

RECOMMENDATION No. 51

Concerning the

**ORGANIZATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION
FOR MENTALLY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN**

The International Conference on Public Education,

Convened in Geneva by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization, and the International Bureau of Education, having assembled on the sixth of July, nineteen hundred and sixty, for its twenty-third session,

Adopts on the fifteenth of July, nineteen hundred and sixty, the following Recommendation:

The Conference,

Considering the principles already laid down by the International Conference on Public Education on the organization of special education in Recommendation No. 7, adopted on the fourteenth of July, nineteen hundred and thirty-six, at its fifth session,

Considering that the right to education, laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, applies to all persons capable of benefiting from it, including the least gifted,

Considering that the principle of compulsory education for all children is universally accepted, and in many countries has already been implemented,

Considering that it is an economic, social and cultural disadvantage for a nation to include a number of mentally handicapped persons many of whom might have become useful citizens if they had been suitably educated,

Considering that any particular ability possessed by a mentally handicapped child should be used to further his education,

Considering that the progress of medicine, child psychology and remedial education has made it possible to identify children suffering from mental deficiency and to undertake their education by methods based on differentiated and individual teaching,

Considering that the use of the differentiated education method should not lead to the complete social isolation of children who need to remain in contact with normal life so that they may later become integrated in it, and that the experienced teacher may take advantage of this situation to cultivate in children of different abilities attitudes which contribute to greater mutual understanding,

Considering that in each country the problem of extending special education for mentally handicapped children is always related to the stage reached in providing education for normal children and to differences existing between large and small towns,

Considering that problems of special education should occupy an increasing place in the field of cultural cooperation between nations and in technical assistance programmes, since these problems, despite their urgency, have not yet been studied systematically in some countries,

Considering that, in spite of similar aspirations, countries in very different positions must reach varied solutions of the problem of the organization of special education for mentally handicapped children,

Submits to the Ministries of Education of the different countries the following Recommendation:

Identification

1) It is essential that, wherever circumstances permit, the identification of mentally handicapped children should be carried out at the very beginning of the schooling period, and if possible even before they attend school.

2) To this end it is important that techniques of observation and psychological measurement on the one hand, and the methods of diagnosis available to the various specialists on the other hand, should be improved in order that identification may be as objective as possible, so avoiding, among other things, confusion between children with true mental limitation and those whose deficiency is merely apparent.

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3) It is further desirable to take into consideration the way in which children suspected of mental deficiency behave in their social, home and school environments.

4) The decision to withdraw a child from ordinary education and the choice of the class or school to which he should be sent is the responsibility of the education authorities, if possible in agreement with the parents; it is desirable for an observation period to precede the decision.

Compulsory schooling

5) All educable mentally handicapped children have the same right to education as other children; it follows therefore that the education authorities have an imperative duty to provide for them an education suited to their needs.

6) The principle of compulsory schooling can only be invoked in relation to the mentally handicapped child in so far as the school authorities are able to provide suitable education for him; it is even highly desirable for this education to be extended beyond the official school-leaving age.

7) As the principle of free schooling is a corollary of that of compulsory schooling, mentally handicapped children should receive instruction free of charge, even though special education requires a greater financial effort.

8) When mentally handicapped children have to attend a boarding school, grants should be made available to assist parents whose means do not permit them to pay for their children's maintenance and transport whether the institution concerned is official or private.

Administration and inspection

9) In countries where the extent of special education justifies it, it is useful to institute a specialized branch of the education service to contribute to the development of education for all categories of handicapped children, particularly by coordinating efforts made in this field.

10) As far as mentally handicapped children are concerned, the special education branch should undertake, either by itself or with the help of documentation or educational research centres: a) the establishment of precise definitions for the different categories of mental defi-

ciency; *b*) the compilation of statistics on the proportion of school-age children in these different categories and on the number of them who attend school; *c*) studies on present provision and future requirements in this field; *d*) the preparation of plans for the systematic and progressive expansion of special education; *e*) the study of problems arising in connection with the vocational training of mentally handicapped children and conditions of employment for them; *f*) the study of various forms of post-school care for these children, etc.

11) The special education branch should also be responsible for the supervision of the public and private institutions under its jurisdiction; as soon as the number of such institutions justifies it, their supervision should be carried out by specialized inspectors or advisers capable of guiding teachers and of contributing to the development of this type of education.

12) Where there are no separate inspectors for special education, the ordinary inspectors, particularly those responsible for schools in small towns and rural areas, should take an active interest in the case of isolated mentally handicapped children and should enlist the support of teachers, education authorities and social welfare organizations in helping these children.

13) The education of mentally handicapped children seems to constitute a field in which cooperation between private initiative and the education authorities may be particularly effective; for this reason, wherever possible, it is desirable to support the work of private associations, which have often been in the forefront of education and welfare work for mentally handicapped children and who still often help to compensate for the lack of official action in this sphere.

Special education system

14) In view of the diversity of forms of mental deficiency and the particular circumstances of each case, it is important to provide various kinds of class and establishment, so enabling education to be differentiated.

15) It is necessary to avoid as far as possible the complete separation of the mentally handicapped child from his environment, and in particular from more gifted children, though he should not be made to compete with them in fields in which he will prove inferior; for this reason, it is desirable to open special classes in ordinary schools.

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16) For the more seriously affected mentally handicapped child, special schools, whether day or boarding schools, seem to provide a better solution; the boarding school appears to be necessary above all when the parents live too far away from a specialized day school, when home conditions are unfavourable, or when the mental deficiency is accompanied by behaviour disturbances.

17) In large towns in countries which have the necessary means and which have solved the problem of universal compulsory primary schooling, it is well to contemplate the progressive opening of schools and classes of the type mentioned above.

18) In small towns or sparsely populated areas, where it is not possible to open special schools or classes, one or other of the following solutions may be contemplated: *a)* individual instruction in ordinary classes; *b)* attendance at a special class or school in a neighbouring town, on condition that transport and, if necessary the midday meal are provided; *c)* instruction at home and the system of travelling teachers; *d)* boarding school education.

19) In countries which have not yet the means of organizing systematic education for the mentally handicapped, and even in those where compulsory schooling for all has not yet been fully implemented, it is desirable to undertake at least pilot experiments, which will enable a certain number of mentally handicapped children to attend school and will serve as a point of departure for a full special education system.

Programmes and methods of education

20) The education of mentally handicapped children, more than any other kind of education, should be functional and concrete; it is therefore desirable to use methods which stimulate mental processes by means of activity requiring practical intelligence and permitting the basic skills to be acquired.

21) Instruction should be highly individual, so that it may be adapted to the particular abilities, needs and pace of each child; it should also allow for group activities, whether work or play, in order to develop the pupils' social sense.

22) For all the above reasons, it is important that as far as possible one teacher should not be responsible for the care of more than about fifteen pupils.

23) Revision and repetition, aimed at consolidating the basic skills and at ensuring the retention of knowledge which is within the powers of mentally handicapped children, should not be neglected; adequate attention should also be given to the formation of good habits and to the development of character and of socially and morally acceptable behaviour, in order to cultivate in the mentally handicapped child qualities which may compensate for the shortcomings of his intelligence and give him self-confidence.

24) It is important to stress the value of speech therapy for mentally handicapped children as a means of re-education.

25) Play, physical and rhythmical education, music and choral singing, drawing and the visual arts, form an integral part of the education of the mentally handicapped child; these are means of expression which will help him to acquire self-control and will contribute to the harmonious development of his personality.

26) Handicrafts have an essential role to play in the education of mentally handicapped children from the very beginning, and may later form the basis of a real introduction to vocational work.

27) Collaboration between the school and the family is particularly necessary in education for mentally handicapped children; constant efforts should be made by the teacher, and when necessary by the social worker, to help parents or guardians understand the particular needs of their handicapped child; they should even be invited to take part in certain school or extra-curricular activities.

Vocational training and post-school care

28) If the special school is not able to provide vocational training proper, it would be useful to institute supplementary courses and training workshops for mentally handicapped persons and to allow for training periods of adequate length.

29) It is of importance to provide numerous activities which will facilitate adaptation to daily life and integration into ordinary working conditions; in particular the "school-employment" system, which entails part-time work under the supervision of the school, may be found useful in some countries.

30) Young mentally handicapped persons should be helped to find employment suited to them, so that educational activity does not cease entirely when they leave school and so that the salary they earn may

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prevent them from being a burden on society; vocational guidance and employment services should undertake a systematic survey of those posts which are best suited to mentally handicapped persons, particularly in industry.

31) Post-school care is indispensable for mentally handicapped children and services providing such care should be extended both on the official and the private planes; these services should remain in contact with mentally handicapped young persons and their families, take an interest in what becomes of them, and give them the social protection and advice which they need.

Staff

32) Special education demands from both teachers and educators qualities of self-sacrifice, patience and tact without which specialized training, however thorough, cannot bear full fruit.

33) As the education of mentally handicapped children sets special educational and psychological problems; it is important to provide for teachers who intend to take up this work specialized courses of adequate length in addition to their general teacher training; it is also desirable that they should be encouraged to take periodical refresher courses.

34) Supervisors, who are responsible for the care of children outside their regular classroom work, particularly in boarding schools, have an essential part to play from the point of view of the child's development; it would be useful to provide specialized training for them also, as is already the practice in several countries.

35) The salaries of teachers and supervisors should adequately reflect the difficulty of their task and any additional training they may have received.

36) Since close relations must be maintained between ordinary education and special education, and since a large number of ordinary teachers are liable to have in their classes children who have difficulty in keeping up with school work, it is very important for all teachers and inspectors to be accurately informed on problems of mental deficiency.

37) It is desirable for special education inspectors to be drawn as far as possible from the ranks of special education teachers.

International cooperation

38) Countries which lack the financial means and qualified staff to introduce or improve special education should be provided with technical assistance which might take the form of scholarships for study and research, material aid, visits from experts, etc.

39) It would be useful if Unesco, in cooperation with others concerned in the problem, would draw up as soon as possible basic terminology for the broad categories of handicapped children.

40) It is desirable that Unesco should take part in setting up a new international body, or should coordinate the work of existing international bodies, for the purpose of helping special education services in all countries by the provision of documentation on progress made in research, identification, observation, techniques, methods, teaching material, administration, etc. in connection with special education.

41) It is also desirable that Unesco, in collaboration with the International Bureau of Education and other international organizations concerned, should assist countries in a similar situation to exchange their experiences in the field of special education.