

# JAMAICA

## Caribbean Symposium on Inclusive Education

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## **Jamaica Country Report**

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### **Introduction**

The opportunity to create an education system where all children are permitted to learn together is a realistic and challenging one. Embracing 'Education for All' must give as major consideration the right of children not only to basic education but education of quality with moral support as well as political and economic backing.

The agendas of Governments of Jamaica, both past and present, have consistently set as a priority the education of the nation. Apart from the Ministry of Finance, the education sector has always received the largest portion of the budget. The government's commitment to education, through its policies and programmes, has provided support to a large extent for broad-based participation thus fostering the development of inclusive communities.

As cited by World Bank in 2001, 'sustainable development programmes deliver action learning activities, build capacity and address such factors as empowerment, inclusion and security'. It is imperative, then, that government recognizes the rights of its people to such aspirations, in order to have a better society.

Jamaica is signatory to a number of international conventions ensuring the political and civil rights of persons with disabilities. This commitment is broadened to involve all persons providing not only access to information but services that enrich the lives of its people.

The world Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien 1990) to which Jamaica is committed, supported by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, give credence to the value Jamaica places on education as an agent of National Development. This commitment, among others, is grounded in the philosophy that "Every Child Can Learn and Every Child Must Learn".

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) reminds us that children, whilst retaining their entitlement to the full range of human rights, are often marginalized or excluded and represent a special case requiring additional safeguards. However, within the constituency of children, particular groups remain vulnerable to further risk factors requiring additional measures for state ratification.

### **The Transformation of the Education System**

The Ministry of Education (MOE) recognizes that the human resource capacities of our nation can only move forward with a transformed education system that is accessible, equitable and relevant. Consequently, in February 2004, the then Prime Minister of Jamaica appointed a 14-member Task Force on Education Reform to prepare and present an action plan consistent with the vision for the creation of a world- class education system, which would generate the human capital and produce the skills necessary for Jamaican citizens to compete in the global economy.

One outcome of the review process was the determination of performance targets for education in response to the validated shared national vision for education.

### **The Vision**

“A prosperous and dynamic Jamaica which upholds the fulfillment of human rights, dignity for all persons, and builds continual social progress based on shared values and principles of partnerships. Minds are transformed and extra ordinary results are produced in this the most caring and secure country in the Americas, where individuals fulfill their potential, and are in control of their destiny, take responsibility for their lives and work always to the larger good.”

#### **(Task Force On Education Reform..2004)**

The realization of this vision will require that our educational institutions become more caring and supportive, creating learning communities that facilitate the needs of all students irrespective of race, class, gender, disability or intellectual capacity.

Emanating from this vision, is the mission of the Ministry of Education to provide a system which secures quality education for all people in Jamaica and achieves effective integration of educational and cultural resources in order to optimize individual and national development. This will be achieved by reforms in the following areas:

- ▲ Governance and Management of the Education System
- ▲ Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Support
- ▲ Full Stakeholder Participation in the Education System
- ▲ Finance

A Transformation Team has been put in place to implement the recommendations of the Task Force.

Consistent with the transformation of the system is the responsibility of the government to ensure that every child's right to basic education and training in an environment that maximizes the potential. The commitment of Jamaica to universal education is also interpreted to mean education for all children including those with disabilities and other special educational needs.

### **Inclusion – The Jamaican Perspective**

Jamaica, for some time, particularly in the late 80's and early 90's focused its attention on mainstreaming as part of the inclusion process. This was done in partnership with the Dutch government, where at the primary level a number of special education units were built and incorporated by host schools to provide small groups/class interventions and resource services for students with special needs including those with disabilities. Students were expected to remain in the programme for a maximum of two years and then be fully mainstreamed. The facilities still exist but over time the significant numbers of children in the mainstream requiring special accommodation suggested a renewed look at the approach.

Inclusion, in Jamaica, has taken on a new perspective where the focus is not only on facilitating children with disabilities in the mainstream but a broader look at provisions for all students. The government embraces the concept that 'all children should have equal opportunities regardless of their cultural and social backgrounds or their differences in abilities or capacities. However appropriate provisions must be implemented on a phased basis in recognition of budgetary constraints.

Even though Jamaica has moved in this direction, there is still the need to maintain segregated facilities for the provision of specialized services and programmes for a select group of students. To do otherwise, at this juncture, would be a serious compromise for the students in the absence of the supports that would be necessary in a mainstream setting. Those institutions still being maintained include:

- ▲ Schools for the Moderate to Severe Mentally Challenged
- ▲ Schools for the Deaf
- ▲ Schools for the Blind

The School for the Blind has over the years, mainstreamed a number of students in High Schools, where support has been provided through the services of itinerant teachers. These students have performed well and have not displayed any maladaptive behaviour that would warrant their staying in segregated facilities.

The University of the West Indies has indicated a steady increase in the enrolment of students with visually impairment in its faculties although this is limited to the Arts, Education and a number of disciplines in the Social Sciences. The University further reported that 'the movement of persons with disabilities into higher education, and the success of those who finally get there continued to be marred by such challenges as language barrier (as in the case of the hearing impaired) as well as the lack of technical support'. Inclusion, therefore, must embrace not only physical space but all the support necessary as well as the educational opportunities to enhance success.

### **An Inclusive Environment – Curriculum Considerations**

Approximately sixty percent (60%) of the population of students with special needs fall within the mild range. These students are recognizable in the lag behind their peers in academic performance. On the other hand, there are students who are gifted and talented and must be provided for in an inclusive context and there must be scope within the curriculum to engage these students. The standards set for curriculum achievement must therefore be applied to students.

Expectation of schools and other educational institutions are constantly rising to meet the challenges of modern societies and competitive knowledge-based economies. This implies that schools must constantly add value to the educational process and their most valued client, the students themselves. To accomplish this, they must set standards and re-assess these continuously.

The Ministry of Education has developed standards at all levels of the system and these standards are drivers of the education process and are grounded in the following principles and understandings:

1. The goal of education is to produce well-rounded, responsible individuals who are literate, numerate, environmentally aware, humane, culturally sensitive and tolerant.....
2. Learning and education are complex activities and are best carried out by corporate and co-operative actions and interactions
3. All students are capable of learning and should be provided with the opportunities to do so

4. All students are entitled to quality curriculum and instructional methods
5. Mastery of the curriculum offerings and delivery techniques are indispensable for success

### **Curriculum Issues in Response to Inclusion**

Curricula must respond to the emerging needs of the society and where this response is ignored, national development is at stake. To this end the Ministry of Education has provided the opportunity for the involvement of various stakeholders in the development of curricula at the three levels of the school system.

- ⤴ The curriculum at the early childhood level provides guidelines for the cognitive, emotional, psycho- social development of the child and facilitates inter-sectoral integration of services. It provides articulation for transition from that level to the early primary years thus bridging the transition gap
- ⤴ The primary curriculum was revised in 1999 and was fully implemented in 2002 and is geared at providing opportunities for child-centered, inclusive teaching learning experiences. It is designed on the premise that every child can learn, and as such provides for the identification and development of the intelligences. It is flexible enough to allow teachers to adapt it to satisfy the varying abilities and learning styles of the students as well as the demand of their local environment.
- ⤴ At the secondary level, curriculum is provided for Grades 7-9 and was developed in response to the need for a common curriculum at that level. The driver of this initiative was the Reform of Secondary Education (R.O.S.E.), a World Bank Project that commenced in 1993 and is still offering support for the programme.

### **Teacher Preparation and Inclusion**

Since 1998, all teachers in training are required to do a module in Special Education. This course is meant to sensitize all teachers to the various types of exceptionalities and the approaches that can be used in working with students even before a formal assessment is done. Teachers are also exposed to other special areas of training in an attempt to provide the best responses to the specific needs of the students.

The issue of teacher quality has been the concern of governments past and present and various programmes and initiatives have been put in place to remedy the situation.

The Professional Development Unit of the Ministry of Education in collaboration with Schools, Professional Associations, as well as the Joint Board of Teacher Education has organized professional development training for both in-service and pre-service teachers. Other provisions have been made in the following areas:

- ⤴ Scholarships in specialized areas of study e.g. Mathematics, Science Spanish
- ⤴ Postgraduate training in Management and Leadership for all Principals at the Primary level, in order to increase site-based management and for more responsiveness to the needs at the local level.
- ⤴ Training in Management and Leadership for Principals at the Secondary level ( Training currently being done)
- ⤴ A revolving loan scheme to facilitate the professional development of teachers

- ▲ A 50% refund of tuition to teachers who pursued courses of study up to the graduate level without taking study leave.

## **Programmes for Maintaining Inclusion**

### **Guidance Counselling**

Integral to maintaining an inclusive education system is the work of Guidance Counselling. Philosophically, guidance espouses the concept of a fully functioning person and acknowledges that individuals have the capacity for self-determination, and are able to make intelligent, rational and satisfying decisions about their lives. The process assumes respect for the personal worth of the individual who by nature has integrity and is entitled to dignity. One of the aims of the programme is to produce students who are more self aware, self assured and capable of demonstrating belief in themselves no matter the level of academic competence.

### **Literacy Initiatives**

The importance of literacy to education is well recognized. Consequently, the Ministry of Education is giving special emphasis to the early development of literacy skills as a tool to enhance student outcomes in all areas of the curriculum. Essentially, attention is given to various facets of instructions such as emergent, developmental, corrective and remedial as reflected in the different programmes and activities being undertaken (MOE 2007). The posts of National and Regional Literacy Co-ordinators were established to promote and improve literacy at all levels.

Some of these initiatives are:

- ▲ The National Literacy Plan under the Education Transformation
- ▲ The Grade Four Literacy Intervention
- ▲ The Student Empowerment Programme (SEP)
- ▲ Expanding Educational Horizons
- ▲ Primary Education Support Project (PESP)
- ▲ The Inner-city Schools Improvement Programme
- ▲ The Competency Shelter Programme

## **Achievements in Support of Inclusion**

The government of Jamaica in its commitment to promote and support 'Education for All' has initiated a number of policies and initiatives to improve access and equity and ultimately the outcomes of the system.

Of significance, some of these achievements in the following areas:

### **Early Childhood Education**

- ▲ Universal access to early childhood and primary education.
- ▲ The expansion of early childhood education to cater for children 0-5 year
- ▲ Institutionalizing the use of a standard curriculum in all infant school
- ▲ Improvement in the quality of Basic School Teachers and the supervision of early childhood education

- ▲ The establishment of an Early Childhood Commission to drive that sector to advise the Ministry Of Education on policy matters relating to early childhood care, education, initiatives and actions to achieve national early childhood developmental goals.
- ▲ The establishment of the Early Childhood Act in 2005
- ▲ The placement of college trained teachers in Early Childhood institutions.
- ▲ The Enhancement of Basic School Project 2002-2008
- ▲ A pilot School Feeding Programme

### **Primary Education**

- ▲ A National Assessment Programme at the Primary level
- ▲ Gross enrollment rate for the primary level at 95.5% (97% for males and 93.9% for females)
- ▲ Performance of Literacy at the grade four levels has increased by 14% from 65% in 2005- 2006 to 79% in the 2006-2007 academic year.
- ▲ National standardized textbooks and workbooks provided free of cost at the primary level
- ▲ Development of the national Grades 1-6 Primary Curriculum. Grades 1-3 fully integrated with discrete subject areas at Grades 4-6.
- ▲ Standards developed for the Primary level
- ▲ The introduction of technology in education
- ▲ The placement of Special Education Resource Teachers in Primary and All-Age schools. These received in-service training and continuous support, both technical and material, to enable them to carry out basic assessment and plan for students using the diagnostic prescriptive approach to teaching and learning.
- ▲ The introduction of Spanish in over 300 primary schools

### **Secondary Education**

- ▲ An aggressive move towards Universal Secondary Education – currently full access at Grades 7-9 and approximately 80% access at Grades 10 and 11. The challenge of space in certain rural/urban centres is of particular concern as the system grapples with migration and the rapid expansion of new housing developments.
- ▲ Development of a common Grades 7-9 ROSE curriculum in 13 subject areas to address equity, access, quality and productivity
  - ▲ The construction of 17 secondary schools between 2005 and 2007 generating over 16,000 spaces in addition to improving the capacity of existing schools
  - ▲ National textbook loan scheme at the secondary level with provision of approximately 590,000 free textbooks to students at grades 7-11 across 270 secondary schools island-wide.
  - ▲ A Secondary School Enhancement Programme to upgrade specific programmes and facilities for the newer secondary schools formerly called upgraded and reclassified high schools. Since the inception of the programme in 2001, the sum of \$547m has been allocated to over 80 schools.
  - ▲ Development of standards for all subject areas to establish a foundation for accountability.

### **Other**

- ⤴ The establishment of a National HIV and AIDS Response Team in collaboration with a number of government and non-government partners.
- ⤴ The establishment of an inner-city project to deal with issues of access and equity
- ⤴ A National School Feeding Programme -approximately 175,000 children benefit on a daily basis
- ⤴ The establishment of a committee to develop a policy for the mainstreaming of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (Tech Voc) in Secondary Schools. This is to ensure that every secondary school graduate has certification in at least one Tech Voc subject which will allow employment in the area or for further training in the area.
- ⤴ The Programme of Advancement Through Health & Education (PATH) where needy students ages of 6-17 years benefit from Education Grants to ensure school attendance.

### **Conclusion**

Inclusion in Education must be considered a long term process for securing economic progress and social stability. Jamaica must continue to provide the framework that will transcend all boundaries so that our most treasured, the human capital, will thrive in a truly inclusive society.