Pupils with disabilities attend mainstream education at all levels, from pre-primary to upper secondary education.

Alongside mainstream education, there are still a few special institutes for the blind and deaf, which existed prior regulations on pupils integration were issued.

When a pupil with disabilities accesses the education system, at whatever level, parents submit to the school a specific certification of pupil’s disability issued by the medical committees foreseen by a recent regulation (Legislative decree 66/2017) in order to receive the specific support measures. This documentation specifies the type of disability and the right to receive specific support and it is released by the relevant local office of the national health system, after completion of mandatory investigations procedures.

Disabled students can enrol in upper secondary education until they turn 18, provided they have passed the first cycle leaving exam and have obtained the final qualification. Otherwise, they must hold an official document with the credits acquired. Disabled pupils fulfil compulsory education at 18 years of age instead of 16.

Pupils with specific learning/developmental disorders must submit to the school the official certification released by the relevant offices of the National health system.

**Definition of the target group(s)**

The most recent definition of special education needs extends the concept of disadvantage at school. SEN not only refers to impairments.

A new pedagogic-didactical category of SEN pupils with “specific developmental disorders” is defined in addition to disabled pupils and pupils with diagnosed specific learning disorders. This new category includes language, nonverbal skills, movement coordination, attention deficits and hyperactivity disorder; whereas, the borderline intellectual functioning can be considered as a border case between disabilities and specific disorders.

Therefore, this area includes the following three sub-categories:

- Disabilities,
- Specific developmental disorders (including specific learning disorders)
- Socio-economic, linguistic and cultural disadvantage.

Integration and support measures for special needs are addressed to pupils with disabilities as defined in the frame law n. 104/1992 on care, social inclusion and rights of persons with disabilities. Pupils with disabilities are defined as pupils with stable or progressive physic, psychic or sensory
disabilities, causing learning and working difficulties that can produce social detriment and social exclusion.

Moreover, law no. 170/2010 has recognised dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysorthography and dyscalculia as specific learning disorders (SLD). SLD are associated to adequate learning abilities, without sensory or neurologic deficit; however, they may seriously limit the pupil’s daily activities.

In particular, dyslexia is a specific disability connected to difficulties in learning to read, in particular in understanding symbols and in reading fluently and correctly. Dysgraphia is a specific disability in writing associated to difficulties in reproducing graphic symbols. Dysorthography is a specific disability in writing associated to difficulties in linguistic processes of trans-codification and dyscalculia is a specific disability associated to difficulties in making calculations and in elaborating numbers.

**Specific support measures**

The offer of education for pupils with special educational needs is totally included in mainstream education.

School inclusion means that the provision of support measures is mandatory for the State as well as for local authorities and the National health system, each within its own competences.

In fact, the achievement of school inclusion falls under the responsibility of various bodies. Therefore, central regulations foresee that schools, local authorities and local health authorities stipulate agreements to establish collaboration methods for co-ordinating their activities.

**Support measures for pupils with disabilities**

The relevant medical committee of the National health system releases a document that certifies the disability and the consequent right to benefit from the support measures foreseen by the legislation in force. This document is a precondition to start the administrative procedures for school inclusion.

Following the disability evaluation, a Functioning profile is released according to the criteria of the biopsychosocial model of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) adopted by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The support measures for pupils with disabilities are then selected on the basis of the Functioning profile and the Individualised education plan (PEI).

The Functioning profile will replace the functional diagnosis and the dynamic functional profile.

The multidisciplinary evaluation unit that draws up the functioning profile is made up of the following members:

- a specialised doctor or an expert of the health conditions of the individual concerned;
- a child neuropsychiatrist;
- a rehabilitation therapist;
- a social assistant or a representative of the relevant local authority which is responsible for the subject concerned.

The parents of the pupil/student concerned and a school representative (better if he/she is a teacher of the pupil’s school) collaborate in drawing up the Functioning profile.

The Functioning profile identifies also the professionals, the types of support measures and the necessary structural resources for school inclusion. It is, therefore, a preliminary document for the
drawing up of the Individualised educational plan (PEI).

The Individualised educational plan describes the interventions planned for pupils/ students with disabilities in a given period.

Teachers, support teachers, the class council, in collaboration with parents, specific professionals inside and outside the school, jointly draw up and approve the plan with the support of the multidisciplinary evaluation unit.

It mainly indicates tools and strategies to create a learning environment based on relationships, socialisation, communication, guidance and autonomy. It also indicates teaching and assessment methods according to the individualised planning.

Each school, as part of the definition of the three-year educational offer plan (PTOF), draws up the Inclusion plan establishing the use of resources, including overcoming architectural barriers and identifying facilitators.

In every school there is a working group for inclusion (GLI), made up of teachers, support teachers, administrative staff, specialists of the local health authority. The GLI, chaired by the school head, supports the teachers’ council in the definition and implementation of the Inclusion plan, as well as teachers’ and class councils in the implementation of the Individualised educational plan (PEI).

School staff now includes also the so called ‘support teachers’ who have received a specific initial training focused on support teaching activities for pupils with disabilities. Support teachers are assigned to the class where the pupil with disability is included instead of to the single pupil. Support teachers are part of the team of class teachers they are assigned to and take part to all planning and assessment activities and decisions. Support teachers’ main task is to boost inclusion by applying specific teaching strategies, also in collaboration with the other class teachers.

If necessary, the teaching support is supplemented through the educative assistance of the so called ‘assistants for autonomy and communication’. They are provided by local authorities and assigned to the pupil and not the class. Assistants, also working with teachers, mediate between the pupil with disability and the class group in order to boost their relationships, to facilitate their participation in class activities and to help them developing autonomy as well as social, verbal and non-verbal alternative communication skills.

The document that certifies the type of disability specifies also its seriousness in order to decide on the number of hours that the support teacher and the educative assistant will spend in the class and with the disabled pupil.

Usually, classes with disabled pupils group a maximum of 20 pupils, provided that the reduced class size is necessary to assure education to these pupils; moreover, the inclusion process must be supported by a project which defines strategies and methods adopted by class teachers together with the support teacher and the school staff.

Assessment of pupils with certified disabilities focus on their behaviour, on disciplines and activities included in the Individualised educational plan. Assessment procedures are the same applied to all pupils, i.e. pupils are given marks in tenths; however, assessment of disabled pupils takes into account pupils’ progresses rather than the results obtained.

Pupils with disabilities participate in the INVALSI tests. Class teachers or the class council may foresee suitable compensatory measures or their partial exemption or, where required, a specific adaptation of the tests. In exceptional circumstances, a total exemption from the tests can be foreseen.
In the first cycle leaving exam pupils, if necessary, can undergo differentiated tests and use specific didactic tools. The final certificate shows the marks in tenth but no mention is done on the special measures taken during the exam. Accordingly, no mention of special measures is done on the displayboard of the school.

Pupils who do not sit the final exam receive a document attesting the credits obtained and allowing their enrolment in upper secondary education or the regional vocational training courses (IFP), just in order to obtain additional training credits valid for integrated education and training paths. Therefore, the following school year these pupils cannot enroll in the third grade of lower secondary education, but can complete compulsory education in lower secondary school or in regional vocational training courses (IFP).

Also the upper secondary education leaving exam can be carried out with the help of special didactic tools. Pupils who followed a differentiated study plan and who have not obtained the final qualification, receive a document attesting the course of study, the subjects, the length of studies as well as competences acquired and the relevant credits obtained at the final exam.

**Support measures for pupils with specific developmental disorders and/or specific learning disorders**

Schools can use compensatory educational tools and exempt pupils from some activities upon decisions taken by the class council on the basis of the clinical documentation provided by parents and for pedagogical reasons. Such measures may apply to all pupils with specific learning disorders and/or specific developmental disorders, also through a Personalised educational plan.

In addition, in order to facilitate the education process of pupils with these types of disorders, teachers and school managers at all levels will receive a specific in-service training.

However, classes receiving pupils with specific learning and/or developmental disorders do not have support teachers, contrary to what happens in classes with certified disabled pupils.

Recurrent and final assessment of students with specific learning/developmental disorders should be consistent with the pedagogic and didactic measures adopted. In particular, schools should adopt assessment measures that allow students with such disorders to demonstrate the level attained. Such assessment measures should concentrate on the mastery of contents, rather than on how students express the competences acquired. For example, oral tests are preferable, in particular for assessing foreign languages and compensative didactic tools or exemption from specific activities are recommended, if suitable. In case of serious learning disorders, also associated with other diseases, pupils can - upon parents’ request and acceptance of the class council - be exempted from studying foreign languages and can follow a differentiated study plan.

Pupils with specific learning disorders participate in the INVALSI tests. The class council may decide to provide them with adequate compensatory educational tools consistent with the personalised teaching plan. Pupils with specific learning disorders who are exempted from the written foreign language test or from learning a foreign language don’t sit the English language national test.

Pupils with specific learning disorders sit the State exams using, if necessary, the compensatory tools indicated in the personalised teaching plan. They may also be allowed an additional amount of time to carry out the written tests. Pupils who are exempted from the written foreign language test should sit an oral test, on different contents, that will replace the written one. Pupils who are exempted from learning one or both foreign languages, may sit differentiated equivalent tests. Such tests are established on the basis of the personalised teaching plan.
The final certificate of these pupils also shows the mark in tenth but no mention is done of the different exam procedures or differentiated tests. Accordingly, no mention of such special measures is done on the displayboard of the school.

The assessment criteria of the learning outcomes of SEN pupils with “specific developmental disorders” without a certified clinical diagnosis are defined in the personalised teaching plan developed by teachers.

**Support measures for pupils with socio-economic, linguistic and cultural disadvantage**

Pupils with special educational needs deriving from proven socio-economic, linguistic and cultural disadvantage (e.g., reported by social services) can follow personalised teaching, through a personalised teaching plan, and can adopt compensative tools as well as been exempted from some activities. For example, immigrant pupils can be exempted from reading aloud, or from dictation. In such cases, the efficacy of intervention is monitored in order to apply support measures only for the time necessary. In fact, contrary to certified disabilities, support measures in cases of disadvantage are temporary.

Classes receiving pupils with specific learning/developmental disorders do not have support teachers, contrary to what happens in classes with certified disable pupils.

Foreign minors have the right to education and must attend compulsory education. The legislation in force on the right to education, on the access to educative services and on the participation in school life apply also to foreign minors.

In the ‘Guidelines on the reception and inclusion of foreign students’ (2014), the Ministry of education, university and research (Miur) has provided, beside a legislative frame, some suggestions for the organisation and teaching, to favour both entrance of foreign pupils at school and their success in their studies.

In particular, support measures focus on language learning; measures are included in a personalised teaching plan only in exceptional circumstances. However, support measures are temporary.

The integration of immigrant pupils is carried out without the presence of support teachers, unless pupils have a certified disability; in this case, the support measures for disabled pupils apply. The presence of language and cultural mediators is quite common; local authorities and other local bodies and associations involve language mediators to help teachers and school staff communicating with pupils and their families.

Foreign pupils undergo the same assessments as Italians. However, guidelines underline the importance of specific strategies and personalised paths in order to adapt programmes to the needs of single pupils; in particular, foreign pupils’ assessment should take into account their previous educational history, their outcomes, the characteristics of attended schools and of skills and competences acquired.

**Support measures for hospitalised pupils and/or pupils with health problems**

Children temporarily unable to attend school for their health conditions, can pursue their education process with no interruptions by attending ordinary classes as detached sections in rehabilitation centres and hospitals. School administrations set up these sections and classes in collaboration with the local health authorities and with the public and private health centres under contract with the
Health and Labour Ministries. Classes in the hospitals admit minors who are hospitalised for more than 30 days.

Teachers with specific psycho-pedagogical training can be employed to teach in rehabilitation centres and hospitals.

Such interventions fall within the wider initiative called ‘school in hospital’, addressed to all pupils of all school levels, who are suffering from serious pathologies or are hospital/day-hospital patients. The organisation of the project is extremely flexible, taking into account the type of disease of each pupil, the time for medical examinations and therapies as well as the life pace in hospital.

A particular evolution of this type of service is home tuition for sick children who cannot attend school for at least 30 days. They are taught at home by one or more teachers according to a specific project aimed at assuring the continuity of their learning process and their subsequent reintroduction in their class. It is a growing service because the National Sanitary Plan foresees the reduction of the stay in hospital in favour of home health assistance.

**Territorial support centres for inclusion (CTS)**

Finally, from an organisational point of view, Territorial support centres (Centri territoriali di supporto - CTS) work at local level for fostering school inclusion. Centres, at least on for provincial area, refer to one school and are set up by the Regional school offices (Uffici scolastici regionali – USR) in agreement with the Ministry of education, university and research (MIur).

The school manager, at least three among subject and support teachers, a representative of the Regional school office, one healthcare professional and specialised teachers make up the CTS.

Their task is the creation of school networks and networks of schools and local services, in order to include fully pupils with special educational needs at school with an efficient use of financial resources. Networking allows the collection, conservation and spreading of knowledge (good practices, training courses) and of resources (hardware and software) for pupils’ integration through new technologies. CTS are also committed with the activation at local level of training initiatives on the correct use of technologies addressed to teachers and other school professionals, as well as to parents and pupils themselves.

At a less large level, other schools work as Territorial centres for inclusion (Centri territoriali per l’inclusione – CTI) that widen the school networks for school inclusion by providing teachers with contacts and references for all problems referring to special educational needs. Schools willing to set up a CTI should submit their candidature to the relevant Regional school office.

CTS and CTI teams should have specific competences related to special educational needs issues, in order to provide a real support to schools and colleagues through ad hoc counselling and training; for example, the team in the field of disable pupils will involve first support teachers, but also subject teachers who are expert in new technologies for inclusion.

The provision of support measures in the regional vocational education and training system (IeFP), depend on regional regulation.

**Legislative framework**

Law no. 104 of 1992 is the reference legislation for the integration at school and in the society of disable people. It collects and amends all the previous legislation on this matter. It establishes that
the aim of the integration at school is the development of the potentials of the person with disabilities in learning, communication, relationships and socialisation. It also defines ‘disability’ as any progressive or stable physical, mental and sensory disability that causes difficulties in learning, relationships and in the working life.

In 2009, the Ministry of education, university and research (Miur) has issued specific Guidelines for integrating pupils with disability at school [1]. These Guidelines provide practical suggestions to improve the integration of pupils with disability, within the legislative framework into force.

Law no. 170/2010 has recognised Dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysorthography and dyscalculia as Specific Learning Disabilities (Disturbi specifici dell’apprendimento, DSA). Such disabilities, although manifesting themselves in a context of adequate cognitive activities, without neurological and sensory impairment, can cause serious limitations to everyday life activities. Pupils suffering of these disabilities receive special organisational and didactic support measures through personalised plans.

In 2013 the Ministry of education has published a directive that on measures for pupils with special educational needs. Beside confirming the existing strategy of inclusion, the directive has also extended the field of application of all provisions on school integration of pupils with disabilities. The principle of inclusion also applies to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds for social and economic reasons and to immigrant pupils. In such circumstances, measures focus on didactic flexibility and, in the case of immigrants with low levels of Italian, linguistic support.

Finally, the reform law 107/2015 has delegated the Government to legislate on the promotion of school inclusion of disable pupils through decree no. 66/2017 [2]; such decree came into force on 31 May 2017, even though the main changes foreseen will be introduced in 2019. The decree focuses on the assignment procedures for the support resources for teaching and school staff training and teaching continuity in order to help disable pupils to create their own life project with the involvement of different subjects of society.

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