Rehabilitation International

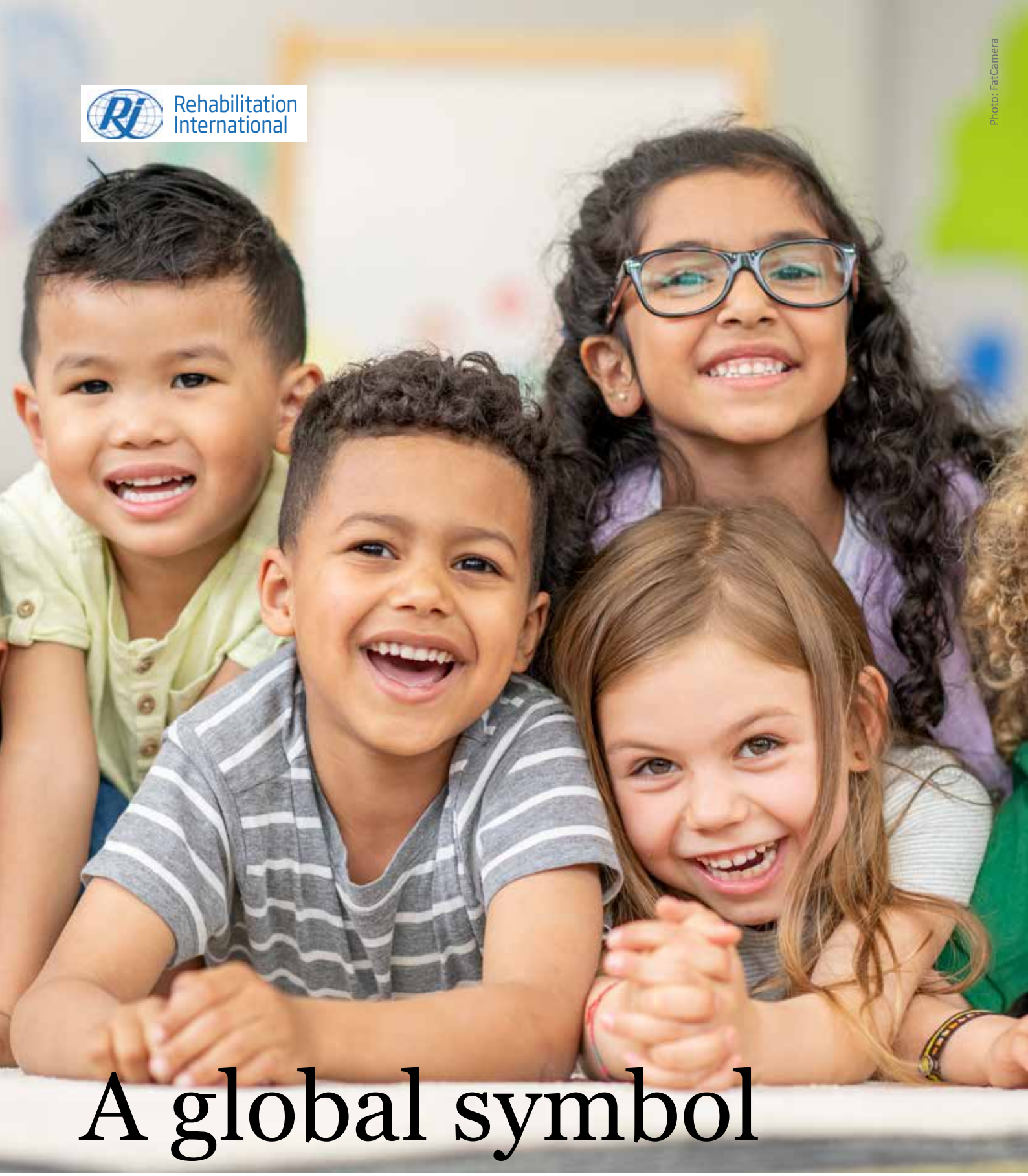

Photo: FatCamera

A global symbol for inclusive education

HANDBOOK

Photo: ljubaphoto

A building is universally designed when **everyone can access** it and **navigate** in it, regardless of a disability.

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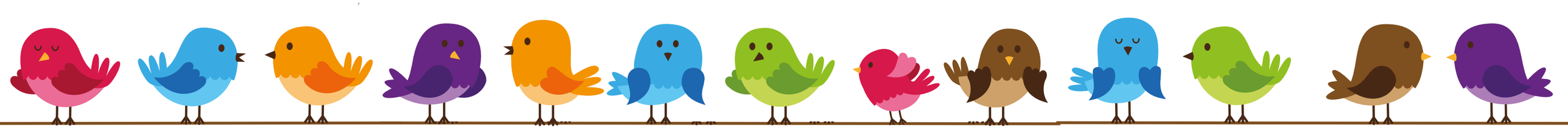

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Rehabilitation International

Photo: Jacob Lund

1. Introduction

Inclusion is based on the principle that everyone has the same value and should be welcome and treated with respect, regardless of gender, skin colour, ethnic background, or disability. In an inclusive educational institution, all children, pupils and students participate in the education process. Inclusion implies adapting the education so that everyone can benefit from it and learn. Adapting the education means organising varied working methods, techniques, and teaching and learning materials. This is at the core of inclusive education. UNESCO expresses it as *a process that helps to overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation, and achievement of learners.*[1]

Universal design is relevant to achieve inclusive education and training. A building is universally designed when everyone can access it and navigate in it, regardless of a disability. This can require adaptation. The same applies to teaching and learning materials. Some pupils need specially adapted materials, beyond universal design.

Everyone has the right to an inclusive environment and inclusive education, as established in international conventions and declarations (see chapter 3). An inclusive educational institution transforms this right and puts it into practice. When the practice meets the requirements for inclusion, the institution can be rewarded with a visual symbol, *a global symbol*. Those looking for an inclusive educational institution can look for the symbol and will know that this institution is a good place for learning.

1. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254

In addition to making practical adaptations, it is essential that the leadership of an educational institution promotes inclusive and accepting attitudes and inclusive practices. It is equally important that the institution has sufficient competence and is organised in such a way that inclusion is possible in daily activities.

The same principles and conditions that underpin an inclusive school can also be largely applied to kindergartens and universities. The recommendations in the handbook are therefore universal and applicable to other contexts.

This handbook provides more information about what inclusive education entails. In it you can find a practical approach to how you organise the process leading towards inclusion and what needs to be in place for the institution to achieve the goal of being inclusive. The handbook contains recommendations about tools and support functions that can be used in this process. Various implementation strategies for leadership are also included.

Finally, you will find the criteria that must be met to be rewarded with the global symbol.

The project *A Global Symbol* is a collaboration between the RI International Commission on Technology and Accessibility (ICTA), the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education (IITE), which has also been an important partner in the process, members of the RI Global – Education Commission, where especially Ms. Seema Tuli, Director Academics/Trustee, Amar Jyoti Charitable Trust from India has been a significant contributor in developing the handbook, user organisations in Norway, and the Secretary General at the RI Global Headquarters in New York.

June 2025, RI Global - Education Commission
Tone L. Mork, Former Chair of RI Education Commission

Article 24 of the UN-Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities gives us a clear guidance: “States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning”. Even though, the Convention has been ratified by 192 and signed by 164 countries around the world, we are still far away from the situation that inclusive education is implemented in all these countries and education is accessible for all pupils and students with disabilities. The concept of universal design is an important step, but in some cases inclusive education must go beyond this, as children and youth in some cases need special assistance.

The global symbol of inclusive education is a milestone for the implementation of inclusive education. It addresses some major barriers towards the implementation of exclusive education: misconceptions on disabilities, resistance from parents with non-disabled children, lack of knowledge, lack of financing, and some societal attitudes. Based on clear guidelines for a disability-inclusive education and a defined accreditation process, it can give motivation to kindergartens, schools, universities and other institutions of professional training and visibility in the public. The development of the global accessibility sign (so-called wheelchair logo) has shown that clear and visible standards combined with a well-known and recognized mark can be a major factor for accessibility and a more inclusive world.

Prof Christoph Gutenbrunner, MD, PhD, FRCP, SFEBPRM
President of Rehabilitation International

The recommendations in the handbook are **universal and applicable** to other contexts.

Photo: SolStock

2. Quality assurance and receiving the quality symbol

The handbook is developed as a part of the project *A global symbol*. The handbook is the foundation for a quality process towards a more inclusive school – a school designed to ensure that all children and youth receive good and inclusive education.

The global Rehabilitation International (RI) symbol will be released after a successful quality process and by achieving the criteria set. Quality assurance is carried out by those who use the different educational institutions. User participation is central in the process. Who performs the quality assurance will vary in the different educational institutions, public or private:

- **In kindergarten:** parents together with the funding authorities.
- **In schools:** parents, but pupils also play a role, both individually and through their formal forums such as school councils etc.
- **In universities:** students, both individually and through their formal forums such as student organisations.

The institutions must ensure that the authorities that allocate resources are involved in the process.

The handbook contains two forms that must be used. Quality assurance is carried out by evaluating and commenting on the criteria in form 2. The institutions must ensure that everyone who should be involved in quality assurance participates and is aware of their role and responsibility, and that they agree on who will sign the completed form. All relevant criteria must be documented and approved before the institution is defined as an inclusive educational institution.

- **Form 1** is filled out by pupils/parents/etc.
  This form is the foundation for the process carried out to complete Form 2.
- **Form 2** is completed by the institutions and those ensuring quality together.
  This form reflects what has been done and what needs to be done at the system level in the educational institution. The comments column is meant for internal use for the institution working to fulfil the criteria. E.g., if there are measures that need to be implemented before the institution can answer “yes”.

After form 2 is completed and sent to RI, the symbol will be released. Both the educational institution and those involved in quality assurance sign the form. Both forms can be found in accessible formats here: **www.riglobal.org**

Bilde av symbolet her også

RECEIVING THE SYMBOL

After the quality assurance process is completed and all the involved agree that the criteria in Form 2 are met:

1. The signed form is sent to RI’s Headquarters in New York for registration.
2. On the website, RI Headquarters will publish the technical specification on how the symbol should be used and present the symbol in the correct colours and layout.
3. The educational institution has the responsibility to follow up the technical criteria, for example, with an annual assessment carried out by the participants in the quality process. These participants are responsible for ensuring that the symbol is not used if the criteria are no longer met. We recommend that this is done well before the end of the school year. If the criteria are no longer met, they send a notification to RI’s headquarters.
4. The institution will be able to download the symbol from the website and use it according to the guidelines and the technical specification listed on the website. The use of the symbol will be free of charge.
5. The RI Headquarters will monitor the number of educational institutions that have completed the process and reports annually to RI’s Executive Committee.
6. The approved institutions will be listed on the RI Website.

Photo: skynesher

3. Education - a human right

Education as a human right was pronounced in article 26 in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights[2] in 1948 and is at the core of inclusive education. The UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women[3] emphasised that this is a human right also for women, and that states should take measures to ensure women equal rights with men in the field of education.

2. United Nations (1948) Universal Declaration of Human Rights. https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/
3. United Nations (1979) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx

Inclusive education

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education[4] first endorsed the idea of inclusive education in 1994 and emphasised the importance of improving the learning conditions of children with specific needs.

The right and access to education for children and pupils with a disability is included in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child[5]. This right is further recognised in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.[6]

In realising this right, States Parties shall ensure that:
a) Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability;
b) Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live; […] (article 24)

International agreements and goals adopted by the UN underpin and support inclusion, education for all, inclusive education, and inclusive education systems. All children should receive inclusive education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live.

Policies on inclusion

Conventions, statements, goals, and declarations provide a strong impetus to establish education policies supporting inclusive education for all, including children with disabilities.

4. UNESCO (1994) The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education
5. United Nations (1990) Convention on the Rights of the Child. https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx
6. United Nations (2006) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html

In Education 2030[7] 184 UNESCO member states commit to making the necessary changes in education policies and focusing our efforts on the most disadvantaged, especially those with disabilities, to ensure that no one is left behind.

Policies on inclusion vary worldwide from inclusion in the education system through special schools and centres, and special classes in integrated schools to inclusive schools.

A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education

UNESCO published A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education in 2017[8]. The guide is a useful tool for the process of implementing inclusion and points out that

- inclusive education must be founded in national policy
- financial and human resources must be available
- schools and teachers must have strategies to meet all learners.

This builds on the Salamanca Statement but gives further guidelines on how to implement an inclusive education system. There are conventions, goals, and guidelines to support the work. The difficulty lies in creating the system and providing inclusive education for all that satisfies every child's right to an education and ensures that the goals are met.

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG Quality Education, emphasises the need for inclusive and equitable education for all- irrespective of their race, caste, creed or disability. The goal aims to ensure that children, regardless of their background, gender, disability or social, or economic status, have equal access to quality education.

7. UNESCO (2015) Education 2030. Incheon Declaration and Framework for action towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all
8. UNESCO (2017) A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254

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Photo: zhudifeng

Photo: Azmanjaka

4. A practical approach

An inclusive and accepting environment

In an inclusive learning environment, the leadership ensures that inclusive attitudes and practices permeate the educational institution. This means that the leadership and teachers regularly reflect on the practices in everyday school life. Creating, implementing, maintaining, and developing an inclusive learning culture requires time and needs to be a priority. A continuous effort to shape and foster positive attitudes to ensure that all pupils are safe and respected is needed.

The holistic approach to education ensures meaningful inclusion of children with disabilities in the regular mainstream system. Inclusive education prioritises the need to transform the entire school system in such a way that each child- rich or poor, with or without disability, boy or girl- feels accepted and included. The holistic approach to education emphasises provisions of inclusive sports and cultural activities along with required therapeutic interventions (occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech therapy, counselling etc.). To ensure empowerment, pre-vocational skill development should be included in the curriculum from primary grades.

Attitudes towards pupils with disabilities

Attitudes towards pupils with disabilities significantly impact their experience of inclusion and participation in school. Positive attitudes from both teachers and peers contribute to a safe and supportive environment where pupils feel valued and included. When pupils with disabilities are met with respect and understanding, they can actively participate in both education and social activities.

Many pupils and adults may have prejudices or misconceptions about disabilities. This can lead to pupils with disabilities being stigmatised or excluded. These attitudes play a crucial role in how pupils with a disability are treated and met in school. Promoting positive attitudes towards diversity and different abilities is therefore very important. Teachers and pupils who are knowledgeable about disabilities are better equipped to create an inclusive environment.

Thus, it is imperative to organise regular in-house orientation workshops for teachers to train them in the nuances of handling children with cross-disabilities. These in-house training programmes in cross-disability equip teachers to understand the unique challenges and abilities of students with diverse needs. The provision of regular hands-on training within the school environment fosters a culture of collaborative learning and adaptability.

A school with an open attitude to diversity that actively works to be inclusive creates a positive learning environment that benefits not only pupils with disabilities but also teaches all pupils to respect differences and develop empathy.

By focusing on classroom management and structure in teaching, teachers actively work to create a good learning environment. Classroom management involves the teacher's ability to create a learning environment that promotes pupils' academic and social learning. The teacher creates an overview and structure through rules and routines. A positive relationship with the pupils is a prerequisite for success. A good learning environment is characterised by structure, safety, and tolerance for differences. The teacher's attitudes and actions greatly influence the environment.

Coordinating plans and measures, methods, communication, and the use of aids in teaching requires teachers to collaborate. Establishing a team that collaborates and coordinates measures around the pupil is useful. Often, there is a need to clarify roles and responsibilities between subject teachers, special educators, and other involved parties.

IMPORTANT TO **REMEMBER / TIPS**

- Plan the education for each individual pupil.
- Discuss inclusion, share knowledge and experience, and set aside time for reflection in staff meetings.
- Provide professional development on how to identify pupils who have difficulties. This includes mapping and assessing needs.
- Provide professional development that promotes inclusion, including knowledge on how to identify pupils with special education needs. For example, teaching methods, the use of digital tools and teaching and learning materials, or how to adapt teaching for pupils with disabilities.
- Create a system that makes it possible to realise inclusive practices by structuring the collaboration between everyone involved with the pupil. Evaluate how inclusive education works in practice.

Adapted and individual education plans

Inclusion means adapting the education so that everyone learns. Adapted education means allowing for varied work methods. A good assessment of the pupil is important to provide appropriate education. Adapting the education so that everyone benefits satisfactorily also involves the school's scope of action and resources.

Not all pupils benefit from ordinary education, consequently a lot of the education is given as special education. Pupils receiving special education have different needs for the organisation and adaptation of the education. The curriculum should still provide goals and content for the education. For pupils with particularly extensive learning difficulties, the general part of the curriculum and the overarching goals can be of most relevance. For others, it can be relevant to have plans for different subjects and create an individual education plan with realistic goals.

Inclusion means adapting the education so that **everyone learns**.

IMPORTANT TO **REMEMBER / TIPS**

- Help and support teachers to adapt education plans and teaching methods.
- Give feedback to pupils and parents during the learning process.
- Consider the pupil's difficulties and adapt the assessment methods so that pupils can show their actual knowledge. Identify achievement of goals so that all pupils receive proof of their abilities when they complete their education.

Collaboration between parents and school

Inclusive education is a collaborative effort of its key principals, management, teachers, policymakers and above all parents. The parents play the most crucial role in ensuring the success of inclusive education by advocating the needs, challenges, strengths of the child. Thus, paving a way for fostering acceptance and equity in the educational journey of the child. A good dialogue is fundamental for the collaboration between home and school to function. The school has the primary responsibility to take the initiative, establish a structure for parental collaboration, and facilitate cooperation. An inclusive school has an open approach to working with attitudes and what an inclusive learning environment entails in practice. The school puts inclusion and the sharing of experiences and reflection on the agenda in meetings. Parents play a crucial role in succeeding to establish an inclusive learning environment.

Parents can provide important information about the pupil's experiences, what the pupil likes, how the pupil reacts, and learns in different situations. Parents with children who have disabilities often have many questions and concerns when their child starts school. They have a greater need for information than other parents. It can therefore be helpful to inform parents about their child's day at school, for example by using a simple notebook or via secure e-mail, tablet, etc. Open and clear information about the school's activities and educational content provides security to parents and strengthens trust in the school.

IMPORTANT TO **REMEMBER / TIPS**

- Ensure a good, open, and clear dialogue between parents and the school. Create a plan for the dialogue, both individually and in common meetings.
- Provide regular information about the child's school day and how parents can support/contribute at home.
- Create a structure for parental collaboration and arrange common meetings with inclusion on the agenda.

External support and professional development

The staff at school needs access to expertise in special education, help, and support to give pupils adapted education. The school also needs access to external expertise from professionals such as speech therapists, vision and hearing specialists, occupational and physical therapists, and psychologists. These professionals need to collaborate to ensure that their collected competence and support gives pupils with various needs adapted education.

Pupils with different needs for adapted education require comprehensive measures both academically, socially, and physically. Ensuring high quality requires coordination both internally at the school and with external partners. Internal coordination can include setting aside time for collaboration, scheduling, and participation in meetings with external partners.

In addition to these external collaborations, it is essential that teachers receive professional development in the use of ICT to support inclusive education. UNESCO's ICT Competency Framework for Teachers (ICT CFT 3.0) emphasises the need for educators to acquire ICT skills tailored to inclusive practices. These competencies enable teachers to adapt their teaching strategies and materials, making learning accessible for all students, including those with disabilities. The integration of ICT into teacher training can facilitate a more inclusive learning environment by empowering teachers to effectively utilise digital tools that cater to the diverse needs of students.

IMPORTANT TO **REMEMBER / TIPS**

- Formalise necessary arenas for collaboration.
- Map out the competencies the school has.
- Create a plan for professional development of the school staff, including fixed times for internal reflection.

Teaching and learning materials, aids and assistive devices

Teaching and learning materials are a support for both the teacher's work and the pupil's learning process. The school should offer a variety of these materials, including concrete objects and materials, printed and digital, to ensure all pupils have access to the school subjects.

In the context of inclusive education designing accessible digital materials means making them accessible and comprehensible for as many as possible, regardless of disability. The content can be adapted in various ways, for example with simplifying layout, providing text alternatives for all non-text content, and adding subtitles for audio-based content.

Universally designed digital teaching materials also make it possible to adapt to pupils' learning needs across multiple competency areas, including written, visual, auditory, etc. Concrete objects and materials are a good supplement to digital teaching and learning materials.

Some pupils need specially adapted teaching materials, beyond universal design. Pupils who use sign language need materials in sign language. Pupils with severe visual impairments/blindness need teaching materials in braille or audio format. Alternative and augmentative communication, such as the use of symbols, pictograms, etc., must be provided for those who need them.

Digital and online learning resources are powerful tools in promoting accessibility. ICT and AI offer dynamic solutions that make learning more personalized and adaptable. These technologies can convert learning materials into various accessible formats, supporting students with diverse needs. For example, AI-driven tools can offer real-time translations, voice-to-text services, and personalized learning pathways based on each student's needs. Online platforms can host a wide range of content that is easily adaptable, fostering an inclusive environment where all learners can access the same educational opportunities.

These pupil groups who need accommodation in the classroom by using assistive technology, can find more information and tips in chapter 7.

IMPORTANT TO **REMEMBER / TIPS**

- Ensure varied access to teaching and learning materials that meet pupils' different needs for adaptation.
- Ensure that staff have competence in using specially adapted teaching and learning materials, such as symbols, braille, sign language, and how digital aids can be tailored to pupils' various learning needs.

Photo: StockPlanets

A school is universally designed when **all pupils** have **access to the same areas** both indoors and outdoors.

Accessibility and physical adaptation

In order for all pupils to be able participate in common education and activities, the school must be physically accessible. A school is universally designed when all pupils have access to the same areas both indoors and outdoors. The extent of adaptation will vary, and in some cases, remodelling and long-term planning are required. This can involve installing elevators, ramps, door openers, the furnishing of changing rooms, dedicated group rooms, and the adaptation of outdoor areas.

In the classroom, it is important to consider space for wheelchairs, known as a turning circle. Additionally, the placement of desks in the room, inclusion in the group, compensation for any visual and/or hearing impairments, concentration difficulties, and the need for shielding must be taken into account.

When it comes to visual impairment, the pupil's needs for adaptation and aids must be assessed. This can involve lighting and glare, colours and contrasts, as well as order and overview. For hearing impairments, it is particularly important to consider light and sound conditions. There are several aids that compensate for hearing loss. Universal design means that information is adapted and accessible to everyone, using symbols, braille, or other tactile materials, sign language, and sound amplification systems.

The role of ICT and AI in enhancing accessibility cannot be overstated. Digital tools powered by AI can help create personalised solutions for students with various disabilities. For instance, speech recognition software can aid students with hearing impairments, while text-to-speech tools can support those with visual impairments. AI-driven applications can also adapt content in real-time, ensuring that it meets the individual needs of each student. Additionally, ICT can support the creation of virtual learning environments, offering flexible options for students to engage with the content in ways that are most suitable for them, whether through audio, video, or interactive elements.

IMPORTANT TO **REMEMBER / TIPS**

- Ensure that all pupils have access to the same areas both indoors and outdoors.
- Teaching must be adapted and accessible to everyone.

Photo: monkeybusinessimages

Starting school and transitions

Starting school and transitions between educational levels or institutions can be difficult for pupils with special educational needs. Therefore, the school must allocate time for planning. Collaboration and the transfer of information about the pupil are necessary for a good learning outcome and a safe daily life for both pupils and parents.

A new school will need information about the pupil's conditions, opportunities, and needs for educational adaptation to plan staff, resources, and any physical adaptations. This collaboration must begin well before the pupil starts at the new school. How the school meets these pupils is greatly influenced by experiences with and attitudes towards inclusive education. Beginning the collaboration and planning early enough gives the school the opportunity to prepare and adapt to the child's various conditions and needs before their arrival. A good transition and reception are crucial for pupils needing adaptations to have a positive start.

IMPORTANT TO **REMEMBER / TIPS**

- Initiate dialogue about new pupils' needs for adaptation early.
- Assess the need for physical adaptations of the school.
- Plan staff resources and information for teachers.
- Organise days to visit the school and give information to parents.

Photo: fotostorm

5. Leadership and implementation

The importance of leadership working with inclusion is universal; it is relevant for education systems in all countries. UNESCO describes two key principles for the work to create an inclusive educational institution

- **Inclusion:** a process that helps to overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation and achievement of learners[9]
- **Inclusive education:** process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners[10]

Targeted work is required to achieve real inclusion in an institution. This involves both the leader's attitude to inclusion and giving teachers information about methods, organisation and learning resources. It is important to have competence to support the school in developing an inclusive culture. The leadership is also responsible for giving the teachers and other staff the possibility to be trained in how to make an inclusive environment. Establishing arenas for pupil participation and parental involvement will be important elements in a leader's work.

9. https://policytoolbox.iiep.unesco.org/glossary/inclusion/
10. https://lifelonglearning-toolkit.uil.unesco.org/en/node/249

To succeed creating an inclusive educational institution, leadership at all levels of the education system is necessary

- at the national political level
- where resources are allocated, and governance signals are developed
- at the institution level
- in the classroom

There are several dimensions of leadership at the different levels. Leadership at the political/national level must ensure

- adopting appropriate legislation
- providing a clear policy direction
- developing a national plan of action
- establishing infrastructure and capacity for implementation

Leadership responsible for financial decisions and governance must ensure

- framework conditions both for financing and quality
- that follow-up systems are designed and results monitored

Photo: fstop123

Photo: Halfpoint

Photo: Jovanmandic

Photo: Dusan Stankovic

Photo: Antonio Diaz

Photo: Fokusiert

Photo: nilimage

Photo: Jose Carlos Cerdeno

Classroom management involves the teacher's ability to create a learning environment that promotes the pupil's academic and social learning. The teacher ensures that the intentions of inclusive education are realised (see chapter 4).

Leadership at the institutional level is briefly explained in relation to these main areas:

- Targeted work both in the implementation process and in the daily work in the school/university.
- Giving clear direction and following up.
- Working with attitudes.
- Training the staff.
- Establishing good relationships and an arena for cooperation both internal and external.
- Feedback to national authority.

Practical tasks for the leader establishing an inclusive educational institution

- **Clarifying expectations:** providing signals and guidelines about the expectations to the staff on how inclusion should shape the organisation.

- **Implementation:** is about understanding and is one of the most important elements to succeed in making an inclusive school. See how to do it below.

- **Knowledge-based practice:** knowledgeable about what being an inclusive educational institution entails both in terms of intentions and in practice. International conventions, national guidelines, and research in the field are important components knowledge is based on.

- **Teacher networks:** establish structures and allocate time so that staff has an arena where they can discuss challenges and opportunities working with inclusion.

- **Parental involvement:** establish arenas for pupil participation and parental collaboration. Consider establishing arenas across sectors.

- **Building competence:** create measures to develop competence about inclusion for those you lead.

- **Competence measures:** create structures to follow up that staff complete the necessary competence development measures.

- **Culture and attitudes:** develop a culture for inclusion in the educational institution and establish arenas and measures for this.

- **Adaptation:** make sure that the school environment is physically accessible and that the teaching materials are universally designed.

- **Following up:** create a system for reports and feedback and establish routines to ensure that the staff work in accordance with the given guidelines.

- **Policy:** as a leader, you address challenges according to the national guidelines and regulations for inclusion. Any need for adjustments is reported to those authorised to make changes.

Implementation is **about understanding** and is one of the most **important** elements to succeed in making an inclusive school.

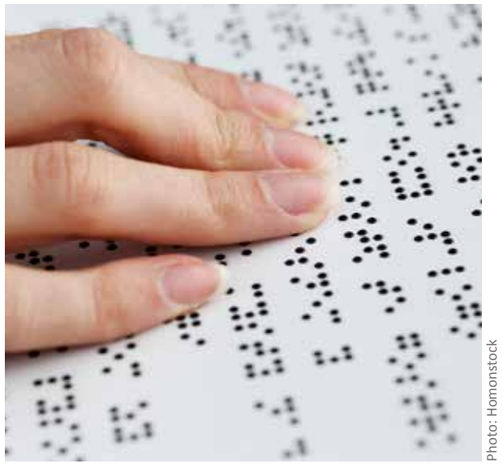

Photo: Homonstock

Photo: Andrea Obzerova

Photo: - Unaihuiziphotography

Implementation

Implementation is crucial for succeeding to create an inclusive educational institution. Implementation involves creating a common language, a conceptual framework, and understanding

- **WHAT** is going to happen?
- **WHY** are we doing it?
- **HOW** are we doing it?

Therefore, a leader must have a good understanding of what is required for a successful implementation process. UNESCO expresses it as follows:

The complexity arises when we try to put this message into practice. Implementing this message will require changes in thinking and practice at every level of an education system, from classroom teachers and others who provide educational experience directly, to those responsible for national policy.[11]

Leadership and a strong, common understanding of inclusion are the key factors in reaching the policy goals.

11. UNESCO (2017) A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254

Practical advice for leaders in the implementation process

Arenas for discussion and conversation (WHAT): create arenas where those you lead can discuss what needs to happen. Providing information and fostering understanding is central.

Knowledge-base (WHY): provide information about why this is done. Offer insights into the given political guidelines and policies (conventions, guidelines, and policies, etc.).

Foster understanding among the staff that pupils are different and that their needs vary. The structure and system must accommodate this:

Implementation (HOW): the question of how to do it opens up for broad participation. Ensure that the process allows for input and suggestions from the entire organisation and from partners. Invite to discussions that foster understanding. Key elements in the implementation can for example include:

- Developing and building competence
- Organisational structure: does it need to be changed to accomplish the task? Ensure staff involvement in the processes.
- Invite pupils into the process: establish arenas for participation.
- Invite parents/guardians into the process: establish arenas for participation. This can be a relevant arena to discuss the need for an individual education plan for the pupil. Parents/guardians can also contribute positively and become a driving force in the change processes.
- Establish a team around the pupil with the necessary competence. Involve other sectors if necessary.
- Create a joint action and implementation plan together with those involved.
- Create good systems to establish and follow up on activities and results

Pupils are **different** and their **needs vary**.

Photo: SolStock

6. Forms to evaluate and monitor the system

The handbook contains two forms that must be used.

FORM 1 *Pupils/parents/etc. fill out the form.*
This information is the foundation for the process carried out to complete Form 2.

FORM 1	Yes	No	Comments
Does the educational institution have an inclusive and accepting environment adapted for all pupils?			
Does the school have accessible infrastructure?			
Does the pupil have an individual education plan with the opportunity to achieve their learning objective?			
Is the communication between the parent/pupil and educational institution open and clear?			
Is external support provided, and does the staff have sufficient competence?			
Does the pupil receive the appropriate teaching materials and sufficient aids?			
Does the school have provisions for in-house-training programmes?			
Is the outdoor and indoor environment accessible and adapted?			
Is the transition from kindergarten to school and to further education planned, safe, and good?			
Is user involvement between the pupil and the educational institution good?			

Place, date

Signature *Signature*

FORM 2 is completed by the institutions and those ensuring quality together.
This form reflects what has been done and what needs to be done at the system level in the educational institution. The comments column is meant for internal use for the institution working to fulfil the criteria. E.g., if there are measures that need to be implemented before the institution can answer "yes".

FORM 2
An inclusive and accepting environment that promotes equality

Principles: The educational institution has a culture where inclusion permeates both attitudes and teaching practices.

	Yes	No	Comments
Works to create good attitudes. Plans the work together with those responsible for quality assurance.			
Has a system that clearly details the responsibilities and arenas of collaboration for all employees and those responsible for quality assurance.			
Has a system in place to develop and maintain a good learning environment.			

Adapted education plans

Principles: All pupils receive adapted education to reach their potential

	Yes	No	Comments
Has a documented system and structure to map, follow up, and evaluate measures for pupils who need adapted education.			
Has measures to develop the competence of the teaching staff to effectively teach those in need of adaptations.			

Collaboration between parents and the educational institution

Principles: The educational institution ensures clear and open communication with pupils/parents.

	Yes	No	Comments
The system for collaborating with pupils and parents is formalised.			
Those who need adapted education has a contact person in the educational institution.			
The educational institution has an information channel to update all involved parties.			

External support and professional development

Principles: The educational institution must ensure that the staff has the competence to see each individual pupil and coordinate the measures that need to be implemented.

	Yes	No	Comments
Time is allocated for necessary collaboration and for the professional development of staff.			
Has an overview of the expertise within the institution, and of where external expertise can be found.			
Ensures that staff has sufficient knowledge about disabilities and adequate competence in the use of assistive devices.			

Teaching materials, aids and assistive devices

Principles: The educational institution ensures that each pupil has access to teaching materials tailored to their needs.

	Yes	No	Comments
There is an overview of teaching materials available for staff and pupils.			
A qualified person is responsible for identifying available assistive devices/teaching materials and presenting these for pupils/staff.			
Has a system and a plan that outlines the pupil's needs for adaptation and assistive aids.			

Accessibility and physical adaptation

Principles: The educational institution ensures that all pupils have access to the same areas indoors and outdoors, regardless of their functioning.

	Yes	No	Comments
Actively works to adapt the physical environment both indoors and outdoors, making it accessible to everyone.			
Has a plan to address deficiencies in the physical environment. The plan is reviewed annually.			

Starting school and transitions

Principles: Starting school is a safe and positive experience for all pupils.

	Yes	No	Comments
To secure the transition to new educational institution necessary adaptations are in place from the start.			
Transitions are secured by involving necessary professionals and pupils/parents.			

Leadership and implementation

Principles: Leadership at all levels of the educational system is necessary to create an inclusive school.

	Yes	No	Comments
Political intentions for inclusive education are upheld and communicated by the leader.			
Implementation throughout the organisation is crucial for success. Implementation processes are ensured through the leader's competence and experience.			

User involvement

Principles: Everyone using the educational institution should have the opportunity to influence its quality.

	Yes	No	Comments
The process ensures that everyone can contribute with their assessment as provided in form 1).			
The process is ensured through collaborative processes completing form 2).			
The educational institution has a system following up and assuring the quality that involves all relevant parties.			

Place, date

Signature *Signature*

Signature *Signature*

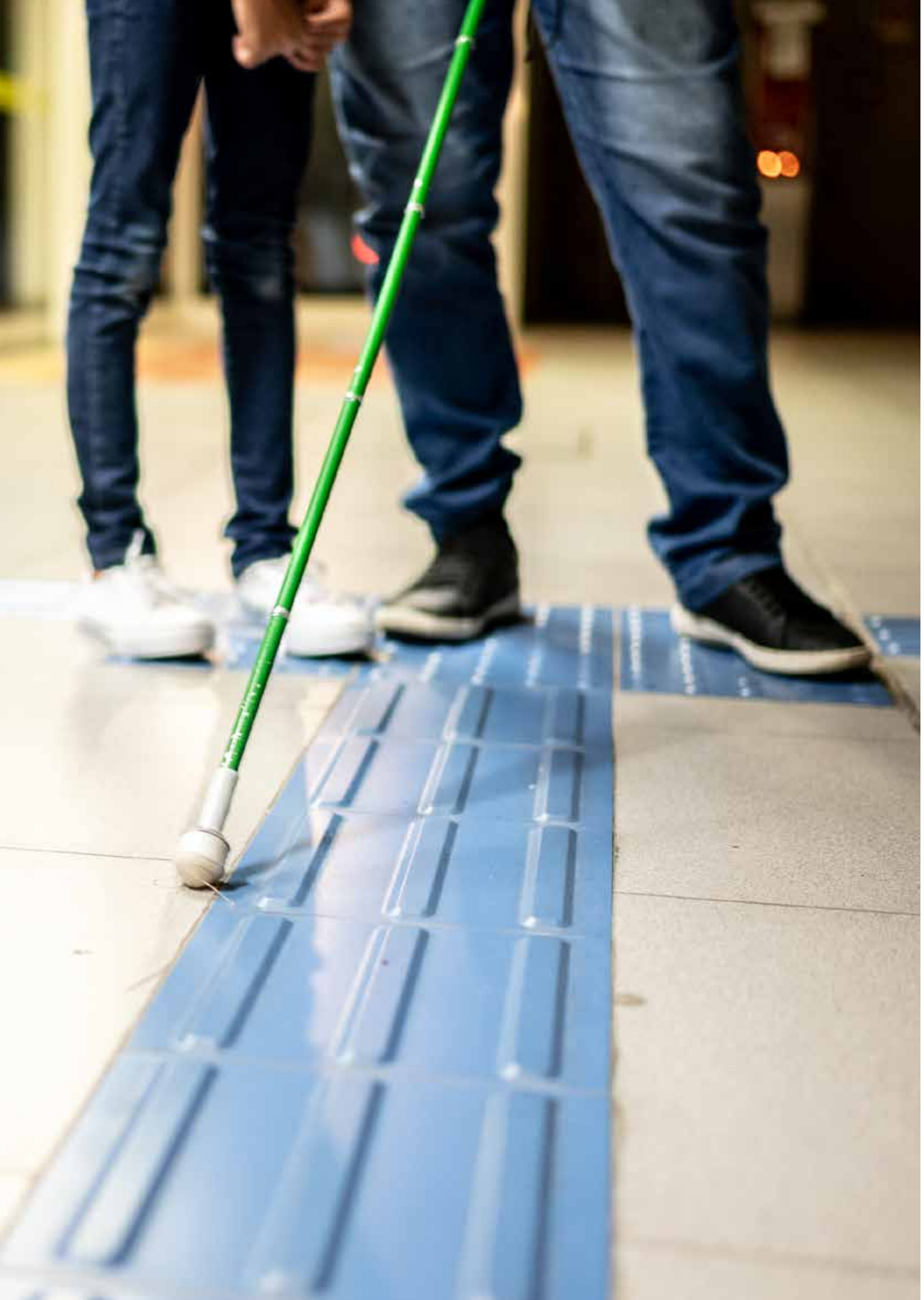

Photo: FG Trade

7. Toolbox for practical adaptation

Two concepts are central to working with inclusion:

- Universal Design
- Universal Design for Learning

Universal design and Universal design for learning

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) has the following definition of universal design:

"Universal design" means the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaption or specialized design. "Universal design" shall not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities where this is needed.

12. *What next for Universal Design for Learning? A systematic literature review of technology in UDL implementations at second level.*

The British Journal of Educational Technology (Vol 25, 1, 2024) describes universal design for learning[12]

UDL which foregrounds the design of flexible and accessible learning experiences for all, regardless of learner characteristics. Technology is a key enabler in this.

The idea behind universal solutions is that the surroundings are designed in such a way that everyone can navigate and utilise the entire society. However, it is a fact that if everyone shall be able to access the same, the planning needs to consider the groups with challenges in relation to the specific solution. In the publication Universal Design in Kindergarten and School we have described the needs for different groups of pupils. Below in this chapter we have included a selection of “points to remember” to make schools accessible for all pupils.

The **idea behind universal solutions** is that the surroundings are designed in such a way that **everyone** can navigate and utilise the entire society.

POINTS TO REMEMBER FOR **ALL DISABILITIES**

- Multisensory teaching methods
- Creating a safe and inclusive environment
- Modified homework and assessment methods
- Peer support and cooperative learning
- Collaboration with parents and caregivers
- Positive behavioural support and reinforcement
- Inclusive extracurricular activities
- Alternative communication strategies
- Breaking up tasks from simple to complex
- Inclusive transition support
- Policy advocacy and community engagement

Photo: PeopleImages

Points to remember for different groups

Children and youth with hearing impairment

Education is a fundamental human right also for pupils who have a hearing impairment. Everyone should have equal opportunity to participate and be taken care of. These pupils may otherwise isolate and feel left out if they do not have the same access to information as their peers. This can also lead to the pupils falling behind in the education and the learning outcomes.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Identify noisy areas
- Adequate lighting to support lip reading
- Registering the acoustics in the class environment
- Cooperation with teachers for the hearing impaired/other relevant professionals
- Technical aids
- Control and improvement of the sound system
- Ensure adequate training of teaching staff and other staff

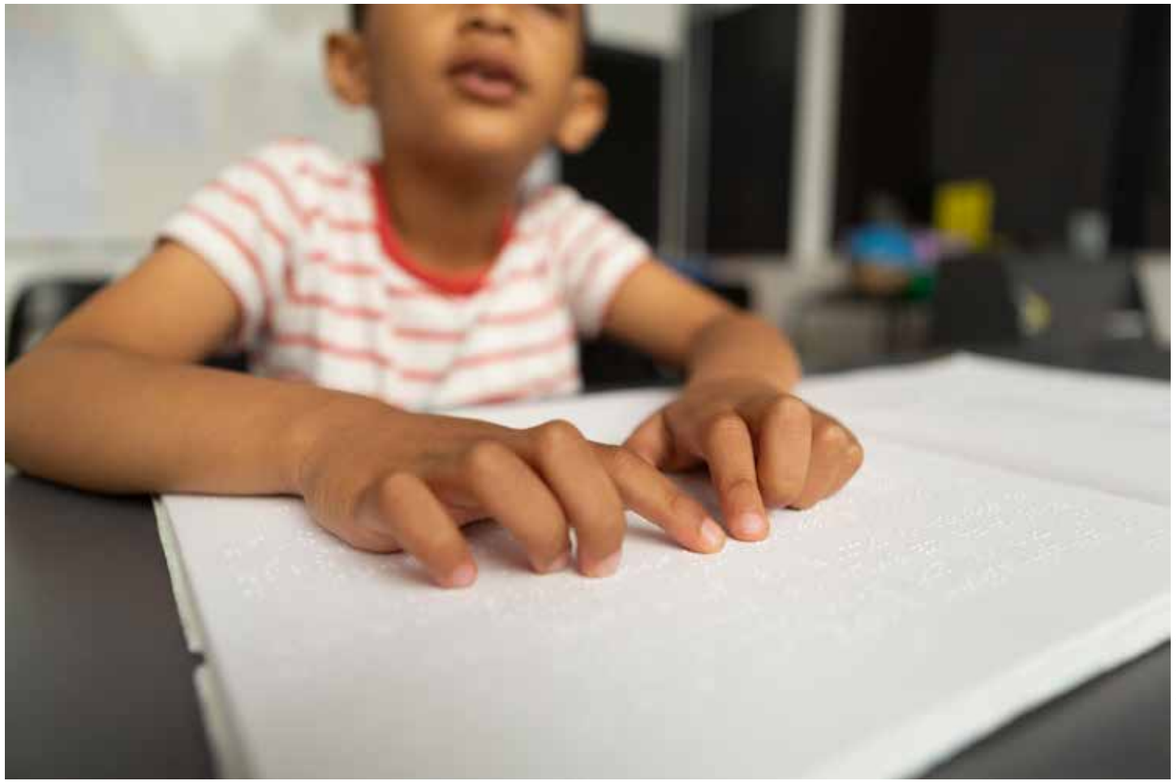

Photo: Wavebreakmedia

Children and youth with visual impairment

With the right knowledge about the consequences of visual impairment, educational and practical adaptation, parents/guardians have the experience that children and youth with a visual impairment have the possibility for a good everyday school life. Adaptation is however essential for the children to be as independent as possible.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Think contrasts
- Think good lighting
- Think tactile paving/lines
- Avoid physical obstacles
- Noise and acoustics
- Access
- Technical aids and maintenance
- Digital teaching materials
- The placement of information boards
- Braille and sound files for information
- Secure adequate training of teaching staff and other staff

Photo: SDI Productions

Children and youth with a physical disability

Universal design for people with reduced mobility uses the person in a wheelchair as a starting point. Physical adaptation is the major challenge, but the experience of what is demanding varies greatly from pupil to pupil.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Consider the distance and level difference from the car park to the building
- Consider the entrance area and the opening force of the main door
- Consider the pedestrian area
- Consider the door opening into the classroom
- Consider space in the classroom
- Think about order in the classroom
- Consider the toilet facilities
- Think about level differences in the school building
- Think about the surface of the floor
- Ensure adequate training of teaching staff and other staff

Photo: Drazen Zigic

Children and youth with hidden, invisible and cognitive disabilities

Persons with disabilities are as diverse as every other person. For certain groups such as the blind/visually impaired, the deaf/hearing impaired and persons with mobility difficulties, it is necessary to adapt the school premises so that they can participate equally in education. The same applies to pupils with hidden, invisible, and cognitive disabilities.

Persons with disabilities are as diverse as **every other** person.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

Some examples of what we need to be aware of to stimulate equal access for this group of pupils:

Floor plan

- Good class management
- Simple and logical layout
- Possibility of a shielded entrance in addition to the main entrance
- Choice of layout that facilitates good sound conditions
- Possibility of permanent places for pupils
- Doors/exits at the back of the classroom so that pupils can leave the area without anyone observing them.
- Enough group rooms/private rooms (defined quiet rooms/restrooms). It must be possible to cover glass walls and some of these rooms should have daylight.
- Option for pupils to have their own changing room/shower

Material use and equipment

- Well considered placement and use of windows and glass walls so that pupils with cognitive and sensory difficulties also get a good learning outcome. Possibility of shielding if necessary.

- Lighting that can be dimmed (especially in parts of the building) and that does not flicker.

- Little contrast between wooden slats and sound-absorbing material at the back when using slatted panels.

- Conscious use of materials and colours both to find your way around and as an effect in a room.

- Good signage and use of pictograms.

- Choice of floor surface and furniture that do not make scraping noises when furniture is pushed.

- Proper soundproofing in all rooms (this includes the corridor, cloakroom, and shower where the noise level is high).

- Sound equalising equipment in all classrooms.

- Ventilation systems and other equipment that emit minimal noise (projector whirring, school bell in the classroom ticking). Placing the copier so that it does not interfere.

- Closed shelving systems such as cupboards and drawers.

Outdoor areas

- Quiet zones in addition to zones for activity and play.

- Well considered placement of zones for activity in relation to the windows in the learning areas. Some pupils experience reduced concentration when they have a view of the school yard.

Management and training

- Ensure adequate training of teaching staff and other staff.

Photo: Drazen Zigic

8. Final comments

Inclusive education is not merely an aspiration but a necessity for equitable learning systems worldwide. By drawing on international best practices, robust policy frameworks, and technological advancements, educational institutions can create environments where all learners thrive. A continuous cycle of **evaluation, adaptation, and collaboration** is essential to sustain and enhance inclusive education. Policymakers, educators, and communities must work together to ensure that no learner is left behind.

In this handbook we have chosen points to remember that are important for four groups as an example. For more detailed information see the publication **Universal Design in Kindergarten and School**. This publication provides comprehensive guidelines and universal tools to help make educational institutions accessible for all children, including those with disabilities.

Universal design is relevant to **achieve inclusive** education and training.

Photo: Tmatin1

Rehabilitation International

Rehabilitation International is a global organization and network that empowers persons with disabilities and provides sustainable solutions toward achieving a more inclusive society for them.

Founded in 1922, Rehabilitation International (RI) is a worldwide organization comprised of people with disabilities, service providers, government agencies, academics, researchers and advocates working to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities. With member organizations in more than 100 countries and in all regions of the world, RI also provides a forum for the exchange of experience and information on research and practice.

Photo: SDI Productions

Rehabilitation International

OUR MISSION

To advance **the rights and inclusion** of persons with disabilities across the world