

Samoa

**Ministry of Education, Sports and
Culture**

Special Needs Education Policy

**A policy about the importance of Special Education
within an Inclusive Educational Approach for All.**

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Samoa – Special Needs Education Policy

Students with special needs are those whose health, abilities, performance or behaviour is significantly different from their peers. This will include students who are talented and gifted as well as those with high learning needs. While the vast majority of such students can be assisted with additional support as part of their regular classroom experience, a small number of students have disabilities or impairments that require ongoing specialist support and access to highly specialised programs and facilities.

1 Developing an Inclusive Education Approach for All

The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture is committed to providing high quality education to all Samoan students within a school culture based on respect and acceptance.

A key component of quality education is the provision of appropriate programs for students with special needs or at risk because of social or economic circumstances. The principle that, ‘*All students can be successful learners*’, recognises that all students can succeed when they are provided with sufficient time, support and effective teaching. This ensures that the aims of social justice and equity are seen in practice as all students, irrespective of race, ethnicity, disability or socio-economic background can achieve quality educational outcomes. It acknowledges the right of all students to be successfully enrolled in schools and experience success through participating in inclusive educational programs. Where possible, all student needs should be met in mainstream schools as these provide the rich social and cultural setting to best develop the social and cultural skills necessary to fully operate in the broader community. For a small number of students learning will best take place in specialist settings where they are better able to learn both the social, physical and educational skills necessary to ensure their success in the broader community. These students will have ongoing and significant disabilities or impairments and be eligible to receive additional resources through inclusion in the Disability and Impairments programs (D&I) operated by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture such as attending a special unit where this is the best interest of the student. However care should be taken to ensure that such students are not isolated or labeled in a negative way. Where students attend special settings, provision should be made to integrate these students into mainstream schools either on a full time or part time basis.

For all students the need to cater for their individual needs and develop appropriate skills, knowledge and personal attributes through a holistic approach to learning is at the centre of all educational programs.

2 Students with Special Needs

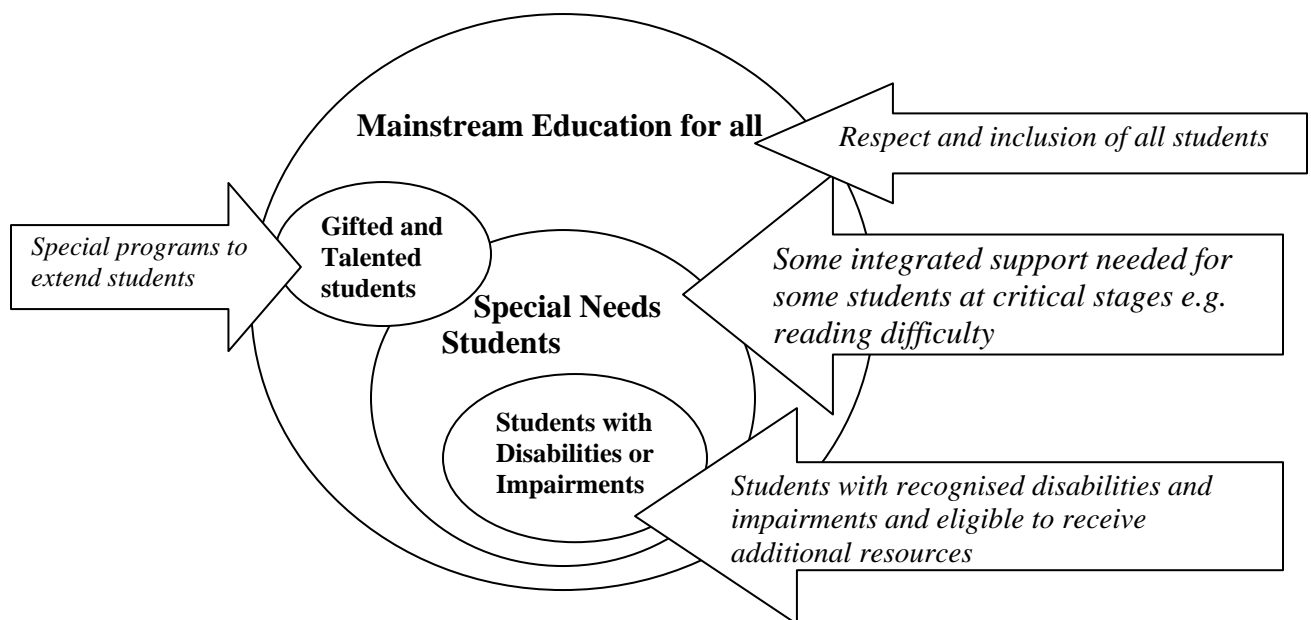
While education is concerned with the total development of each student within a supportive and challenging environment, a number of students require additional assistance at some point in their schooling. The practical application of this is the development of differential programs to meet the diverse needs of all students. All

programs should have intervention strategies built into them to assist those students whose development is of concern. These strategies will require specialist assistance to be provided by the classroom teacher or other support personnel. For most students this will enable their progress to be accelerated so that they are able to achieve at similar levels to their peers. This is especially needed in the early years where foundation skills in literacy and numeracy are developed. Such programs should operate within the spirit of accelerating development and not on a deficit model of intervention.

Gifted Students

Students who are gifted in one or more areas also have special needs. For these students it is important that programs are provided that extend their abilities and assist them to develop their intellectual, artistic or other talents to their fullest potential.

The program can be shown as:



3 Resourcing Students with Severe Disabilities or Impairments

A small percentage of the total special needs students will require highly specialised assistance beyond that provided for other students. These are students with an officially recognised disability or impairment in the following areas.

- Physical disability
- Hearing impairment
- Intellectual disability
- Visual impairment
- Severe behaviour disorder

For a number of these students special units are the most appropriate means of providing for their needs while for others, attendance at a main stream school is preferred as that provides them with a more appropriate socially and intellectually challenging environment. This will impact on teaching programs, class groupings and physical conditions in order to create supportive and inclusive learning environments. Education programs provided by schools will seek to ensure full acceptance,

participation and inclusion of all students in the life of the school community. Where possible shared enrolment in a specialist unit and mainstream school should be considered at this provides increased opportunities for all students to learn to live together in a supportive and respectful environment.

Students who are identified as meeting the eligibility requirement of the Disability and Impairment program are eligible to receive additional assistance such as enrollment in a special unit.

3.1 Eligibility Criteria¹

Students who are admitted to the MESC Disability and Impairment Program must meet the following criteria for eligibility for additional support including enrolment at a special unit.

3.1.1 Physical disability

	CRITERIA	EVIDENCE
A	A significant physical disability; AND/OR	A statement detailing the disability or health impairment from a doctor
B	A significant health impairment AND	AND
C	Requires regular paramedical support	A statement detailing the paramedical support requirements

3.1.2 Hearing Impairment

	CRITERIA	EVIDENCE
A	A bilateral sensori-neural hearing loss that is moderate/severe/profound and where the student requires intervention or assistance to communicate	An audiogram with a written statement from a doctor or audiologist

3.1.3 Intellectual disability

	CRITERIA	EVIDENCE
A	Sub-average general intellectual functioning which is demonstrated by a full-scale score of two standard deviations or more below the mean score on an existing achievement test and where the student has been exposed to quality teaching but failed to make sufficient progress. AND	A written report provided by a psychologist or special education teacher
B	A history and evidence of an ongoing problem with an expectation of a continuation during school years	

¹ The criteria outlined are consistent with World Health Organisation standards.

3.1.4 Visual impairment

CRITERIA	EVIDENCE
Visual acuity less than 6/60 with corrected vision; OR That visual fields are reduced to a measured arc of less than 10 degrees	Assessment/report from a doctor or vision specialist

3.1.5 Severe behaviour disorder

CRITERIA	EVIDENCE
A Student displays disturbed behaviour to a point where special support in a withdrawal group or special class/unit is required AND	Evidence is required for each of the criteria.
B Student displays behaviour so deviant and with such frequency and severity that they require regular specialist support AND	The evidence and application for inclusion into the disability and impairment program must be endorsed by a School Review Officer
C The severe behaviour cannot be accounted for by: Intellectual disability, hearing and/or visual impairment or health issues AND	
D A history and evidence of an ongoing problem with an expectation of continuation during the school years	

Where eligible disability and impairment students are not able to be enrolled in a special unit, schools may seek support from the Special Needs Education Coordinator who will assist with program planning and implementation.

4 Support for the program

In order to ensure that all students operate within an inclusive educational culture, the following roles and responsibilities are outlined.

The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture central office is responsible for:

- Where necessary, possible and appropriate making school buildings accessible to children and students with special learning and teaching needs.
- Informing the community of new developments and initiatives in the education of young children and students with special learning and teaching needs.

- Ensuring that students with special needs are included in the mainstream learning experiences and in the regular classroom as far as possible and appropriate in both primary and secondary schools.
- Ensuring that appropriate provisions are made for the education of students who are in a special unit, or following alternative teaching programs.
- Ensuring the optimum placement of Special Needs Trained Teachers where their specialised skills can best be used.
- Developing and maintaining a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Health to provide a multi-disciplined approach to catering for special needs students.
- Supporting Non-Government Organisations (NGO's) in the area of disability.

The Curriculum, Materials and Assessment Division is responsible for:

- Maintaining a range of special education materials and resources for teachers, advisors and Ministry staff.
- Developing a register of local, national and international resource people.
- Maintaining a register of stakeholders in special education to facilitate communication and provide a means of ongoing support.
- Providing a database of special needs students and those eligible for inclusion in the Disability and Impairment program.
- Providing advice on the inclusion of special needs students within mainstream programs.
- Conducting in-service training programs for teachers and community members.
- Monitoring the operation of the special needs unit.
- Ensuring that all curriculum support materials address the issue of modified or alternative assessment and teaching procedures to ensure that students with special learning and teaching needs receive appropriate support.
- Establishing a Special Needs Advisory Committee in order to provide advise on all aspects of special needs education including;
 - Approaches to be adopted to cater for students with learning difficulties
 - Identification of effective intervention programs
 - Identification of teacher pre-service training needs
 - Identification of teacher in-service training needs
 - Operation of the Disability and Impairment program
 - Development of support material

School Review Officers are responsible for:

- Ensuring principals in their districts are aware of the special needs policy.
- Validating applications by schools for students to be included in the Disabilities and Impairment program.

Principals are responsible for:

- Implementing the special needs education policy.
- Enrolling all students.
- Referring potentially eligible students for inclusion in the Disability and Impairment program.
- Ensuring that students with special needs are not discriminated against.

- Ensuring that students with special learning needs are involved in inclusive programs that provide for their needs.
- Providing effective intervention programs in order to address the differential learning needs of students.
- Overseeing the development of Individual Learning Plans for students with significant learning needs.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of special needs education programs in the school.
- Where appropriate, liaising with preschools in the identification of students with special learning needs to ensure their successful transition to school.
- Providing opportunity for teaching staff to be informed about appropriate teaching practices to cater for the various needs of special needs students.
- Liaising with other agencies and stakeholders in providing services to students with special learning needs.

Teachers are responsible for:

- Ensuring that all students learn in an environment where they are safe, valued, respected and encouraged, free from verbal and physical threat and where they experience success.
- Where appropriate, developing Individual Learning Plans which meet the needs of students with significant learning needs and are consistent with Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture guidelines and incorporate input from parents, caregivers, students and specialists as appropriate.
- Maintaining records and monitoring the effectiveness of identification procedures, assessments and outcomes of special education programs and approaches used in their classrooms.
- Reporting to the principal special conditions or resources necessary in order to cater for the differential needs of special needs students.
- Encouraging good home/school relationships and involvement of parents in special needs programs.

5 Special Needs Education Advisory Committee

The Special Need Advisory Committee provides advice to the Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture in relation to Special Needs education and the needs of Special Needs students.

The committee is representative of relevant offices within MESC and of special interest community groups.

The Committee undertakes the following functions:

- Advocating for individuals with special needs and special needs programs within MESC and the community in general.
- Facilitating communication and coordination between stakeholders within the field of special education, including various government ministries, non-government organisations and the community at large.
- Advising on future developments and how to achieve the stated goals associated with Special Education through using the expertise and resources of committee members.
- Advising on the implementation of MESC initiatives and projects.

- Advising on how best to effectively and constructively monitor services provided by all organisations and ministries to ensure that they provide appropriate opportunities for all individuals with special needs.

6 Guidelines to support the implementation of the Special Needs Policy.

These guidelines assist schools to develop procedures for the identification, assessment and education of students with special needs. There are seven key areas that should form the basis of planning programs to assist students with special learning needs.

The key areas are:

1. Identification and assessment
2. The school curriculum
3. Partnerships in Education
4. The Learning Environment
5. Evaluation and Improvement
6. Reporting
7. Professional Development

6.1 Identification and assessment

Outcome sought:

Students with special learning and teaching needs are identified through the use of appropriate assessment practices in their early years and throughout their schooling.

Assessment is a key aspect of education. It allows student progress to be monitored and program effectiveness evaluated. To be accurate in the identification of students with special needs, assessment must be regular and continual across all years of schooling. Changes in achievement, rate of progress or behaviour may warrant further examination. Where assessment indicates that a student is performing significantly below or above the norm the provision of alternative programs should be considered. For students with identified disabilities or impairments a formal assessment should be undertaken to determine their educational needs and eligibility for inclusion in the disability and impairment program. For other students who have significant learning difficulties the development of an Individual Learning Plan is recommended. The plan should outline the goals, achievement objectives and outcomes as well as the teaching approaches to be developed in order to address the student's educational needs.

Schools achieve this by:

- Regularly assessing student *at all levels* using classroom assessments, teacher observations and student achievement profiles.
- Analysing results of standardised assessments such as School Entry Test, SPELL 1 and 2 and national examinations to identify students who need to be included in a special unit or undertake modified programs.
- Analysing other information such as attendance, participation and behaviour.
- Monitoring and recording changes in students' rate of progress including any change in behaviour which differs noticeably in a sustained manner from their past performance and that of their peers.

6.2 The school curriculum

Outcome sought:

Whole school activities, learning programs, units of work and lessons are planned and delivered in ways sensitive to the needs of all students. For some students Individual Learning Plans will be developed in order to cater for their learning needs.

The planning and implementation of school-wide and classroom programs, units and lessons must reflect official policy as outlined in curriculum guidelines and support material. Programs need to be well planned and include strategies for assisting students whose progress is of concern or whose learning needs differ from the norm.

Schools achieve this by:

- Providing opportunities for and encouraging all students to participate in school activities to the best of their abilities.
- Providing appropriate learning materials and resources for all students including specialised resources for those with special.
- Identifying and catering for individual learning styles through the delivery of the curriculum in a variety of ways.
- Planning and implementing education programs that teach students to accept and include people who are different.
- Actively promoting non-discriminatory language through principals and teachers modeling appropriate language when referring to individuals or diverse groups.
- Providing specialised intervention programs where appropriate.
- Developing Individual Learning Plans for identified students. Such a plan should contain the goals, achievement objectives and outcomes sought and provide an indication of the teaching approaches to be used.

6.3 Partnerships in Education

Outcome sought:

Through the development of partnerships with parents, caregivers and specialist providers, support will be coordinated to best meet the needs of students.

Effective education takes place when all key stakeholders are involved including – students, parents and caregivers, teachers and specialist support staff. Each stakeholder is able to provide important information and support in educating students with special needs.

Schools achieve this by:

- Consulting with parents and caregivers at an early stage when children are identified as having special learning needs
- Involving parents and caregivers in planning, implementing and reviewing programs for students with special needs.
- Collaborating where appropriate and necessary with relevant government ministries, non-government organisations and volunteer organisations to provide quality services and support to children with special learning needs.

6.4 The learning environment

Outcome sought:

The development of a safe and stimulating environment that meets the needs of all students including those with special needs.

Students learn best in an environment that is safe and stimulating. All students need to be valued, respected and encouraged. They need to experience success in school in order to build confidence and achieve their full potential. Students with special learning needs often do not experience success and often lack confidence in their own abilities. The learning environment, including the classroom and the school as a whole, play a crucial role in the educational development of students with special learning needs.

Schools achieve this by:

- Ensuring students learn in an environment free from verbal and physical threat.
- Where appropriate and possible, making the school buildings and facilities accessible to students with impaired mobility.
- Providing an attractive, clean and functional school environment.
- Where appropriate and possible, providing access for people with sensory disabilities to appropriate forms of communication including writing, braille, signing and interpreters in both English and Samoan.
- Providing opportunities for all students to interact with students with special needs.
- Where appropriate and possible, providing special needs trained teachers and classrooms for students with special needs.

6.5 Evaluation and improvement

Outcome sought:

That schools use student development information as part of their regular School Improvement Cycle to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and resources targeted to support students with special needs.

Programs designed to cater for students with special learning needs must be evaluated regularly and adjusted where necessary to ensure their success. Information such as attendance, participation, behaviour and academic performance is important in reviewing programs and planning for improvement.

Schools achieve this by:

- Ensuring that as part of the school improvement process the guidelines outlined in the School Improvement Manual on evaluating 'Intervention and Special Assistance' are followed.
- Regularly recording and assessing students' progress in relation to stated goals, achievement objectives and outcomes associated with Individual Learning Plans.
- Analysing other information such as attendance, participation and behaviour to determine changes in student performance.
- Using all information to review program effectiveness and develop improvement options.

6.6 Reporting

Outcome sought:

Stakeholders regularly receive meaningful and accurate information about student progress and program effectiveness.

All schools have procedures in place to report on student progress and achievement. Parents, caregivers, School Review Officers, and principals must be informed about the progress of all students including those with special needs. For students enrolled in a

special unit the Special Needs Education Coordinator must also be given regular feedback on the progress of students and the effectiveness of the programs provided.

Schools achieve this by:

- Regularly providing information to the Special Needs Education Coordinator, School Review Officers and principals through a range of means including work samples, written reports and interviews.
- Ensuring that stakeholders are aware of progress in relation to the goals, achievement objectives and outcomes outlined in Individual learning Plans.

6.7 Professional development

Outcome sought:

Teachers have the skills and knowledge to effectively meet the learning needs of special needs students.

The central role that teachers play in student learning requires that the skills and knowledge of teachers be constantly renewed. Appropriate professional development for all teachers on special needs education and the teachers' central role in assisting students with special needs is essential.

Schools achieve this by:

- Working cooperatively as a school staff to meet the special needs of students
- Identifying the professional development needed to support the teaching of students with special needs.
- Meeting identified professional development needs using available resources locally, nationally and internationally.

7 Review of the National Special Needs Education Policy

There is a need to regularly update the policies outlined to ensure that they are relevant and reflect the best international standards and practices. While this will largely be undertaken by the Special Needs Education Advisory Committee there is also the need for more formal reviews of policies and practices to occur. It is envisaged that a formal review process of Special Needs Education policies, practices, programs and management should occur every three years.