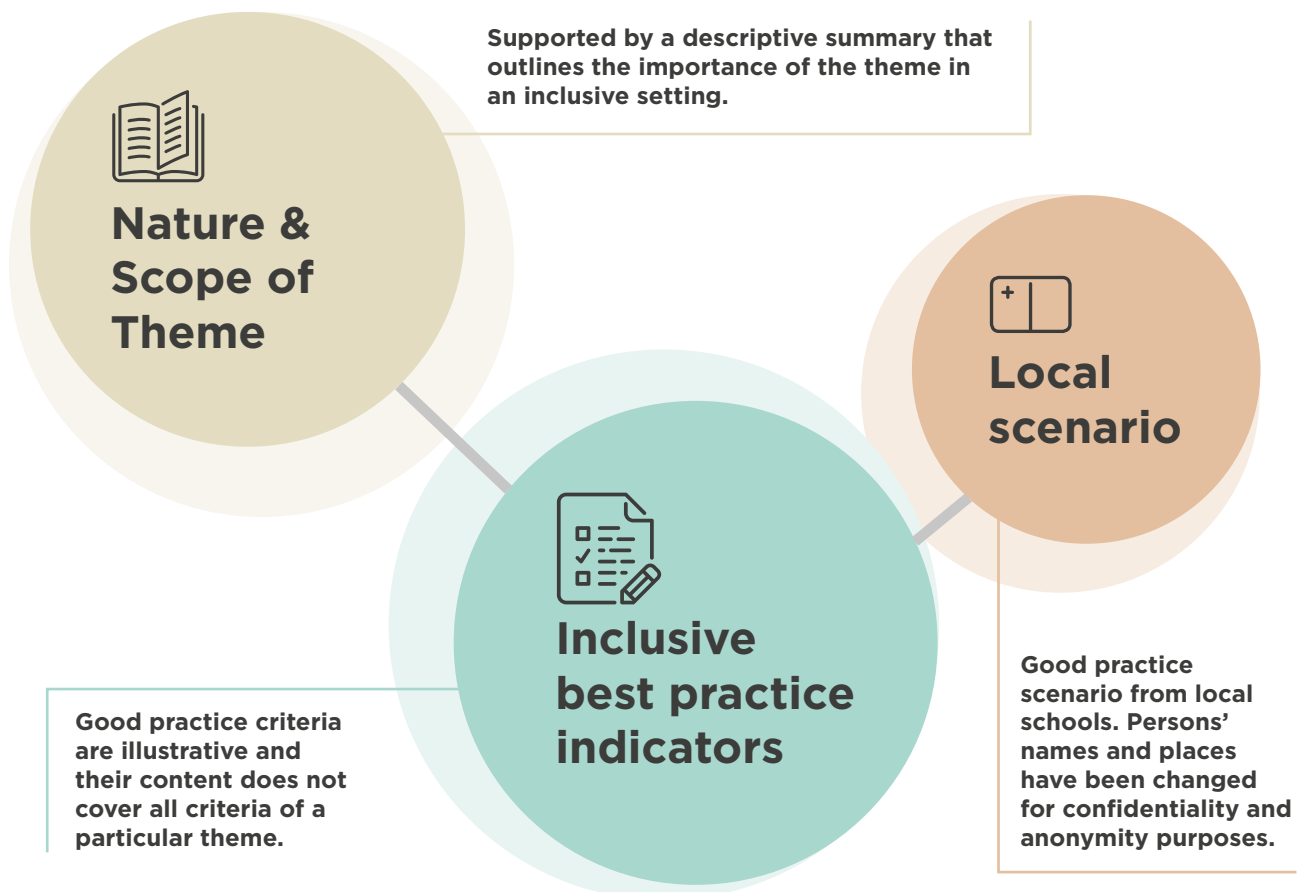
[Ainscow, 2000; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2015]

Structure of the Framework

Schools are actively seeking ways to improve their practices and monitor progress. The framework and its structure provide the school communities with an opportunity to discuss and assess the way learners are included in their schools. Through its structure, the framework has user friendly tools which will enable the schools to identify areas to be improved in their quest to have an inclusive community, celebrate positive achievements, as well as rate their levels of inclusion in order to plan how wanting areas can be addressed and improved.

The framework is structured in terms of ten interrelated and interdependent themes as illustrated in the diagram overleaf. The ten themes were derived following intensive literature review. All aspects are essential in sustaining the school's commitment to inclusion.

Each theme within this framework is developed in the following manner, involving three processes:



Themes

1 Inclusive and Strategic Leadership

2 Whole School Development Planning

3 Whole School Inclusive Environment

4 Collaboration with Parents and Community Engagement

5 Individual Education Planning

6 Teaching and Learning

7 Learner and Staff Well being

8 Continuous Professional Development

9 Positive Behaviour Management

10 Support Structure and Services

Inclusive and Strategic Leadership

Descriptive Summary

School leaders are fundamental in promoting ways in line with principles of inclusion e.g. setting strong goals and holding high expectation of the learners (Portela, 2013). School leaders also guide the respective schools through the challenges posed by an increasingly diverse and inclusive as well as complex school environment. Leaders need to respond to increasing diversity in learner characteristics and abilities, cultural backgrounds, immigration status, different socio-economic status, disabilities, and variation in learning capacity. At the core of Inclusive and Strategic Leadership are two important functions – providing a sense of purpose and direction as well as exercising influence in order to develop school cultures that include all learners.

Inclusive best practice indicators

- The school mission statement includes evidence of values of diversity and inclusion placing high importance on equity and improved outcomes for all learners. The school mission statement should be available in different formats to be understood by every learner within the school.
- School leaders build an inclusive culture, ensuring that all educators take responsibility for all learners.
- School leaders change the attitude of educators in line with a rights-based approach and by moving away from deficit models *i.e.* by removing barriers to learning and participation and eliminating discrimination and stereotyping.
- School leadership team promote and model the values and benefits of inclusive education, including high expectations for all learners. This is carried out during meetings, the School Development Plan, school website, school communication as well as in everyday face to face conversations. In all forms of communication person first language should be employed.
- School leadership team work together in initiatives of school wide improvement that benefit all learners. This includes short, medium and long-term efforts to implement and improve inclusive educational practices included in the School Development Plan.
- School leadership team work together, in order to make collaborative decisions regarding school policies and practices.
- School leadership team take a universal design approach to the school environment and curriculum, such that a safe physical environment as well as a conducive learning environment is created.

- School leadership team foster a collaborative environment that supports teachers and inspires collective responsibility for learners
- School leadership team supports teacher inquiry and development.
- School leadership team and planning teams use data to identify barriers and initiate improvement steps, based on the needs of the school and to monitor and evaluate school and individual learner achievement and progress.
- School leadership team identifies a key person who oversees, coordinates and monitors the implementation of best practices for inclusive education. This has to be a member of the SMT who is present at school at a daily basis.
- School leadership team facilitates networking among schools, in particular those within the college, for sharing of resources, joint problem-solving, designing innovative practices *etc.*

Local Scenario

Mr Psaila has been appointed Head of Primary School situated in a local village. Initially he familiarised himself with the educator and learner community in order to understand the existing practices and learn more about the realities of the school. Mr Psaila had a future vision for this school and throughout his planning and reflection, inclusion and diversity of the school assumed a central role. He identified the vision for the school with embedded best teaching and learning practices and communicated this to the rest of the SMT. This vision was articulated and explained to educators, who are ultimately the agents for the success of the school.

Mr Psaila was aware that various educators can interpret this vision in their own way and base their actions accordingly. Therefore, he ensured to create a shared meaning and understanding to support the school community's vision. During one of the initial meetings with the staff, Mr Psaila and the SMT conveyed their intention for quality and high performance amongst the learners, indicating areas of development in which the school aspires to improve. An atmosphere of shared targets and effort was established which will help in determining whether proposed changes will occur. Mr Psaila, being aware that most results can be achieved through the joint effort of educators, he sought ways of how to offer intellectual stimulation, examined assumptions on teaching and eventually enabled educators to understand and gain mastery of the required changes enshrined in the developmental vision of the school. Being very aware of the fact that some educators might have mixed feelings over some changes, Mr Psaila ensured there was support from the rest of the SMT to demonstrate respect towards concerns and feelings.

Ultimately the Head of School intends to create a professional learning community including educators and learners. This is brought about by strengthening the school culture with embodied norms, values, attitudes that reflect a positive and caring attitude, modifying organisational structure through the identification of talents that educators in a school have as well as foster positive interactions with outside community *e.g.* parents, agencies, local entities *etc.*

Whole School Development Planning

Descriptive Summary

Whole school development planning is a procedure that schools can implement to manage change and enhance quality. Tuohy (1997) explains that for a school to accomplish its preferred future a number of steps have to be planned out. Whole school development planning emerges from an effective internal review process. It enables schools to set priority targets in all areas of school life, set up a plan of action which is regularly reviewed and update and establish ways of consultation with, and the involvement of other stakeholders.

The progress of each priority target is the responsibility of the school leadership team, but the development work of the priority target must be widely shared if this is to be put into practice.

Schools should examine existing priorities and analyse how one can contribute to the inclusive development of the school, including the necessary accommodations and modifications. The whole school development plan should include the priorities that emerged from the internal review process, plan of action, resources, strategies and assigned responsibilities of staff together with an evaluative mechanism to monitor progress.

Inclusive best practice indicators

- ▶ The school is committed to the inclusion of all learners. Inclusion values are articulated and rendered visible, and can be seen underpinning all the school's planning and practice processes, reflected in the mission statement *etc.*
- ▶ A culture of improvement is promoted through the regular evaluation of action plans in the whole school development planning, an effective internal review process that identifies priority developmental targets and external reviews.
- ▶ Strategic planning facilitates equitable and effective resources for the accommodation of all learners.
- ▶ School ensures that diverse needs, experiences, skills and knowledge are respected and valued by all members of the school community, and that are also reflected in the school policies and procedures.
- ▶ Whole school development planning sustains best practices through a specific action plan to increase inclusive opportunities for all learners. This is assessed and reviewed regularly to ensure compliance with inclusive practices. Implementation of the action plans need to be regularly monitored by the School Management Team through a system of ongoing school self-evaluation.
- ▶ Parents participate in the whole school development planning. The whole school development plan as well as reports on its implementation and progress, are disseminated to parents in a format that is accessible to them.

Local Scenario

During the SMT meeting at a Local Primary School, whereby the School Development Plan were discussed, Ms. Busuttil, the Assistant Head of School suggested that one or more of the priority action target, emanated from the Internal Review process in the next scholastic year's SDP action could be Inclusive Practices. Ms. Caruana, the Head of School, agreed that there is much need for this area to be further developed at school. Thus, following this meeting, the SMT initiated a whole school reflection on the priority development targets related to inclusion to be addressed during the following scholastic year. These discussions took place in small groups involving all educators working in school together with other professionals supporting the school. This was followed by a whole school exercise to agree on priorities. The outcomes of this discussion led to the development of various actions that would be taken to reach the Priority Development Targets related to inclusion. The following are some examples taken from action plans:

- All educators (both teachers and LSEs) are to introduce a visual timetable so that all learners would know what is expected of them.
- The teacher starts the lesson by stating the learning intention of the lesson and, during the lesson, constantly asks learners for feedback on learning.
- Curriculum time is provided to plan differentiated tasks. Teamwork between the class team is essential to enhance inclusive practices.
- All educators at school start to carry out Circle Time with the learners once a week.
- Copybooks for each year group are to be colour coded according to subject.
- Learners' transition is prioritised and a plan is devised by the end of the second term.
- A peer preparation programme is to be implemented for learners with diverse needs during the first term.
- Once a week a special assembly is organised to introduce and present different values to the learners.

Whole School Inclusive Environment

Descriptive Summary

A welcoming and inclusive learning-friendly environment is based on accessible transport, buildings, resources, facilities, activities and strategies where “every learner matters and matters equally” (UNESCO, 2017, p.12).

Accessibility as well as health and safety matters need to be appropriately considered. Hence, the attendance and active participation of all learners in schools are enhanced following reasonable modifications.

A whole-school inclusive environment needs to take into consideration the principles of Universal Design for Learning including the school environment and the curriculum together with teaching and learning.

An inclusive school environment is one in which the learner’s voice is given value and where all learners are listened to.

Inclusive best practice indicators

- Universal Design for Learning is central to the school's environmental planning to ensure flexible and accessible learning environment for all.
- Periodic evaluation of school's environment accessibility is carried out at school.
- An action plan is created to remove physical barriers to inclusion and to ensure that good practices are maintained. Also, this needs to include the training of staff in the use appropriate strategies and equipment (such as evacuation chairs).
- All parts of the school are accessible, and all resources, equipment and strategies are accessible to all learners so that they can actively participate in activities organised at school.
- Safety procedures are designed to cater for the diverse requirements of all learners.
- Learning materials such as handouts, textbooks, charts, manipulatives, digital resources and other resources used across all subject areas are reflective of the diversity of the whole school community.
- Events that recognize and celebrate diversity are incorporated into the school calendar.
- Periodic survey of the school climate is carried out at school to capture the school community's perception and experience of safety and inclusion on issues such as bullying, curriculum, sexism, cultural sensitivity *etc.*

Local Scenarios

Scenario 1

Since his appointment as Head of Primary School I, Mr. Xuereb started to equip the school and make changes to the school environment to become more accessible to all learners. Although school had a lift installed, Mr. Xuereb made sure that the lift is serviced on a regular basis so as to make the school more accessible for learners. Also Mr. Xuereb, with the support of the NSSS, introduced a Multi-Sensory Learning Room, where on a scheduled timetable, the LSE accompanies the learner so that support is given by the teacher present according to the child's needs.

In the corridor he made sure that there are soft edges in all corners so that learners would not get hurt, and colour coded corridors and classroom doors, with large print signs. As , some learners found it difficult to navigate the school's corridors due to the fact that there was a lot of confusion, the use of footprint symbols on the floor was introduced. This resulted in educators and learners walking on one side of the corridor, thus reducing the confusion that learners were previously experiencing.

Ramps were installed outside the school with high visibility marks together with handrails. Some learners at this school experienced sensory issues when they heard the bell ringing for break time, end of day, and change in lesson *etc.* This has been replaced by a 30-second soft background music. Mr. Xuereb was also made aware of the hypersensitivity of some learners to certain colours. Therefore, Mr. Xuereb ensured that educators refrain from using charts, curtains, carpets *etc.* with bright colours in class. Classroom improvements conducive to learning can also include provision of good acoustics in class to decrease reverberation as it impedes hearing aid users from hearing speech clearly resulting in missing vital information. Examples include eliminating hard surfaces (e.g. soffits for ceilings) and have more soft furnishings that absorb sound (e.g. curtains, cork boards), chairs and desks to have rubber tips to reduce noise.

Together with the SMT, Mr Xuereb emphasised the need for structure in the classrooms. Several educators took the initiative by making use of a visual timetable, and ensured that clutter was kept to a minimum in the class. In some classes the TEACCH approach was implemented following suggestion by the different professionals. The school yard was also a priority for Mr. Xuereb. He made sure that the yard is accessible for all learners and that it is also safe. Mr. Xuereb also started to develop a multi-sensory garden with the school community. He accomplished all these projects and a whole-school inclusive environment through support and guidance from the school community, health and safety teachers and professionals who are supporting learners at his school.

Scenario 2

Mr. Camilleri is a year 4 teacher in a local primary school. He was well aware of his learners' needs and equally committed to building a positive classroom environment. Hence, when he was preparing for the next scholastic year and became aware that Julia, a new student joining the school, who lived with her two fathers, would be in his class, he did some research and found two suitable books that depicted families with same-sex parents to add to his classroom library. During a meeting with Julia's parents, Mr. Camilleri mentioned this and they appreciated his thought. During this meeting it was also discussed that a good communication channel between the parents and teacher would be established so that if Julia exhibited any signs of distress due to bullying this would be immediately tackled by referring her to the college anti-bullying teacher. However, it was agreed that no extra attention would be given to Julia in class and she would be treated with equal concern as the rest of her classmates.

Being proactive and knowing that certain students would question Julia's family structure, Mr. Camilleri also spoke to the school guidance teacher and college counsellor. It was decided that a peer preparation programme would be prepared for the start of the scholastic year so as to celebrate diversity in his class. Mr. Camilleri, wanted to celebrate the differences pupils brought in class and not just focus on Julia. He wanted to emphasise the point that all learners in class are unique in their own way. Their differences could consist of their reading level, athletic ability, cultural background, gender, personality, religious beliefs, and the list goes on. Mr. Camilleri also adapted some examples he used during delivery of curriculum to represent all family structures.

Mr. Cutajar, the Head of School also aligned school policy and any circulars to be issued at school so as to respect all different family structures at school.

Collaboration with parents and community engagement

Descriptive Summary

“The family microsystem plays not only a pivotal role in learners’ life and education, it is also a key systematic dimension for supports and participation when promoting inclusive systems in and around the schools” (Downes, Nairz-Wirth, Rusinaite, 2017, p.61).

Hence, it is important that the relationship between the school and parents is based on mutual respect.

Also, open lines of communication are well established between parents and the school taking into account the needs of all learners.

Parents are made to feel welcome at school and the collaboration between parents and the school is central when major decisions affecting them and their children are taken.

The school also acts as a lifelong learning centre where the community can, amongst other, enhance parenting and literacy skills.

Inclusive best practice indicators

- There is a partnership between school staff and parents in order to increase learners’ aspirations and participation.
- An open communication channel with regards to matters that are important to both the parents and the school are established. Parents know how and when to contact the school.
- Communication by the school is conducted in a way, language and format that parents/ guardians can understand.
- The school offers support to parents in accessing support networks and resources available in their community. Hence, community resources are known and drawn upon.
- Parents are active participants in advisory, decision-making and advocacy activities at school. All contributions are respected.
- Everybody’s contribution is genuinely sought, respected and facilitated during meetings.
- Spaces are created at school where parents can meet. Practices of classroom and extracurricular participation by parents are evident at school.
- Parents are provided with training opportunities to enhance their parenting skills so that they are in a better position to support their child’s learning at home and at school.
- Involving the community and employers to increase curriculum relevance and work opportunities.
- Regular feedback with regards to learners’ progress is regularly communicated to parents using the appropriate communication channels.

Local Scenario

Paul is a Year 2 learner at a Local Primary School. Paul is on the Autism spectrum and exhibits challenging behaviour. He is supported by a one-to-one LSE at school. The HoD (Inclusion) visits Paul regularly in class to provide support strategies to the teacher and LSE together. With the collaborative work of the class team Paul's learning experience at school is rendered a positive one. The class team regularly keep contact with Paul's mother, Maria, using the contact book. Support strategies and resources found effective at school are communicated to the parent. The school and home work together for the benefit of the learner and they have managed to establish a constant home/school routine that is very beneficial to the learner.

Maria understands that she must make an appointment to speak to Paul's class team or a member of the SMT if and when the need arises. If at times the teachers or a member of the SMT are unavailable Maria knows that they will contact her again and a meeting will be set up. The school also suggested to Maria to contact local NGOs that support parents of learners on the Autism spectrum. With the help of the parents' committee training for parents and workshops for all parents at school have been organised to raise awareness on Autism and the rights and entitlements of learners and their families. The parents' committee have also organised a fund-raising activity during the mid-term holidays so that resources that are beneficial for all learners at school can be purchased and used for the benefit of all learners. Maria is positive about Paul attending this school because communication is very effective and she feels supported by the school on which strategies to use with Paul. She knows that her voice will be heard if the need arises and she will be supported accordingly.

Individual education planning

Descriptive Summary

Planning for individual learner needs is a crucial aspect of whole school policy on inclusion. Individualised Education Planning unites learners, parents, educators and professionals in the design of a curriculum programme according to the level of performance of the learner. This planning process fosters good communication amongst stakeholders for the sharing of responsibility for the key aspects of IEP design, including gaining agreement on goals and sharing accountability for outcomes. The plan devised will guide educators at classroom level to meet the particular needs that arise from their background or disability through modification of the mainstream curriculum. In the local context, meeting individual educational needs of the learners involves resources and specialised support, differentiation, varying teaching methods according to learning style as well as provision for the needs of the learner which may vary in nature such as physically, cognitively, socially or emotionally amongst others.

Inclusive best practice indicators

- ▶ Individual Educational Planning is characterised by high expectations for the learner by providing challenges that stretch learning however always ensuring realistic targets.
- ▶ Individual Educational Planning includes identifying, using, coordinating and managing the services and support that is available to learners with Individual Educational Needs.
- ▶ Individual Educational Planning sees the school partnering with families and other stakeholders to be actively involved in assessing learner needs and designing the Individual Educational Programme. The contribution of the learner is sought in the IEP process in different ways and at different levels.
- ▶ Individual Educational Planning identify targets that:
 - are relevant, age appropriate as well as sensitive to the social culture of the learner;
 - focus on the learning of decision and choice making skills;
 - develop peer interaction, communication and other social skills.
- ▶ Individual Educational Planning determines the instruction within an age appropriate curricular framework albeit being differentiated according to the needs of the learner.
- ▶ Individual Educational Planning determines the differentiated instruction provided by educators for a variety of learners' needs by incorporating visual, tactile, and kinaesthetic materials as well as experiences.
- ▶ Individual Educational Planning determines the modifications and accommodations required for learners in order to be incorporated into lesson plans and everyday instruction.

- Individual Educational Planning provides a framework for direct instruction on IEP goals which are infused across various subjects and themes.
- Individual Educational Planning provides for learners using Assistive Technology in classrooms as needed for meaningful participation in teaching and learning.
- Individual Educational Planning provides an opportunity for teachers to work with LSEs in order to discuss provision of appropriate supports as well as plan for fading adult support to increase learner independence.
- Individual Educational Planning provides opportunities for access to consultation and support from professionals and specialists in order to support them in meeting the diverse needs of all learners.

Local Scenario

Celine is currently in her fourth-year of Primary schooling. She has various strengths such as heightened capabilities in IT, and able to create meaningful social interactions. Celine needs to be supported in literacy concepts as well as numeracy. Due to the cognitive challenges Celine has, learning is evidently harder with the most significant difficulties being in Maltese and English. The learner is struggling in accessing other subjects due to literacy challenges. On a positive note Celine is intrinsically motivated to learn and her parents provides a lot of support at home and support the school in tasks initiated by her teacher and LSE. The Individual Educational Planning initiated through observations of the learner in different lessons, break times and different times of the day. Strengths and needs were drawn up accordingly. Provided it was a transition year, a MAP session was held in the beginning of the scholastic year whereby parents met with school educators and professionals involved. This gave class team information about Celine and an action plan could be drafted. The HoD (Inclusion) discussed with the class team prior to the IEP and checked the draft IEP drawn up by class team. On meeting again for the IEP, parents, professionals and school team discussed the learning goals, and strategies to be employed. Parents had time to ask questions and give their feedback. The learning targets agreed related to reading and written expression as well as grammar and spelling in Maltese and English.

Goals identified were SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time specific. Following the IEP meeting, the document was finalised and all stakeholders signed a copy and started to be implemented. Regular monitoring has been taking place since then and goals to be achieved were daily recorded on the daily evaluation sheet. Through this planning it was possible to determine which goals are achieved, which were partially achieved and which were not achieved. Appropriate modifications and accommodations were implemented to ensure that needs are worked upon whilst strengths are strengthened and used to ameliorate areas of challenges.

Teaching and learning

Descriptive Summary

School management and educators engage in curriculum design that satisfies every learners' entitlement as outlined in the National Curriculum Framework (MEDE, 2012). Curriculum design for inclusion aims at providing learning experiences that have goals, contain material and are assessed in ways that respect learner variability with more emphasis on hands-on, active and co-operative learning. Also, curriculum design includes the methodology and pedagogy of the process of learning based on learner-centred and assessment for learning principles. Content, process and outcomes are designed to offer learners with diverse needs the opportunity to reach their maximum potential. This is done through delivery of scaffolded lessons that motivate learner involvement, respecting different needs, abilities and learning preferences. Hence, "seeing individual differences not as problems to be fixed, but as opportunities for democratizing and enriching learning" (UNESCO, 2017, p.13).

Inclusive best practice indicators

- ▶ Teaching and learning activities are meaningful and appropriately challenging for all the diverse learners through active, independent and co-operative learning. They relate to the learner's interests, needs and goals.
- ▶ Curriculum design gives the opportunity for all learners to learn within a community of learners. The flexibility of the curriculum should be used so that a range of accessible and relevant learning opportunities for all learners are planned by the teacher.
- ▶ Adaptations and differentiation is done collaboratively between teacher and LSE. Teachers share schemes of work and relevant lesson materials with LSEs well in advance to have the necessary time to adapt accordingly.
- ▶ Learner participation, self-esteem and a sense of competence are promoted. Class teams develop positive relationships with learners such that high expectations are communicated for all learners in the class. Teachers and LSEs work together for the benefit of all learners.
- ▶ Learning is success oriented and equips learners to develop successful coping skills and manage educational challenges. Setbacks and mistakes are acknowledged and learning through them is encouraged.
- ▶ Flexible teaching-learning methodologies with particular emphasis at creating an optimum learning environment with appropriate learning materials, helps all children to learn and develop their potential.

- Teachers working collaboratively together can implement evidence-based teaching approaches that actively involve all learners. Educators are encouraged to share teaching methodologies, and to pool strategies and resources in schools.
- Educators are encouraged to participate in networking and collaboration projects both nationally and internationally.
- The school's assessment policy and practices promote quality development at the classroom and school levels both through formative and summative assessment practices. Assessment strategies address the different needs and abilities of all learners which are aligned to teaching methodologies.

Local Scenario in a Primary School

Ms. Bartolo has been a teacher for five years. She has always fostered positive relationships, structure and routines, as well as communication. These are essential for fostering positive teaching and learning in the classroom. This scholastic year Ms. Bartolo has a Year 4 class of 20 learners. The class team is made up of Ms. Bartolo, Ms. Abela, an LSE supporting a learner on full-time one to one basis, and Ms. Zammit, an LSE supporting three other learners.

Ms. Bartolo, Ms. Abela and Ms. Zammit continuously work together to give a positive teaching and learning experience to the learners. Whilst in the beginning to the school year, Ms. Bartolo gave Ms. Abela and Ms. Zammit her schemes of work. Ms. Abela and Ms. Zammit make sure that they know what teaching and learning is going to take place during the week so that the class team readily prepares for the learners. Ms. Bartolo also sends her lesson plans and the resources she will be using with the learners to Ms. Abela and Ms. Zammit two weeks in advance so that they have ample time to prepare adaptations that Ms. Bartolo evaluates and approves. Before each day, the class team find it beneficial to be in class 10 minutes before the lesson starts so that they discuss the timetable for that particular day and go over the daily schedule that they prepared prior to the day to confirm that everything is in place. Following this, Ms. Bartolo prepares the visual timetable for the learners.

After assembly Ms. Bartolo briefly explains what is going to happen on that particular day to the learners in class and then starts off with the day's lessons. As the school day can be particularly long for some learners, Ms. Bartolo ensures that lessons are not more than 45 minutes long and there is structure within each lesson. Ms. Bartolo always starts a lesson by sharing the learning intentions with the learners, following by a short-ice breaker where possible. Ms. Bartolo tries to keep her speaking to a minimum and explanations are given short and to the point. Rather she tries to engage the learners in active participation. Group work is central in Ms. Bartolo's lesson and she ensures that learners are involved in various flexible group work activities during which independent learning is encouraged. After group work, Ms. Bartolo asks the learners to do a short task which is related to the lesson. At this point Ms. Bartolo, Ms. Abela and Ms. Zammit support the learners through

prompting, attend to the needs of the learners who might need support and obtain feedback on the outcomes of the lesson.

When a learner finishes a task, s/he can engage in another educational activity on a rotational basis, or they could go in the reading tent and read a book. They could also do a filler or else go on the mat and play an educational board game. These routines were clearly presented by Ms. Bartolo in the beginning of the school year so that learners are continuously engaged in the learning. After each lesson, Ms. Bartolo, asks one learner to come out and take off the lesson's visual flash card from the visual timetable so to indicate that the lesson is now over. As sometimes the school day is too long for some learners, they are given a five-minute movement break through brain gym activities.

As the learners will sit for their first examinations this year, Ms. Bartolo readily prepares the learners for their first summative examinations through constant positive and constructive feedback in the tasks given to the learners. Ms. Bartolo met with the parents at the beginning of the scholastic year and presented her work for the year. Also Ms. Bartolo, Ms. Abela and Ms. Zammit point out the importance of scheduling work with the learners. The class team also encourage children to speak out about concerns that they might have through weekly circle time sessions that they have as a group. Homework is structured and the class team make sure learners are given homework that is suited to their abilities so that they are able to complete on their own.

Ms. Bartolo also engages the class to participate in collaborative projects with other schools both locally and internationally. She feels that such projects enhance teaching and learning and expands the horizons of learning for all learners such that learning is promoted as an enjoyable activity. In Ms. Bartolo's class and supported by Ms. Abela and Ms. Zammit learning is authentic, positive, success oriented and meaningful.

Local Scenario in a Secondary School

Ms. Friggieri is a teacher of Mathematics at a Local Secondary School. She plans her Mathematics lesson in a way that sustains lesson delivery. Learning outcomes are clearly stated on her lesson plan and these are shared with learners at the start of the lesson. Ms. Friggieri plans sequencing activities and tasks to target the different learning needs and abilities of the learners in her classrooms. Positive relationship between the teacher and learners is evident and based on successful classroom management and meaningful interaction with learners.

At the start of the scholastic year, Ms. Friggieri shared the scheme of work with the LSEs supporting learners in her classrooms and shares relevant lesson materials with LSEs on a weekly basis keeping an open communication channel through regular e-mails and discussions. Ms. Friggieri and the LSEs work together for the benefit of all learners and she is aware of the different needs and strengths of all the learners in her class. Adaptations to meet the different learning needs of the learners being supported by the LSE are worked collaboratively between the teacher and LSEs and based on the targets set in the IEP. In fact, during the lesson, the teacher employs a creative teaching approach that involves and motivates all learners. Learners are exposed to different resources and are assigned tasks that engage them according to needs and abilities. Ms. Friggieri goes around the class when learners are engaged with the activities to continually assess her learner's level of understanding and she interacts meaningfully with both LSEs and learners.

During weekly subject meetings, Ms. Friggieri shares different resources with the rest of the colleagues at the school. Different assessment strategies are also shared and challenges arising at classroom level discussed. During this meeting all the teachers contribute and share different strategies based on their knowledge and experience. The college, through the HoD (Mathematics) is also taking part in an EU funded project with a school in Finland with the aim of sharing different activities linked with Inquiry-based learning to enhance the Mathematical learning experience of all learners in class.

Learner and staff well being

Descriptive Summary

Promoting the well-being of all learners and staff at school is of primary importance. This is based on a rights perspective. When it comes to learners, effective monitoring of attendance, participation and well-being are essential. A resilience curriculum is presented to learners that seeks to foster the emotional and social learning of all learners. This will put them in a better position to achieve academic success and social and emotional wellbeing as independent young citizens of the European Union.

Educators are to have access to continuous professional development and adequate training to cater for the needs of all learners. For both learners and staff, adequate fora are set up where they can express their opinion and voice their concerns such that challenges are discussed collaboratively, and solutions agreed upon.

Inclusive best practice indicators

Learner well being

- The school fosters the holistic development of all learners such that their skills, knowledge, range of abilities and diverse needs are identified and developed.
- Equipping learners with competences to overcome challenges related to poverty, mobility, unemployment, family stress, discrimination, bullying, violence and social exclusion to develop resilient and independent citizens.
- The school promotes and enhances the voice of all learners and encourages expression of personal identities and experiences.
- The school promotes and safeguards the learner's well-being through an effective pastoral care system.
- The school embraces diversity and an awareness of diversity is included into all aspects of the school community.
- Learner's progress is regularly communicated with parents.
- All new learners are helped to settle into the school.
- Support for migrant learners is coordinated with the Migrants Learners' Unit.
- Indefinite suspensions/exclusions are not given to learners as a disciplinary consequence.

Inclusive best practice indicators

Staff well being

- Mentoring for educators needs to be enhanced in the school, especially newly appointed staff. Hence, all new staff is helped to settle into the school.
- Staff is encouraged to meet personal and professional development goals and are given access to appropriate continuing professional development.
- The school supports staff experiencing exceptionally stressful circumstances arising from their work by guiding them to services that cater for adult well-being.
- Services from outside the school such as specialised teachers support educators in their work.
- The school actively supports staff through difficult personal circumstances including illness, disability and loss.
- The school promotes and enhances the voice of all educators and encourages expression of personal identities and experiences.

LOCAL SCENARIO 1 : Staff wellbeing

The Farrugia family are lately going through a difficult time since Mr. Farrugia has recently passed away. Mr. Farrugia was a healthy 45-year-old, however, when he was at work he suffered from a heart failure. Mrs. Farrugia is a teacher at a Local Middle School. Mr. and Mrs. Farrugia have two children: 12-year-old Nigel and 7-year-old Laila. Mrs. Farrugia, Nigel and Laila are devastated by the loss of a dear husband and father. When this tragic incident happened, Mrs. Farrugia was at work. Ms. Lanzon, the Head of School, asked Mrs. Farrugia to go to her office since she had received an urgent telephone call and accompanied Mrs. Farrugia to hospital.

Following the bereavement leave Ms. Lanzon encouraged Mrs. Farrugia to seek support from Employee Support Programme. Nigel was a learner at the Local Middle school, and Ms. Lanzon contacted the College Psychologist and College Counsellor to support Nigel. Ms. Lanzon also contacted Mr. Schembri, the Head of School at the Local Primary School so that the College Professionals would also support Laila in the challenges she was experiencing. The College Psychotherapist was also asked to support the family. Though the Farrugia family were going through a challenging time in their lives, the Senior Management from both schools supported the family in their grief.

LOCAL SCENARIO 2 : Learner wellbeing

Ahmad was a Year 5 learner at the local primary school. This was his second year in a Maltese school after he had fled to Malta together with his family from a war-torn country. He could communicate well in English and was also becoming very proficient in Maltese. He was a bright learner who could grasp new concepts easily however, he was very reserved and hardly participated during lessons or had any friends. He showed no interest in his peers and although they spoke with him during class activities, they did not seek his company during recess. Ms Grech, his new teacher wanted to include Ahmad more in the school life and decided to speak with him. He readily communicated with his new teacher. He explained to her that since he was the only learner of colour he found it quite difficult at times and he claimed that he did not feel confident to participate in class since he believed that if it would not be the correct answer, he would be mocked by his peers and his lack of knowledge would be attributed to his race.

Ms Grech suggested whether Ahmad would be comfortable to describe his country, together with the traditions, food and culture to the rest of his peers so that they will get to know more about him. Ms Grech told him that this exercise could be part of the Geography session since she was going to mention his country in the upcoming lessons. Ahmad was pleased with this and also enquired whether he could play some music from his home country – something which he really missed. Ms Grech told Ahmad that they will deliver an interesting lesson together for the rest of his classmates.

During the next few days Ms Grech helped Ahmad with the presentation, which he eventually carried out. He also brought a typical sweet from his home country which his mother prepared for him on the day of his presentation for his peers. His peers were very interested in his presentation and asked numerous questions. Ms Grech noticed a more accepting attitude from his peers over the next few days and Ahmad's relationship with his peers improved. Ms Grech tried to create a democratic classroom culture through various activities, used books to encourage tolerance and Ahmad's national holidays and festivals were included with those of his peers.

Continuous Professional Development

Descriptive Summary

Continuous professional development is important and necessary for an inclusive and equitable school, since educators must respond to new challenges given a greater diversity of learner needs. Inclusive education is the responsibility of all education professionals and therefore training should be a priority. Teachers should gain knowledge and understanding on diverse challenges of learners so responsibility is shared in class rather than shifted onto the LSEs. For educators to work effectively in inclusive settings, appropriate values, attitudes, skills, competences, knowledge and understanding are necessary (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2009).

An understanding of inclusive practices has to be developed and diversity among learners has to be approached with a positive attitude. Reflection on practice also contributes to enhancing the knowledge and skills and ways to improve.

Inclusive best practice indicators

- School staff is encouraged to engage in personal and professional development and training in different areas of inclusive education.
- Opportunities are created where educators can plan together, share resources and experiences of teaching to learn new ways about how best to respond to learner diversity.
- Professional development opportunities are available to enhance teachers' inclusive pedagogical skills (flexible teaching-learning methodologies) to meet the diverse needs of learners.
- Training is provided to educators on how to identify and support learners who may have "invisible" disabilities since these learners experience greater risk of dropping out when their conditions go unnoticed in educational settings.
- School leaders are aware of inherent biases that may lead to exclusionary practices and in turn guide and support educators to explore and address such bias where it exists.
- ICT can facilitate participation in educational activities for diverse learners promoting equity in education. CPD courses focusing on this should be promoted with all educators.
- Educators working together in inclusive classrooms receive training on working collaboratively to clarify their respective roles for the best interest of the diverse learner.
- Educators are provided with CPD that upskills the necessary knowledge and understanding with a clear focus on delivering and developing high quality education and systems of support for all learners.

- School leaders may support educators to identify professional development as appropriate for their role and to enhance best practices in inclusive education.
- College systems should provide potential networking opportunities such that collaborative professional development can be organized potentially for sharing expertise and developing inter-schools collaborative teams.
- Opportunities for continuous professional development for school leaders on managing and setting up inclusive schools and promote inclusive education, use of appropriate strategies, implement current policies and equitable use of resources to cater for the diverse needs of learners.
- Training in inclusive education is provided for all education stakeholders (including policy makers, school leaders, educators and non-teaching staff such as caretakers, maintenance, secretary *etc.*).

Local Scenario

A local secondary school embarked on an initiative to promote CPD. In the beginning of the school year, all educators were given a form where they indicated which areas of training they wish to engage in and be trained in during the scholastic year and further on. This form was handed over to the SMT who, in view of the feedback asked the Institute for Education to provide in-house training to educators. Ms. Psaila, the Head of School, made sure that each member of the SMT engages in and attends at least one phase course organised by the Institute for Education.

At the beginning of the scholastic year a noticeboard was set up where different courses and training initiatives were announced. These ranged from short training courses, part-time degrees, on-line courses and talks. Also, Ms. Psaila made sure that generated e-mails on CPD were forwarded to all educators. Ms. Psaila encouraged educators to further their professional development also during meetings. There were educators at school who furthered their training by attending a number of courses and training initiatives to better support the learners enhance their knowledge and skills on inclusive practices

Positive behaviour management

Descriptive Summary

Behaviour that is challenging (both internalised and externalised) causes concern in schools. This framework supports and promotes preventive strategies whereby the school supports all learners through positive behaviour management.

Also, this framework supports the inclusion of all learners, including learners who present with SEBD. It gives guidelines with regards to the creation of a safe and secure environment for learners' academic, social and personal development to increase and maintain positive behaviour.

Inclusive best practice indicators

- › A school-based behaviour policy is designed following a consultative process with and accessed by all stakeholders (educators, learners and parents).
- › School and classroom rules reflect the school-based behaviour policy and are communicated clearly to all stakeholders. School and classroom rules need to be clear, few and reflect on the routines of the school.
- › Schools use school-wide positive behaviour support strategies to improve learner behaviour and school participation.
- › Positive behaviour and social and emotional literacy are promoted at school. Reasonable accommodations are made, and coping skills fostered in learners who are finding challenges in following the school behaviour policy.
- › Learners exhibiting challenging behaviour are referred to appropriate services and supported through whole-school approaches, group approaches and/or individual support.
- › Prioritising social and emotional education. Awareness of emotions, caring, empathy, concern for others, positive relationships, making responsible decisions, impulse control, resolving conflict constructively are embedded in school curriculum.
- › A behaviour modification plan is designed and implemented for learners exhibiting challenging behaviour. In certain instances, a peer preparation programme should also be included to explain to peers how and why some learners with disability behave in certain ways and thus why the behavior policy cannot be the same for all.

- Disciplinary procedures are based on proportionate responses to behaviour and should be in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).
- The school addresses any fear, threat or injury to self and, others (as well as inappropriate use of the physical setting) in a serious manner and responds according to its behaviour policy. When all in-school resources have been exhausted and behaviour is still of concern school refers for service/s using appropriate procedures.
- Making diversity visible and welcomed in schools, so that an attitude of respect is fostered.

Local Scenario

Ms. Borg is the Head of School at a Local Middle School. With the support of the HoD-College Prefect of Discipline, a behaviour policy was designed that fosters a positive educational climate. At the start of the year during her first meeting with the staff, Ms. Borg clearly discusses the behaviour policy and gives clear guidelines to the staff on how they need to use a firm but kind approach to behaviour management at school. All stakeholders at school have knowledge of the school behaviour policy and the school has a policy version for staff, learners and parents. The parents are also provided with a copy of the school behaviour policy in both Maltese and English before the start of the scholastic year.

All educators at the school are aware of the school behaviour policy and they are asked to discuss class rules with the learners during the first lesson of the school year based on the school behaviour policy. All educators are responsible at all times that learners follow such procedures and act appropriately at time and place. Educators who support learners during the PSCD sessions and in the Learning Support Zone are also encouraged to discuss school and class rules with the learners through Circle Time. Once every month, Ms. Borg also holds a special assembly where the learners are introduced to the rule that they wish to focus on during that month. Also, both school and class rules are presented through visuals, which are positive, promote effort and are written in both Maltese and English.

This scholastic year, Matthew, a learner in Year 7 has been exhibiting a number of challenging behaviours at school namely threats towards self and others, use of foul language, disregarding school rules, and bullying other learners. Faced with this situation Ms. Borg asked a number of professionals to support the learner, namely the HoD-College Prefect of Discipline, the Learning Support Zone team, the College Counsellor and the Anti-Bullying Guidance Teacher. Ms. Borg informed Matthew's parents about the behaviour that Matthew was exhibiting, and they readily approved that professionals and support educators support Matthew. Matthew joined the Learning Support Zone for an anger management programme and a behaviour management programme. The Learning Support Zone team also implemented the behaviour modification programme for Matthew. Whilst Matthew had to follow this behaviour modification programme, he knew what the sanctions for inappropriate behaviour were e.g. community work at school. When looking at the sanctions Ms. Farrugia and Mr. Tabone (LSZ team) made sure that sanctions do not conflict with Matthew's rights. Mr. Tabone, the Learning Support Zone LSE, also supported Matthew through various in-class support sessions. As there were threats towards self and other learners, Ms. Borg asked Ms. Abdilla, the College Counsellor to support Matthew through individual counselling sessions. As it was reported that Matthew bullied another learner in class, the Anti-Bullying Guidance Teacher was asked to support Matthew and the other learners through individual and group sessions. At first Matthew did not want to comply with the adults that were supporting him. Thus, Ms. Borg asked for support from the NSSS to send an Education Officer to observe Matthew during a lesson. The Education Officer asked Ms. Borg to continue to support Matthew through established support services and if the learner continues to exhibit a regression in behaviour, and all support services have been exhausted to no avail, a case conference will be called, where all professionals can discuss alternate provisions that could support Matthew such as a Learning Support Centre.

Support structures and services

Descriptive Summary

Support structures and services are essential in supporting educators, learners and parents. These are diverse and often involve a range of different service professionals, approaches and working methods. In inclusive education, a continuum of support is required to be effective ranging from differentiated classroom to support from external agencies. Steps are being taken so that screening and needs assessment processes are implemented as intervention and preventative rather than a compensatory approach. Multi-disciplinary teams are crucial in the set-up of support structures and services. Support services outside of school such as Resource Centres and Learning Support Centres “can play a vital role by acting as resource centres for supporting regular schools as they seek to become more inclusive” (UNESCO, 2017, p.31). The role of support services is not to provide support to learners but to provide support to educators with flexible support, including opportunities to work with peers and other professionals.

Inclusive best practice indicators

- Educators are aware that support services are a means to enable them to meet the diverse needs in the classroom.
- Educators are aware of the different in-school support services available to help them support the different needs of learners.
- Educators are aware of the referral procedures available to refer learners to the different support services through the SMT.
- Parents are aware of screening procedures and early intervention services
- All forms of support services are coordinated and work collaboratively. This would entail a clear designation of the person at school who is responsible for the inter-disciplinary work. Clear communication channels are set up among the stakeholders so that action-plans can be established.
- SMT shall ensure that all in-school support services are exhausted before referral is made to use support services outside of school such as Learning Support Centres.
- Cooperation between the school and Resource Centres/Learning Support Centres is necessary and this cooperation opens promising opportunities for collaboration. There should be constant communication throughout especially for re-integration purposes.
- The school is aware of the support services available for parents and suggests these support services to them.

- The school is aware of the support services available for educators and suggests these support services to them after HOD (Inclusion) has carried out the necessary observations to ensure the eligibility for the service.
- The school is aware of a wide range of community based organisations and services that could provide various forms of support to the work carried out by school staff and the department responsible for Inclusive educational services and is able to work collaboratively with them when learners or parents request their intervention in addressing a school based issue.

Local Scenario

Julia is a learner who was diagnosed with Down syndrome at birth. From birth she was supported by the early intervention resource worker who visited her at home and aided the development of the child including early literacy, language development and communication, motor skills development, self-awareness, social and emotional development. Individual Family support plans (IFSPs) that supported the learner and family in transitions between home, preschool, and primary education were also offered to the parents. When she was three she started attending a Local Primary School.

When Julia was in Kindergarten the learner was supported by the early-intervention teacher. This professional service worked closely with the class team so that appropriate resources and strategies were used to cater for her ability. The HoD (Inclusion) also supported the class team by regular class visits and also suggested strategies that could help the learner have a better learning experience. During her primary years, Julia received the full time one-to-one support of an LSE. The LSE worked closely with the HoD (Inclusion) and teacher to develop an adapted curriculum that catered well for Julia's ability and her functional skills. The HoD (Inclusion) supported the class team on the preparation of resources that could support the learner's learning and strategies that could be beneficial to this learner.

Julia has recently been diagnosed with a mild hearing loss. HoD (inclusion) has recommended that the school refers to the support offered by the Teachers for the hearing impaired so that they too can support the class team to enhance Julia's potential.

7

Literature underpinning development of framework

An extensive literature review guided the initial conceptualisation and development of the themes within *A National Inclusive Education Framework*. This section presents some of the key documents that influenced the development of the framework and the major themes emerging from them.

The themes were then condensed based on shared and similar characteristics to the ten identifies themes making up this Framework. The table below summaries the major themes that feature in the sources referenced at the end of this section.

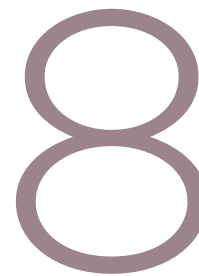
Table 1: Summary of themes within major sources

Source	Themes
Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive policies • Whole School inclusive development Planning • Learner and Staff well being • Collaboration with parents and community building • Whole school inclusive environment • Teaching, learning and assessment • Support Structures and Services • Inclusive leadership
Inclusive Practice: What, why and how? (Florian, 2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining inclusive education • Whole-school inclusive environment • Learner participation in decision making • Positive attitude • Teaching and learning • Parent support • Continuous professional development • Learner-centred
Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All (UNESCO, 2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining inclusive education • Positive attitude and values • Support structure and services • Whole-school inclusive environment • Curriculum design • Teaching and learning • Collaboration at community level and parents • Continuous professional development • Whole school development planning • Learner-centered
Towards Inclusive Education, Examples of Good Practice of Inclusive Education (Inclusion Europe, 2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching Strategies • Professional roles • Accessible environments • Professional development • Family and community involvement

Source	Themes
Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education (UNESCO, 2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible teaching and learning methods; • Access to learning - rights based, child-friendly schools, optimum learning environment; • Financial support for Inclusion; • Reorienting teacher education – to address the context of promoting diversity; • Flexible inclusive curriculum – responding to diverse needs; • Welcoming diversity; • Involving parents and the community; • Early identification and support of children at risk; • Creating schools for all – access to school building and curricula.
Key Principle for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widening access and participation • Teacher skills, competences and knowledge • Positive culture and ethos • Support structures and services • Flexible resourcing system • Inclusive school policies • Legislation that promotes inclusion
Five Key messages for inclusive education: Putting theory into practice (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2014b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early intervention • Pupil assessment • Early learning support • Improved access to education resources • Inclusive school policies • Diversity • Holistic/person-centred • Curriculum design • Leadership • Training/CPD • Teacher skills, competences and knowledge • Support structures and services • Funding Mechanisms • Research/Data collection systems
Agency Position on Inclusive Education Systems (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education,, 2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive education • High-quality education • Implementation • School Leaders • Inclusive Education Systems • Equity • Raising Achievements • Community • Accessibility • Diversity • Curriculum • Continuous Professional Development

Source	Themes
<p>Embracing Diversity: Toolkit for Creating Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environments (UNESCO, 2015)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion • Diversity • Strategies for Learners with Disabilities • Challenges to Diversity • Inclusive, learning-friendly environment (ILFE) • School Environment • Rights • Teaching and Learning • Leadership • Community & Communication • School Development Plan • Social & Emotional Development • Managing Active and Inclusive Classrooms • School Health and Protection Policies • Skills-Based Health Education • Healthy Nutrition • Improving Sanitation & Hygiene • Mental Health Promotion
<p>Raising the Achievement of All learners in inclusive education (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2016)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole-school development/improvement/planning • Effective organisation • Raising achievement of all learners • Teaching strategies/quality teaching • Assessment strategies (formative assessment, Assessment for learning) • Curriculum design • Use of technology in pedagogy • Active learning • Personalised learning • Learner-centred • Learner voice and participation • Management/leadership • Leadership types (transformational, instructional, distributive, inclusive) • Clear/effective professional roles • Collaborative learning • Professional learning communities (sharing of practices) • Community engagement • Collaboration with parents/other schools/university • Defining inclusion/diversity • Improve equity and enhance outcomes for all learners

Source	Themes
Structural Indicators for inclusive systems in and around schools (Downes, P., Nairz-Wirth, E., Rusinaité, V., 2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early school leaving • Data collection Systems • Segregation • Avoiding year repetitions for learners • Alternative to suspension and exclusion • Increasing educational pathways • Social and Emotional Learning • Whole school approach to inclusion • Structures for inclusion • Giving a voice to learners • Promoting extra-curricular activities • Personalised learning • Inclusive and strategic leadership • Continuous professional development • Professional learning communities • Creating positive attitudes and expectations • Diversity • Teacher's knowledge on career guidance • Support services • Collaboration between health and education • Supporting vulnerable individuals • Collaboration with parents and family support • Community engagement • A family literacy approach • Implementation of structural indicators
Fighting school segregation in Europe through Inclusive Education (Council of Europe, 2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Segregation • Inclusive Education • Migrant and refugee children • Early Intervention • Lack of accessibility • Heterogeneity • Social cohesion • Inclusive education policy • Rights to and rights in education • Regulating school choice • Learning for All • Legislation • Quality Education • Needs assessment • Challenges in Summative Assessment • Parental Participation
Inclusive education for learners with disabilities (Soriano, Watkins & Ebersold, 2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political will • Systematic change • Resources • Inclusive learning environments • Right to equal access opportunities • Social, cultural and learning diversities • Poverty & Exclusion • Equal citizenship opportunities • Broad view of inclusion • Inclusion • Personalised Learning • Decentralised & flexible education systems



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