



Research on Socio-Economic Policy

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Building an evidence base for inclusive education in South Africa: Focusing on learners with disabilities

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To make rational decisions that will lead to good education for all, policymakers need reliable information and solid evidence. This brief is based on a study that looked at how well the South African public schooling system is serving *all* learners, particularly those with disabilities. It emphasises the need for evidence to support policymaking for inclusive education, and the need for evidence to support policymaking for our education system in general.

The brief presents data gathered from Department of Basic Education (DBE) surveys in 2014, including the 10th School Day (Snap) Survey, the 2014 Statistics South Africa General Household Survey (GHS), and data from various 2014 school audits, conducted mainly by the DBE, but supplemented by data from other government Departments, including Social Development. It looks at lessons learned in the course of developing systems to support policy decisions for schools and recommends an information management system for inclusive education.

We urgently need an evidence base if we are to achieve inclusive high quality education for all, as envisaged in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, adopted in 2015 by the UNESCO member states.

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1. Why focus on disabled learners?

Table 1 shows a breakdown of the disabilities most frequently reported in A Special Schools Snap Survey in 2014.

TABLE 1: Most frequent disability types indicated for enrolled learners aged 7–15 and 16–18, 2014

Enrolled 7–15 year olds		Enrolled 16–18 year olds	
Severe to profound intellectual disability	14,818	Mild to moderate intellectual disability	14,889
Mild to moderate intellectual disability	10,412	Severe to profound intellectual disability	7,744
Specific learning disabled	8,881	Specific learning disabled	3,093
Cerebral palsy	3,940	Behavioural disorder	1,581
Deaf	3,788	Deaf	1,317
Autistic spectrum disorder	2,370	Cerebral palsy	1,217
Attention deficit disorder	2,306	Physically disabled	899
Physically disabled	2,276	Partially sighted/ low vision	622
Behavioural disorder	1,890	Epilepsy	592
Partially sighted/ low vision	1,381	Attention deficit disorder	555

Source: DBE 10th School Day (Snap) Survey 2014. Data extracted by the Research Co-ordination Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate, Department of Basic Education (DBE).

Access to good education, particularly for learners with disabilities, learning difficulties and special needs, is essential for achieving equity and social justice in our democracy. Global commitment to inclusive education resonates with rights of access and equity in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Policy support systems to benefit learners with disabilities would also satisfy broader national requirements for monitoring improvement for all learners.

To support disabled learners will require the fine co-ordination of several government departments at various levels. To provide these learners with a seamless service will require rethinking 'big' systems for managing learner information, development, support and experiences. A policy support system created specifically for disabled learners could serve as a model for responding to all vulnerable learners in the school system.

2. What do we know about disabled learners' current placing in schools?

According to Statistics South Africa's General Household Survey (GHS),¹ there were about 390,000 disabled children aged 7 to 18 in 2014. Of these, just under 23,000 children aged 7 to 15 were not in school and around 325,000 were in school, and around 21,000 aged 16 to 18 were not in school and only around 25,000 in school. This is a total of about 350,000 disabled children aged 7 to 18 in school in 2014, according to GHS estimates.

¹ Calculated from Statistics South Africa General Household Survey (GHS) 2014 by the Research Co-ordination Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate, Department of Basic Education.

Table 2 shows that disabled learners are accommodated in public schools as follows:

- 3,884 mainstream public schools account for nearly 77,000 learners with mild to moderate disabilities.
- 793 full service schools across 86 districts provide for just under 25,000 disabled learners in a specialised environment. These schools provide district-level support for parents and carers.
- 453 special schools cater for just over 117,000 high need learners. These schools now act as resource centres for the full service schools. Most of them predate the policy on inclusive education set out in the Inclusive Education White Paper.²

TABLE 2: Numbers of disabled learners in educational institutions, 2014

	Schools	Learners	Source
Total disabled enrolled in mainstream schools	3,884	76,993	DBE
Total disabled learners enrolled in special schools	453	117,477	DBE
Total enrolled in full service schools	793	24,724	DBE
7 to 15 year old disabled learners in school			
7 to 15 year old disabled learners in school		325,374	GHS
7 to 15 year old disabled young people not in school		22,974	GHS
16 to 18 year old disabled learners in school			
16 to 18 year old disabled learners in school		24,953	GHS
16 to 18 year old disabled young people not in school		21,144	

Sources: DBE Annual Schools Survey, 2014; DBE 10th School Day (Snap) Survey 2014; Statistics South Africa General Household Survey (GHS) 2014. All data extracted by the Research Co-ordination Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate, Department of Basic Education (DBE).

Figure 1 shows the proportions of disabled learners in South Africa in 2014 by race groups, and Table 3 breaks this down further into age groups and shows levels of school enrolment.

TABLE 3: Number of disabled 7 to 18 year olds in the general population, by race, 2014

Population group	Disabled learners 7–15 in school	Disabled learners 7–15 not in school	Disabled learners 16–18 in school	Disabled learners 16–18 not in school	Total disabled population 7–18	% of disabled population 7–18
Black/African	298,725	21,607	19,456	17,077	356,865	90.5%
Coloured	20,453	1,367	2,419	4,067	28,306	7.2%
Indian/Asian	3,009	0	1,068	0	4,077	1.0%
White	3,187	0	2,010	0	5,197	1.3%

Note: Some figures show nil values because the numbers are too small to make a reliable estimate from the household survey.

Source: Calculated from Statistics South Africa General Household Survey (GHS) 2014 by the Research Co-ordination Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate, Department of Basic Education (DBE).

2 DoE (Department of Education), *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System*, 2001. www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=gVFccZLi/tl= ;

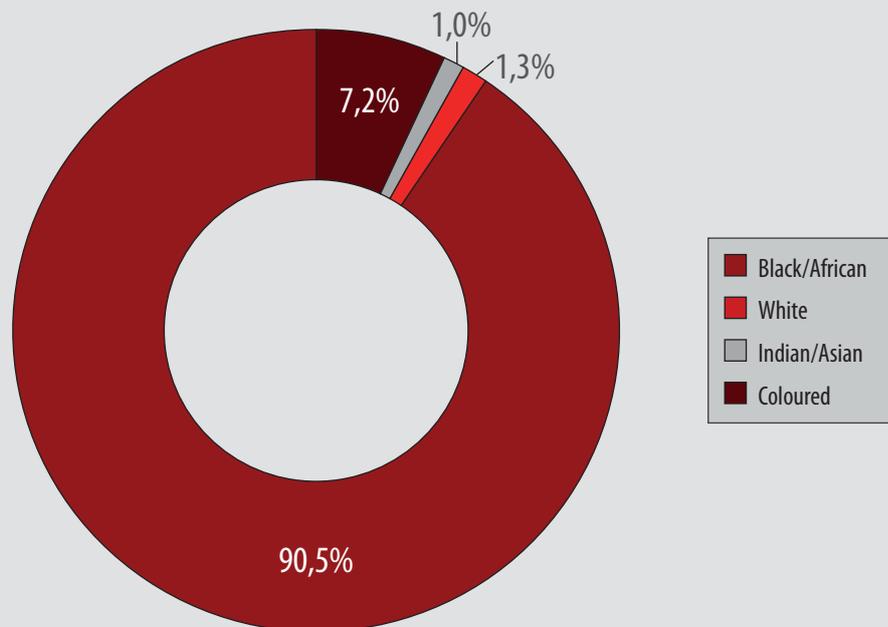


FIGURE 1: Breakdown of disabled learners aged 7 to 18 years, by race, 2014

Source: Calculated from Statistics South Africa General Household Survey (GHS) 2014 by the Research Co-ordination Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate, Department of Basic Education (DBE).

According to these DBE administrative data, in 2014 about 219,000 disabled learners from 7 to 18 year old were in schools countrywide – 131,000 fewer than the 350,000 reflected in the 2014 GHS data. Underreporting and other problems associated with collecting data on disability at school level partly explain this discrepancy, and many of these young people may be in educational institutions which are not public schools, but this does not account for all of them. In addition, the GHS estimates have been found to reflect about 15% more learners enrolled in schools than the DBE administrative data reflect,³ so a working estimate of about 300,000 school-going learners with disabilities may be more reasonable.⁴ Without a system to track learner numbers accurately, we do not have sufficient evidence to investigate this discrepancy.

3. What performance tracking and reporting is being done currently?

Examination tracking and reporting systems have improved in the past three years and it is possible to identify and report on learners in special schools who enter for the National Senior Certificate. The participation and performance of disabled learners at mainstream schools needs better monitoring to ensure equity. Other school based assessments of the quality of teaching and learning are needed for learners who require extra support. This has implications for the information and assessment systems in educational institutions catering for learners with disability. Key indicators of progress must be developed, monitored and adapted to make the systems accountable for inclusive education and to tailor interventions to schools supporting these learners.

³ DBE (Department of Basic Education), 'Report on the implementation of Education White Paper 6 on inclusive education: An overview for the period 2013–2015', 2015. www.thutong.doe.gov.za/ResourceDownload.aspx?id=49049

⁴ Gustafsson, M., 'The gap between school enrolments and population in South Africa: Analysis of the possible explanations', *Stellenbosch Working Paper Series* No. WP23/2012. www.ekon.sun.ac.za/wpapers/2012/wp232012

4. Developments in education policy support systems

The past two decades have seen unprecedented interventions to expand participation and physical access to schools globally and a growing emphasis on effective learning,⁵ now reflected in SDG 4. The international literature brings mounting evidence of a link between the quality of education (indicated by what children know) and a country's economic growth.⁶

In developing countries, socio-economic factors related to exclusion, poorly functioning schools and teachers' ineffectiveness have been found to negatively affect learning outcomes for all learners.⁷ Disabled learners are particularly vulnerable because of their multi-faceted requirements for learning support. This threatens their achievement of inclusive education for all, and the achievement of SDG 4 for South Africa. Following the declaration of 2014 as the Year of Inclusive Education by the Minister of Basic Education, government's Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) for 2015 to 2019 now features implementation plans to this end, with clear actions, targets and expected outputs.

The reconfiguration of basic education after the advent of democracy brought the following reform opportunities and challenges:

- The development of a national education management information system (EMIS) was a direct response to the emerging need for information to underpin resource allocation and provisioning;
- The National Education Policy Act (1996) further entrenched the role of information and standards of provision in terms of the Minister's responsibilities in overseeing concurrent functions shared between national and provincial departments;
- Reports dating from the 1996 School Register of Needs show that information was mainly focused on resource endowment, determination of need and an audit of input-based resourcing information on teachers and students and physical assets such as toilets;
- Over the past 20 years, with the considerable resourcing and elaboration of EMIS and other operational information systems (e.g. for administration of the National Senior Certificate examinations, for provisioning of personnel and materials, and for administration of salaries), opportunities for adding value to information have increased;
- A pioneering report on the costs and resourcing of education in 2003⁸ advocated wider use of performance data in the system for accounting for resources, echoing the African National Congress (ANC) 1994 policy which called for more feedback in assessing learning performance to drive quality improvements in schools.⁹ Current presentations on the state of education reflect on learning much more than in the past. The basic education sector plan, Action Plan 2019: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2030, is evidence of this change in narrative, as is the National Development Plan Vision 2030.¹⁰

5 This figure of 300,000 is the best estimate of young people aged 7 to 18 years enrolled in education institutions countrywide, deflating the GHS figures by 15% because of the discrepancy between overall enrolment rates in schools reflected in the GHS and long range trends in DBE administrative data.

6 UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), Education for All Global Education Monitoring Report, 2015. <http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/>

7 Hanushek, E. A. & Woessmann, L., 'The role of education quality in economic growth', World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 4122, 2007.

8 Lockheed, M.E. & Verspoor, A.M., *Improving Primary Education in Developing Countries*, New York: Oxford University Press, for World Bank, 1991; Boissiere, M.X., 'Determinants of primary education outcomes in developing countries', Operations Evaluation Department Working Paper Series, Washington, DC: World Bank, 2004; Van der Berg, S., 'How effective are poor schools? Poverty and educational outcomes in South Africa', *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 34, 145–154, 2008.

9 DoE (Department of Education), *Report to the Minister: Review of the Financing, Resourcing and Costs of Education in Public Schools*, 3 March 2003. www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=oAFdXOYShKo%3d&tabid=452&mid=1038

10 ANC (African National Congress), *A Policy Framework for Education and Training*, Part 5 'Resources for learning', Section 13 'Curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and certification', draft document, 1994. www.cepd.org.za/files/pictures/Policy%20Framework%20For%20Education%20and%20Training%20ANC.PDF

The appetite for information on the quality and equity of education provision has been driven by the need for more accountability for the resources allocated to education and for more effective learning. This has sharpened the focus on learning outcomes, where these are taken to mean learner performance in credible tasks designed to measure knowledge.

The administrative software package produced for schools by the DBE, the South African school administration and management system (SA-SAMS), must be used to collect credible and more nuanced information on individual learners with disability. The system for tracking learners through their schooling careers (the learner unit record tracking system, LURITS) is not yet functional, and local level management, referral and support systems are not sufficiently coherent to provide a high quality learning experience and effective support system at the level of the learner.

Policy support systems must take account of the complexity of provision, the many levels of responsibility, and the need for the learner to be at the centre. We need information on the services provided, post-school outcomes and schooling experience as critical indicators of how well inclusive education functions. The effectiveness of referral systems at local level must be evaluated to determine reasonable expectations and feasible response rates in terms of support for learners with disabilities. Such evaluations could have spillover effects for other vulnerable learners and for education provisioning in general, as they will necessarily involve various delivery mechanisms across different sectors of service provision.

Historically, policy support systems were designed to support schools as institutions. These systems must now be supplemented with learner-centred systems, if we are to achieve inclusive education for all, with appropriate learning outcomes.

Human Rights Watch summarises departments' responsibilities for children with disabilities as follows:

- The Department of Social Development is responsible for protecting learners from vulnerability and providing social, disability and care dependency grants and institutions such as hostels and early childhood centres;
- The Department of Health is in charge of medical services, including primary health care, provision of assistive devices and specialised services and assessment of disabilities;
- The Department of Transport is responsible for learner transport;
- The Department of Public Works is in charge of delivering accessible school and facility infrastructure;
- The Department of Basic Education is responsible for placement in schools, teaching and curricular assessments, provision of district-based support teams, and transport subsidy administration for schooling;
- The Department of Higher Education and Training is responsible for tertiary and post school education, including technical and vocational education and training and adult education and training programmes.¹¹

¹¹ DBE, 'Report on the implementation of Education White Paper 6'.

5. Recommendations for an evidence base to support policy for inclusive education

The following recommendations are made to improve the evidence base for policy support for inclusive education in South Africa:

Better diagnosis of disabilities and removal of barriers to learning

Inclusive education must become richer in teaching and learning effectiveness for all children – including those with disabilities. This requires well-researched curriculum differentiation approaches and resources. It requires a progressive plan with practical ideas to improve teaching, act on diagnosed weakness and remediate effectively. And it requires effective oversight of curricula for learners with various kinds of learning difficulties. Higher education institutions, research organisations, development partners, teacher associations and unions must be encouraged to help.

Better learner information systems

A fit-for-purpose learner information system must be developed from existing arrangements to manage inclusive education provisioning. Such a system might be modelled on the patient information systems that integrate health information for each patient, regardless of the clinic or hospital visited.

Better operating standards for processes for learner support

A set of standards must be developed for a policy support management system for identifying learner disability, with subsequent referrals, support, care, instruction, assessment and development, much like Standard Operating Procedures in health. This should enable us to map all aspects of support for each learner better than we do currently.

More focus on monitoring learners' and parents' perceptions and satisfaction levels

The experiences and perceptions of services provided must be incorporated into the monitoring systems. This will add to community voice, increase systemic oversight and monitoring, improve local accountability and perhaps reduce sensationalist media exposés of individual failures. Resources must be set aside for collecting objective information on the career intentions, experiences, perceptions and development needs of learners in special schools, full service schools and mainstream schools separately.

Improved tracking of learning needs

Tracking surveys that follow learners through their schooling careers and into the world of work and life would show whether what they learnt in school stands them in good stead in the labour market. It would be useful to quantify the determinants of learning outcomes achieved by learners requiring different levels of disability support. This will help to benchmark likely learning, work and life outcomes for all disabled learners, and could be extended to all learners, once methodologies have been well documented and refined.

Research and evidence-based advocacy

Inclusive education research must be strengthened, particularly focusing on learning support, learning outcomes and post-schooling outcomes as these will promote diversity, social cohesion and employment equity.

12 Human Rights Watch, "Complicit in exclusion": South Africa's failure to guarantee an inclusive education for children with disabilities, 18 August 2015. www.hrw.org/report/2015/08/18/complicit-exclusion/south-africas-failure-guarantee-inclusive-education-children

13 The bulleted list summarises a figure on this website showing 'Inter-departmental obligations' (figure not numbered, no page number).