

DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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Abstract. Looking at the educational policies in recent years there is a clear outlined strategic change toward the support for children and students with special educational needs which provides them with an equal opportunity to learn and develop alongside with their peers in kindergartens and schools and to become a fully engaged citizens of our society.

The current paper focuses on the development of special educational needs and support for children and students with special educational needs in preschool and school age within the educational system.

Keywords: special educational needs support; children and students with special educational needs; special educational needs teacher

Introduction

The most recent educational policies on the support for children and students with special educational needs within the educational system aim to guarantee the right of education. Fully integrated educational environment means that it is for everyone and it has to guarantee access and special educational needs support for those who need it.

The very beginning of special educational needs in Bulgaria dates back to 1994, following the signing and ratification of The Salamanca Declaration when the director of the school for children with impaired vision in Varna - Dr. Vladimir Radulov began implementation of recommendations (Radulov, 1995). The development of the special educational needs and support could be divided into the following stages: Stage One – till 1994, Stage Two 1994 – 2003, Stage Three 2004 – 2016, Stage Four 2016 – today.

Stage one dates back from the creation of the first special educational needs schools in Bulgaria up till 1994. During this phase children and students with special educational needs were being educated and referred to separate schools in relation to their individual special educational needs and were assisted

by special educational needs experts, psychologists, and speech and hearing rehabilitators;

Stage two begins in 1994 and lasts till 2003. During different programs for integrated education were implemented providing children with special educational needs the opportunity to learn along the side of their peers within regular schools and providing them the support of special educational needs teachers (in accordance to their individual needs).

Stage three – 2003 – 2015 is marked by the ratification the National Integration Plan for children with special educational needs or with chronic illnesses and the implementation of integrated education with the assistance of special educational needs specialists within the educational process. There are some important educational, social and moral reasons for providing equal access and full integration for children and students with special educational needs

This phase marks educational policies outlining real change in attitude toward children with special educational need as reflected in the National program for development of school and preschool education (2006 – 2015), and regulatory legislature such as: The National Law for Public Education; The Statute for implementation of the national Law for Public Education; Law for integration of people with disabilities; national strategies, plans and programs for integration of children and people with disabilities. All of those documents carry the messages in all EU regulations as well as UN recommendations regarding education; The Declaration and action frame from Salamanca for special educational needs, 1994; The Dakar Frame Action, 2000¹⁾.

Special educational needs centers in support of the integrated educational and training of children and students with special educational needs are also opened at this stage, because an important factor in the integrated education of children and students with special educational needs in the kindergarten and the school is the special educational needs teacher. The special educational needs teacher plays an important role in the process of complete integration of children and students with special educational needs in the educational system. The definition of “special educational needs teacher” is “ a special pedagogue who is an additional help in the integration and education process of children with special educational needs and in the extracurricular activities for optimal learning of educational content, intellectual, psychological and social development and adaptation in the educational environment”²⁾.

In this regard it can be stated that it was during this phase that the job description of the special educational needs teacher was adopted. The special educational needs teacher’s functions, which are a system of interconnected in a components dealing with the educational process, are also mentioned. They are related to the planning and preparation of the educational process of children and students with special educational needs. It is extremely important for the special educational needs teacher to participate in the training, upbringing and

support of children and students with special educational needs in the group in the kindergarten and in the class. Special educational need's focus is the assistance toward formation of general knowledge, skills, attitudes, values in children and students with special educational needs. An important emphasis in the special educational need assistance is the assessment and reporting of the dynamics in the development of the cognitive processes and the personality of the students as well as their achievements in the educational process³⁾.

Special educational needs support is a key in the communication between teacher-student-parents of students without and with disabilities, and is viewed both vertically and horizontally; its main goal is *integration* and *cooperation*. Collaboration as a collaborative work is driven by common goals, tasks and activities based on the principles of equality, mutual trust, responsibility, loyalty, empathy and community-building. Successful cooperation of teachers - students - parents is subordinated to the leading idea of the uniqueness of each student and child and his/her unique individual qualities. The student-child should be able to reveal his / her abilities and needs both at school and at home to work in parallel and in synergy to develop his / her potential (Yankova & Damianov, 2013).

The implementation of special educational need support at this stage of his/her development is carried out by experts from the Resource Centers to support the integrated education and training of children and students with special educational needs. Support is provided to children and students who have been advised to receive integrated training by the teams for complex pedagogical assessment of the Regional Inspectorates of Education.

Stage four began in 2016 and is ongoing. This stage covers educational reforms and the 2015 Preschool and School Education Act, which came into force in 2016, as well as the adopted Inclusion Education Ordinance 2016 and 2017, which outlines the new vision in the training of children and students with special educational needs with the support for personal development. In this respect, it can be said that the philosophy of the educational system and its organization has changed. The child - as a core value - is placed at the center of the educational process. It is through inclusive education that equal opportunity and opportunity for each child and student to realize their capacity as much as possible, to develop according to their individual needs, because inclusion means changing the philosophy of the process of learning and functioning of the educational institution itself. An important factor in the educational process is the special educational needs support in the preschool, schools and centers for support and personal development. In the Preschool and School education, special educational needs support is defined as "providing a general and additional support based on evaluation of individual needs of children and students including activities with experts aimed at their personal development and regarding achieving the goals from the individual curriculums for support."⁴⁾

Every child and student with special educational needs is supported in the educational process. This support could be *individual* or *group* depending on the individual educational plan for support and is implemented with the common efforts of teachers in the group/class, the special educational needs teacher and assistant teachers whenever that is in the individual educational plan.

Special educational needs support in the preschool/kindergarten is implemented through:

- educational substance adaptation depending on the individual needs of each child and student with special educational need;
- cooperation between the homeroom teacher, the specific subject teacher and the special educational needs teacher during the classes;
- providing assistive means and technologies to ensure full engagement in the educational process;
- therapeutic support for children and students with special educational needs
- providing learning opportunities through alternative forms of communication;
- consulting teachers in regards to the development of a supportive environment in their classroom or group room or developing an ergotherapy, sensory integration and other educational resources;
- life-skills training and preparation for living;
- including classroom/group room activities for inclusion and acceptance of children with special educational needs⁵⁾.

Special educational needs support for hearing/visually impaired children is provided in special schools for education and support for students with sensory disabilities.

The goal of special educational needs support is every child/student with special educational needs to be integrated in the preschool/kindergarten or school and to be supported by the special educational needs teacher in accordance to their individual needs.

The role of the special educational needs teacher in the educational process is defined as:

- actively participating in the evaluation of individual needs for each student done by the personal development team in the kindergarten/school in order to guarantee an additional help for the child/student's development;
- defining concrete educational goals for children/students with special educational needs for each year or semester/quarter in cooperation with the homeroom teacher or the subject teacher and participation in each lessons according to the plan and the educational goals set in it;
- participation in the special educational needs plan: defining clear educational goals, preparation of individual educational plan and programs when they are needed;
- cooperation in the planning of all support materials needed for quality educational process for children with special educational needs in the kindergarten group or classroom in schools;

- implementation of individual or group work with children/students with special educational needs when providing additional support;
- cooperation for organization and adaptation of educational environment for effective integration of children/students with special educational needs;
- participation in the evaluation of the cognitive and personal development of each student;
- consulting teachers regarding the specifics in educational content learning in children/students with special educational needs and supporting the teacher in preparation for different subjects and individual work;
- consulting teachers for differentiating approaches toward education in a classroom where special educational needs support is provided;
- educating parents about the principles of inclusive education, their rights and responsibilities;
- participating in the evaluation of the development of children/students with special educational needs;
- providing parents with different means and techniques for individual work at home;
- participating in the professional and career consultations of students with special educational needs;
- providing parent education (upon their approval) for different techniques, approaches for work with their child/student and for helping him/her develop autonomy and help him/her prepare for their independent life;
- planning and implementing of partnerships with other pedagogical staff as a part of the teamwork for discussion of issues and good practices exchange when working with the same children/students which will help increase the efficiency of the pedagogical approaches⁶⁾.

In accordance with the decisions of the support team for personal development the special educational needs support could be terminated if/when:

- a review of the student/child's development calls for termination;
- the goals of the special educational needs plan have been achieved;
- a parent/s or caregivers of a child/student with special educational needs have turned in a request for termination.

Based on the theoretical and normative analysis of the studied problem a survey was conducted amongst 98 resource teachers from the Regional Centers for Support of the Inclusive Education Process - Burgas, Kardjali, Pazardjik with the purpose of providing the special educational needs support to children and students with special educational needs in the educational environment of kindergarten and school.

The survey results show that 98% of respondents are participating in teams for personal development in kindergarten and school, in assessing the individual needs of a child or student to provide additional support and in the preparation of the special educational needs plan.

The majority of the respondents (77.5%) point out that the children and students with special educational needs are still only supported by the special educational needs teacher, the psychologist and speech therapist. The special educational needs support is done in the resource room - individually or in groups.

The answers to the question of whether teachers in kindergartens and schools have changed their attitudes towards children and students with special educational needs, the results show that 27.5% of the respondents answered *definitely* 6.7% responded with *rather yes*, 35.8 *hesitated* in their response. The results also show that teachers educating children and students with special educational needs have changed attitudes in a positive direction.

When asked about the adaptation of the educational environment for the inclusion of children and students with special educational needs in the educational process 79.5% of the respondents agree that they are actively involved in adaptation of the educational environment.

Answering the question of whether the special educational needs teacher participate in assessing the development of cognitive processes and the personal development of the child and student with special educational needs, it is acknowledged that special educational needs teachers participate fully in the evaluation and development of the child or student with special educational needs.

The question of whether they participate in counseling teachers who work with a child or a student with special educational needs about the specifics of mastering the curriculum the 83.6% of the respondents answered *definitely yes*.

The analysis of answers on the questions regarding the cooperation between the school and the family of disabled children, it is clear that at this stage the cooperation between the parents of the children with special educational needs and the school is not at the necessary level and they are the two most important sides responsible for in the education and the personal development of the students. Family and school cooperation is a social need that often requires additional educational and social support. The families' activeness reflects the humanization of social relations and the change of the legal framework in accordance with the social and cultural models (Yankova, 2015).

The collected data also shows that special educational needs support of children and students with special educational needs is seen as a part of the educational process in an integrated education.

Taking into account the development of special educational needs support, it could rightly be pointed out that at this stage it is carried out by special educational needs teachers, speech therapists, psychologists, hearing and speech rehabilitation teachers, kindergarten teachers and schools after the proper assessment of the individual needs of the child or student by the personal development support team in the kindergarten or school. Kindergartens and schools that do not have the necessary special educational needs teachers receive help from The Regional Centers for Support of the Inclusive Education Process.

In conclusion, it can be said that within the range of inclusive education, the special educational needs support is one of the main concepts because each participant in the learning process is unique and needs support to develop his or her individual abilities

NOTES

1. Methodological Instruction of The Ministry of Education and Science 2007.
2. Rules for the implementation of the law on public education, SN, issue.68 from 30.07. 1999, addition SN, issue 74 from 05.09.2014.
3. Job description of a special education need teacher Ministry of Education and science 24.01.2012
4. Preschool and School Education Act, updated, SN, issue. 79 13.10.2015, implemented since 1.08.2016., <http://www.mon.bg/?go=page&pageId=7&subpageId=57>.
5. Inclusion Education Ordinance. – SN, issue 86 -27.10.2017 г., implemented with PMS No232 from 20.10.2017.
6. Ordinance №12 for the status and occupational development of teachers, headmasters and other pedagogical specialists –SN issue 75 from 27.09.2016, implemented since 27.09.2016.

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