Special Education Needs Provision within Mainstream Education

Definition of the target group(s)

The Compulsory School Act [1] prescribes 10 years of schooling for all children from the ages of six to sixteen. The ideology is that the compulsory school is to be inclusive and educational needs of each pupil being met. Admittedly, more organised effort is being put on meeting the needs of children with disabilities rather than those children with exceptional abilities.

Health-service, educational and social workers pay special attention to children's mental and physical condition. If they discover that a child shows symptoms of a disability, they inform its guardians accordingly. If a preliminary assessment reveals the need for further diagnosis or means of therapy, the guardians are directed to the appropriate national agency. The four main National Agencies concerned are as follows. the State Diagnostic and Counselling Centre [2] and the Resource Centre for the Blind, Visually Impaired and Deafblind [3]. This is a national agency monitoring all blind and visually impaired persons in the country, and is responsible for the diagnosis of blind and visually impaired children. A corresponding facility exists for deaf and hearing-impaired children and adults, the National Hearing and Speech Centre [4]. Children and adolescents with serious emotional and psychiatric problems are referred to the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Unit of the National Hospital [5]. Each agency seeks adequate solutions of diagnosis and treatment in consultation with the parents.

According to the Pre-primary School Act [6], children who, because of their disabilities or because of emotional or social difficulties, need special assistance or training, are to be provided with such support, in their own pre-primary school in cooperation with the municipality. This is supervised by the head teacher of the pre-primary school in cooperation with the teacher, a developmental therapist or other specialists. All children are given regular check-ups to monitor their health and development.

The Compulsory School Act [1] stipulates that all children are to receive suitable instruction and care. Pupils have the right to attend school in the area where they live. Schools are systematically to undertake the integration of children with special educational needs, (emotional or social problems and/or physical or mental disabilities) into mainstream education.
Pupils with dyslexia or pupils suffering from long-term illnesses and pupils with health-related special needs, also have the right to special study support, according to evaluation of their special needs. Pupils that are deemed unable to attend school, according to doctor’s evaluation because of an accident or a long-term illness, have the right to special instruction because of their condition, either in their home or at a medical facility. Special instruction needed because of medical conditions is the responsibility of the relevant municipality.

If a child’s parents, head teachers, teachers or other specialists believe that the child is not receiving suitable instruction in the compulsory school, the parents can ask that their child be admitted to a special class within general compulsory school or to a specialised school. Most of the larger municipalities have one or more special classes within their catchment area, inside mainstream schools, which provide appropriate services for various disabilities according to needs.

There are currently three segregated special schools that provide services for the whole country at the compulsory level, one that serves pupils with severe disabilities and two for children with psychiatric and social difficulties.

At the upper secondary school level, pupils with special needs, disabilities or emotional or social difficulties are to be provided with instruction and special study support. Specialised assistance and appropriate facilities must be provided as considered necessary. A few secondary schools in the country have special programs or units for pupils with disabilities where they are taught according to an individual curriculum. The units may differ from one time to another because they are by definition run on a temporary basis. Everyone is entitled to education for the first two years of the secondary school level (age 16-18) but pupils with disabilities are entitled to education for four years at the secondary level.

Specialist advice and suitable conditions are to be ensured. In their studies disabled pupils follow the ordinary curriculum and take courses with other pupils as far as possible.

There are no special schools at the upper secondary school level.

**Specific Support Measures**

Each school decides how the special teaching is organised in alliance with the child’s parents or legal guardians. Pupils with disabilities, specific learning difficulties, emotional or social difficulties are given special support. It depends on the individual needs and the size of the school how the remedial teaching is organised. Bigger schools tend to have more options, e.g. either total integration or special classes for at least a part of the school day. Special classes with reduced number of pupils also offer a necessary rest periods, for example for children with attention disorders.

In recent years, more and more children have diagnosed with autism or similar disorders than before, which has called for more special classes and more specialized treatment and teaching. It includes additional support by specialist teachers, special teaching methods, special teaching materials, teaching in small groups or individual teaching, increased use of computers and an adapted curriculum with an emphasis on individual planning for each pupil.
According to the Ordinance on Special Education [7] nr. 585/2010, it is the responsibility of special education teachers to make individual education plans for pupils with disabilities and organise the teaching in co-operation with guardians. These education plans are generally reviewed at least annually. This applies to pre-primary, compulsory an upper secondary school level, and special units within the schools.

Most children in special units located in mainstream schools are integrated for part of the time into regular classes and this makes the sizes, and composition of the groups variable during the day, anywhere from 1 or 3 up to 20-27. Class sizes in mainstream schools are ca. 20 on average and rarely exceed 27 pupils.

Youngsters in special units in upper secondary schools are divided into groups of 2-12 persons.

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