



*Cook Islands Ministry of Education*

*Special Needs Education Policy*

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Cover design a traditional Mau'ke design believed to represent voyaging. Taken from "Tatau" (tattoo) by Jean Tekura Mason. Mana Publications 2001. Reprinted with permission.

## ***FOREWORD***

This document is an official policy of the Cook Islands Ministry of Education and is to be used by administrators, advisers, Principals and teachers as a guide towards achieving equitable provision of high quality educational opportunities for all students. I acknowledge the significant contribution made to the formulation of this policy by the “Special Needs Education in the Cook Islands, Draft Policy Development and Recommendations” report produced in 1999 under the ADB funded Education Development Project. I also acknowledge the valued input from the Ministry of Education’s Special Needs Education Adviser and Director of Policy and Planning.

*K. S. Matheson*

Ken Matheson

Secretary of Education

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# ***SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION POLICY***

## ***1. DEFINITION***

### ***Who are students with special learning needs?***

Students with special learning needs are those students who for various reasons are not developing to their full educational potential or are at risk of not achieving the major achievement objectives of the Cook Islands Curriculum.

*Note: This refers to those students who are at risk of underachieving including those with specific learning and behavioural difficulties as well as those gifted and talented students who are not realising their potential. The Cook Islands Curriculum is made up of the curriculum statements of each learning area taken from the Curriculum Framework.*

## ***2. OBJECTIVE***

### ***What is the purpose of this policy?***

This policy aims to achieve an education system that identifies students with special learning needs, implements appropriate educational programmes and monitors their progress within a culture of acceptance and understanding.

## ***3. RATIONALE.***

### ***Why do we need this policy?***

There are a proportion of children who may not be developing or achieving to their potential within the current education system. All children and students have a fundamental right to education and must be given the opportunity to achieve to their full potential. All students need a system that is fair and equitable. Equity needs to apply at all levels of the education system and across all islands. Inclusive schools are effective maximising learning outcomes and in developing positive attitudes towards others, creating acceptance and achieving beneficial education for all.

## ***4. WHAT THIS DOCUMENT WILL DO.***

### ***This document aims to:***

- Outline the responsibilities of the Ministry of Education, and schools in catering for students with special learning and teaching needs.
- Provide schools with guidelines for developing procedures that cater for students with special learning and teaching needs.



## ***5. POLICY DIRECTIONS***

### ***5.1 Support Services shall be provided through the:***

- Employment of a Special Needs Education Adviser with the Curriculum Advisory Unit of the Ministry of Education;
- Maintenance of a resource centre at the Curriculum Advisory Unit which:
  1. Houses a range of special education materials and resources available for use by teacher and stakeholders
  2. Contains a registry of local, national and international resource people
  3. Contains a registry of stakeholders in special education to facilitate communication and provide a means of ongoing support;
- Supply of trained teacher aides are working in schools to support teachers in the education of students with special learning needs (Where necessary and possible); and
- Provision of additional resources and assistive devices for students with special learning needs where necessary and possible.

### ***5.2 Teacher Education programmes shall be provided including the:***

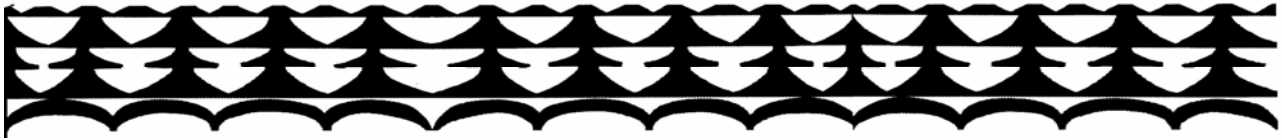
- Provision of professional development in inclusive education practices, for Permanent teachers throughout their career;
- Integration of inclusive education practices as an integral part of the training college curriculum;
- Completion of a special education course by trainee teachers as a compulsory part of the training college curriculum; and
- Training of teacher aides for the support of teachers in the education of students with special learning and teaching needs.

### ***5.3 Identification and Assessment programmes shall be provided through the:***

- Development and implementation of procedures for the early assessment and identification of preschool children and students with special learning and teaching needs (early intervention programme);
- Use of a multi disciplined approach to identifying and catering for special needs students; (*use of health, education and other professionals in assessing and identifying student need*)
- Referral of cases to health and education professionals where necessary; and
- Maintenance of confidential records of identification procedures, assessments and results and reporting of this information to the principal, MOE, parents/ caregivers and the students themselves.

### ***5.4 Educational Strategies shall include the:***

- Provision of altered assessment and teaching procedures to ensure that students with special learning and teaching needs are not disadvantaged;
- Enrolment of *all* students;
- Promotion of students with special learning needs through the compulsory part of the education system with their peers;
- Provision of a learning environment where children are safe, valued, respected, encouraged, free from verbal and physical threat and where they experience success;
- Modification of teaching programmes for students with special learning and teaching needs so that they can take part (as far as possible) in the regular classroom programme; and
- Provision of alternative programs for the education of students who are not able to be included in the regular classroom.



## **6. RESPONSIBILITIES**

Every section of the education system has a role to play in the education of students with special learning needs. By each section fulfilling their responsibilities as outlined below, an inclusive education system will exist which recognises the diversity of learners' abilities and provides for these within a culture of acceptance and understanding.

### ***6.1 The Ministry of Education is responsible for:***

- Where necessary, possible and appropriate, making school buildings physically accessible to children and students with special needs;
- Informing the community of new development and initiatives in the education of young children and students with special learning and teaching needs;
- Where necessary, possible and appropriate, ensuring a supply of trained teacher aides are working in schools to support teachers in the education of students with special learning needs;
- Ensuring that alternative provisions are made for the education of students who are not able to be included in the regular classroom; and
- Upholding a memorandum of understanding with the ministries of Health and Internal Affairs for providing a multi disciplined approach to catering for special needs students.

### ***6.2 The Directorate of Audit and Quality Assurance (DAQA) is responsible for:***

- Providing guidelines to ensure that students with special learning needs are not discriminated against by assessment and other teaching procedures; and
- Monitoring the implementation the special needs education policy within schools.



### ***6.3 The Special Needs Education Adviser (SNEA) is responsible for:***

- Guiding schools in the implementation of the special needs education policy
- Providing advisory services to schools to enhance the development of individual and school wide intervention programmes (including the development of IEP's) for students with special learning needs;
- Ensuring that permanent teachers receive professional development in inclusive education practices throughout their career. Professional development includes in-service, personal study and school based courses;
- Sourcing external assistance in the form of funding, expertise or resources where necessary;
- Liasing with other agencies and stakeholders to assist schools to provide services to students with special learning needs;
- Taking a lead in the development of special needs policy and strategy;
- Maintaining updated research information as to the extent and nature of the special learning and teaching needs of students; and
- Maintaining a resource centre which:
  4. Houses a range of special education materials and resources available for use by teacher and stakeholders;
  5. Contains a registry of local, national and international resource people; and
  6. Contains a registry of stakeholders in special education to facilitate communication and provide a means of ongoing support.

### ***6.4 The Teachers Training College is responsible for:***

- Implementing relevant areas of the special needs education policy;
- Ensuring that inclusive education practices are an integral part of the training college curriculum;
- Ensuring that pre-service teachers complete a special education course as a compulsory part of the training college curriculum; and
- Facilitating the training of teacher aids where required.

## ***6.5 School Principals are responsible for:***

- Implementing the special needs education policy;
- Enrolling *all* students;
- Ensuring that students with special learning needs are not discriminated against by assessment and teaching procedures;
- Referring cases to the special needs education adviser, and/or health and education professionals where necessary;
- Ensuring truancy is monitored and the requirements of the education act in regard to truancy are implemented;
- Informing the community and the Ministry of Education about the programmes in place and the achievement of students with special learning needs;
- Liaising with other agencies and stakeholders in providing services to students with special learning needs;
- Guiding the development and implementation of procedures for the early assessment and identification of preschool children and students with special learning needs (early intervention programme).
- Promoting students with special learning needs through the education system with their peers;
- Ensuring that high school students with special learning needs are supported in the careers education programme; and
- Ensuring that accommodations and modifications to the teaching programmes are made for those students so that they can take part (as far as possible) in the regular classroom programme.
- Reporting to the school committee when special conditions or resources are necessary to ensure equal educational opportunities exist for all students.
- Overseeing the implementation of IEP's and monitoring the effectiveness of special education provisions in the school.

## ***6.6 Teachers are responsible for:***

- Producing and implementing educational plans with the input of parents and caregivers which meet individual students' needs (IEP's) and are consistent with Ministry of Education guidelines and national curriculums;
- Maintaining confidential records of identification procedures, assessments and results. Reporting this information to the principal, MOE, parents/ caregivers and the students themselves;
- Promoting students with special learning needs through the education system with their peers (dual responsibility with principal);
- Regularly monitoring in terms of outcomes, the effectiveness of programmes for student with special learning needs;
- Ensuring that children learn in an environment where they are safe, valued, respected, encouraged, free from verbal and physical threat and where they experience success;
- Reporting to the principal where special conditions or resources are necessary to ensure equal educational opportunities exist for all students; and
- Encourage the active participation of parents to work with teachers in classroom programmes.



## **7. GUIDELINES**

These guidelines are to assist schools to develop procedures for the identification, education and assessment of students with special learning needs. There are seven key areas which should form the basis of planning and procedures for students with special learning needs.

**The key areas are:**

*Identification*

*The school curriculum*

*Partnerships in education*

*The learning environment*

*Evaluation and improvement*

*Reporting*

*Professional development*

### **7.1 Identification**

To be accurate in the identification of students with special needs, assessment must be regular and across all years of schooling. Students' needs should be continually monitored, as should changes in their achievement level, rate of progress and if their behaviour differs noticeably from past performance or that of their peers. Special needs students are of all ages and their needs can change at different times due to a range of situations and circumstances.

### **Outcome**

*Students with special learning and teaching needs are identified and assessed in their early years and throughout their schooling.*

### **Schools achieve this by:**

- Regularly assessing students *at all levels* using classroom assessments, teacher observations and student achievement profiles;
- Analysing results of standardised assessments such as the grade 1, grade 4 and grade 6 diagnostic tests to identify students who may need special assistance;
- Analysing other information such as attendance, participation and behaviour; and
- Monitoring and recording changes in students', rate of progress and if their behaviour differs noticeably in a sustained manner from past performance or that of their peers.

*Note: At the time of writing this policy, the grade 1 diagnostic test was still being developed.*

## ***7.2 The School Curriculum***

The planning and implementation of school-wide and classroom programmes, units and lessons must reflect the requirements of the Cook Islands Curriculum Framework, be relevant and challenging for students and be flexible in meeting the needs of students with special learning needs. The topics of study, activities students do and the way classrooms are organised overall, determine how effective learning is for all students.

### **Outcome**

*Whole school activities, learning programmes, units of work and lessons are planned and delivered in ways sensitive to the needs of all students.*

### **Schools achieve this by:**

- Providing opportunities for and encouraging all students to participate in school activities to the best of their abilities;
- Providing appropriate resources for students with special learning needs;
- Ensuring all students have access to learning materials and resources;
- Identifying and catering for individual learning styles through delivery of the curriculum in a variety of ways;
- Planning and implementing education programmes, which teach children to accept and include people who are different; and
- Actively promoting non-discriminatory language and by teachers role modelling appropriate language when referring to individuals and diverse groups.

### ***7.3 Partnerships in Education***

Effective education takes place when all key stakeholders are included: the student, the parent/caregiver and school personnel. Each stakeholder is able to provide important information and support in educating students with special needs.

#### **Outcome**

*Education plans that most effectively meet the special learning needs of students.*

#### **Schools achieve this by:**

- Consulting with parents and caregivers at an early stage when children are identified as having special learning needs;
- Involving parents caregivers and the students themselves in planning, implementing and reviewing programmes for students with special needs; and
- Collaborating where appropriate and necessary with relevant government departments and non-government organisations to provide quality services and support to children with special learning needs.

*Relevant government departments include Ministries of education, health and internal affairs. NGO's include Punanga Tauturu, Disabled Persons International, deaf and blind societies, Disabilities Committees, The National Disabilities Council etc.*

### ***7.4 The Learning Environment***

Students learn best in an environment that is safe and stimulating. Students need to be valued, respected and encouraged. They need to experience success in school in order to build confidence and achieve to their full potential. Students with special needs often do not experience success and lack confidence in their abilities. The learning environment (the classroom and the school as a whole) plays a crucial role in the educational development of students with special learning needs.

#### **Outcome**

*The learning environment caters for the needs of students with special educational needs.*

#### **Schools achieve this by:**

- Ensuring students learn in an environment free from verbal and physical threat;
- Making the school buildings and facilities accessible to students with impaired mobility;
- Providing an attractive, clean and functional school environment;
- Providing opportunities for all students to work with children with special needs and people with disabilities with appropriate support, resources and information; and
- Providing guidance and counselling to students in need of emotional support.

## ***7.5 Evaluation and Improvement***

Programmes designed to cater for students with special learning needs, must be evaluated regularly and adjusted when necessary to ensure their success. Information such as attendance, participation, behaviour and academic performance is important in reviewing programmes and planning changes.

### **Outcome**

*Schools use student development information to evaluate the success of programmes and to plan for improvement.*

### **Schools achieve this by:**

- Regularly recording and assessing students' academic progress in relation to stated goals, achievement objectives and outcomes in work plans and individualised education plans (IEP);
- Analysing other information such as attendance, participation and behaviour to determine changes in student performance; and
- Using all information to review programmes and make changes where necessary.

## ***7.6 Reporting***

Currently all schools have procedures in place for the reporting of student progress and achievement. Parents, caregivers and other stakeholders must be notified as soon as teachers identify that a student's achievement level, rate of progress or behaviours differ noticeably in a sustained manner from past performance and his/her peers. Stakeholders must be given regular feedback regarding the progress of students with special learning needs.

### **Outcome**

*Stakeholders regularly receive meaningful and accurate information about student progress.*

### **Schools achieve this by:**

- Regularly providing information to stakeholders through a range of means including work samples, written reports, interviews and telephone conversations.

## ***7.7 Professional Development***

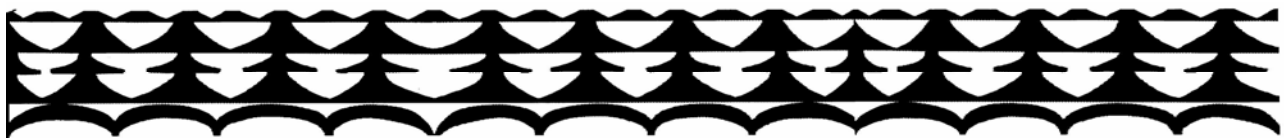
Schools have procedures in place whereby teacher professional development needs are established and recommendations made. Appropriate professional development for teachers is essential in improving educational outcomes for students with special learning needs.

### **Outcome**

*Teachers have the skills to meet the special learning and teaching needs of students.*

### **Schools achieve this by:**

- Working cooperatively as a school staff to meet the special learning needs of students;
- Identify professional development needed to support the teaching of students with special learning needs; and
- Meeting identified professional development needs using available resources locally, nationally and internationally.



## **8. REFERENCES**

Asia Development Bank (1999). "Special Needs Education in the Cook Islands, Draft Policy Development and Recommendations" Asia Development Bank loan no, 1317-COO (SF). Rarotonga, Cook Islands.

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