

POLICY BRIEF DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION GOVERNMENT OF ST. LUCIA

NATIONAL SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION POLICY

BACKGROUND

The Government of St. Lucia’s general objective for public education “*is the continued quality adjustments and transformation of Saint Lucia’s education system by making it responsive to the needs of all learners and more aligned with the requirements of the 21st century labour market*”. This policy brief summarises the intent and key components of the *special needs education policy and strategy*. The policy and strategy aim to provide guidance for the Government of St. Lucia (GOSL) through the Department of Education (DOE) to effectively respond to ‘the needs of *all* learners and align the public education system with the requirements of the 21st century labour market’. The policy is underpinned by a rights-based, non-discriminatory philosophy that equally values the presence, participation, and contribution of *all* children regardless of where they are on the abilities spectrum. The Education Act (2005) as the relevant legislation entitles *all* children the right to a quality education; this places a statutory obligation on the Government of St. Lucia to account for diversity and difference in the student population and provide appropriate resources, services, and support systems. Within the context of the Caribbean region, the Government of St Lucia also shares ownership of the CARICOM Human Resource Development (HRD) Strategy 2023, as well as the OECS Education Sector Strategy (2021-2026). The philosophical core of these regional and international agreements is interrelated and, as such, along with the international conventions are an appropriate anchor for the policy and strategy.

The Government is a signatory to, and has ratified the following international agreements on inclusive and special education:

- *Convention of Rights of the Child (CRC 1989),*
- *The Salamanca Agreement (1994),*
- *the Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006), and,*
- *the Cali Commitment (2019)*
- *The Sustainable Development Goals (2015)*

Ownership

The ownership of the policy and strategy belongs to the Department of Education who will decide the effective date. The policy and strategy serve as a guide for the Department of Education through the Special Education Unit in operationalising the duty of providing a quality and equitable education to all children. The policy objectives and associated strategies are guidelines for executing general decisions in relation to the management and operations of special education as a sub-sector in the public education system. The Special Education Unit in partnership with Ministries such as the Health and Wellness, and Elderly Affairs, Youth and Sports, Equity, Social Justice and Empowerment are expected to give regard to the policy and strategy in relation to dealing with special education needs and disabilities in the schools.

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

The evaluation of the education system with specific emphasis on services and supports for special education needs and disabilities (SEND) highlighted the current situation:

INSIGHTS FROM STAKEHOLDERS AND DESK REVIEW		
The impact of special needs accommodations is not known. This raises the question of fairness in the examination system.	The structure of the Education Statistics 2020 highlights the practice of segregation in the public education system.	Stakeholders highlighted gaps in the delivery of the curriculum, programmes, assessment, accountability, and support and services at all levels of the public education system.
PRIMARY SCHOOL PERFORMANCE		
Grade repetition at the primary school level was prolific across grade levels but is chronic at K, grades 1 and 3, which accounted for 78% of all repetition in the 2019/2020 academic year.	Analyses of the 2006/2007 to 2014/2015 primary school cohorts showed that drop-out occurred across the grades in all the cohorts. The number of dropouts increased in forms 4 and 5, which accounted for up to 82% over the period.	Academic performance in the primary school system was marked by a performance gap between boys and girls in all the national examinations. And, the risk of failure is evident from MST 2, which affect the CEE results. Children are not being recovered by grade 6 transferring the pattern of underperformance to the secondary school system.
Grade 2 results in English Language showed 8% (females) and 19% (males) of grade 2 children in the general education system were at risk of failure.	Grade 4 results in the English Language Test indicated the proportion of children at risk was 2016 – 35%, 2017 – 23%, and 2018 – 27%. In the case of mathematics, the incidence of risk was 2016 – 19%, 2017 – 31%, and 2018 – 45%.	Grade 6 results showed that just slightly above one-half of the children sitting the CEE examination obtained a score at or above the national average, and this means that the proposition of children at risk was as follows: 2018 – 47%, 2019 – 48% and 2020 – 45%
SECONDARY SCHOOL PERFORMANCE		
In terms of secondary schools, in 2019/2020, the net enrolment rate for forms 1 to 5 was 82%, which means that 18% of children of secondary school age were not enrolled in a school.	Analysis of the CSEC results based on the cohort showed that for 2013/2014 ¹ and 2014/2015 ² , 49% and 39% of students, respectively, of the cohort exited secondary school without an outcome in	For the 2015/2016 cohort, the number of students without an outcome in English was 712 (32%). In addition, the examination of the population shows that although there were 2560 children in the age

¹ CSEC Examination year was 2017/2018.

² CSEC Examination year was 2018/2019

	English A. In respect of mathematics, this was 65% and 63%, respectively	12 group, it was noted that grade 6 enrolment for the cohort was 2340, and the number assigned to secondary school was 2256, while only 1856 sat the English A and 1914 sat the mathematics examinations.
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RATIONALE FOR THE SPECIAL EDUCATION POLICY AND STRATEGY

The rationale for policy and strategies is to account for *all* forms of special needs, including the needs relating to the intersectionality between gender and special education needs and disability. *The policy and strategy, therefore, seek to address the challenges of:*

- I. limited human capital and financial resources in the special education sub-sector.
- II. conflicting definitions of the key concepts such as inclusive education, inclusion, special education, and special educational needs, which has limited the framing and the reach of service provision and supports.
- III. the absence of collaboration and cooperation across the sectors of education, health, equity, and other social development agencies.
- IV. equitable and timely assessment and placement options
- V. parent and stakeholder involvement.

GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the Special Education Needs Policy and Strategy is to ensure that all learners with special education needs are provided with the best quality education, which allows them to achieve their fullest potential. The objectives are:

1. to provide equitable treatment to all children in the provision of quality education.
2. to ensure that Special Education Needs is recognised as an integral part of the education system.
3. to ensure that all children who need educational support are provided with such support at every school and by every teacher.

VALUES AND COMMITMENT³

i. Flexibility

We will live this value by...

- Responding to the developmental needs of learners.
- Providing differentiated curriculum and instruction.
- Facilitating activities that enhance student learning.
- Accommodating learners with exceptionalities.

³ Adapted from the The Education Sector Development Plan (2015 - 2020).

ii. Diversity

We will live this value by...

- Providing an open educational environment that appreciates and ensures inclusion.
- Respecting individual differences of all learners within the learning environment.
- Providing a variety of teaching approaches/ strategies that cater to the multiple intelligences of learners.

DEFINITIONS

The definitions presented are primarily drawn from the CARICOM HRD 2030 Strategy Report (pp 59-68). They were modified to further capture the applied interpretations of the CRPD in daily practice and were validated by regional partners. The modified terms are *access, equity, quality, and inclusiveness*. Based on the regional partners' descriptions of services and Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) provision, the modified definitions for *special education, special educational needs, inclusion, and inclusive education are proposed*. These definitions are complementary to the existing definitions of the CRPD and are the standards internationally.

Definitions	
Access	The policy-based conditions, modalities, procedures, and considerations that enable all learners to be admitted, matriculated, and successfully integrated into educational or vocational institutions, or social, cultural, and recreational environments with opportunities to participate that are equitably distributed.
Disability	Long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder an individual's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others ⁴ .
Equity	The practice of unbiased, fair, relevant, and appropriate provision of educational and training opportunities, and other critical services and support to learners regardless of gender, ethnicity, language, religion, locale, socio-economic status, disability, indigenous origin, or any other personal circumstances.
Inclusion	The practice which ensures universal and unbiased acceptance of all learners regardless of gender, ethnicity, language, religion, locale, socio-economic status, disability, indigenous origin, or any other characteristics, thus allowing them full access to educational opportunities, assessment, and support, and equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and needs.

⁴ Adapted from CRPD (UN Division for Social Policy and Development: Disability, 2006)

Inclusive Education	Educational practices that ensure that all learners, including those with special educational needs, are provided with educational opportunities that are fair, equitable, relevant, rights-based, and non-discriminatory, and enable them to attend their community school to receive high quality instruction, interventions and supports that enable them to meet success on the core curriculum, unless it is clearly demonstrated that education in general education classrooms is incapable of meeting the child’s educational or social needs, or when it is required for the welfare of the child or that of other children ⁵ .
Quality Education	Educational provisions and outcomes that are developmentally and pedagogically appropriate, relevant, and sound, and lead to cognitive, social, emotional, creative, physical, occupational, and life-skills development, and promote the values and attitudes for responsible citizenship.
Special Education Needs	The educational considerations and provisions resulting from a diagnosed disability, advanced abilities, or other non-traditional learning need that requires specialized support or services to facilitate learning and development.
Special Education	A range of educational and social service provisions designed to facilitate the learning of individuals who, for a wide variety of reasons, have special education needs and, therefore, require additional support and adaptive pedagogical methods in order to participate and meet learning objectives in an educational programme.

THEMATIC POLICY AND STRATEGY COMPONENTS

The core elements of the framework are interrelated and anchored by the principles of the CRPD, CRC, SDG4, CARICOM, and the OECS. Each theme is a critical element in an enabling and supportive legislative and policy environment.

POLICY GOALS	STRATEGIC POLICY OBJECTIVES
<p>1. ACCESS The Chief Education Officer shall provide access to quality, appropriate inclusive education at all levels for learners with SEND, and all vulnerable groups, with free and compulsory primary and secondary education in their communities with their peers, unless it is clearly demonstrated that the child’s</p>	<p>1.1 Inclusion in general education will aim to address the underachievement of all vulnerable groups without discrimination based on disabilities, varying socioeconomic status, gender, indigenous origin, cultural identity, ethnicity, religion, language, and locale (urban, urban inner-city, rural, remote rural), and other learners in migrant, displaced, or refugee populations.</p> <p>1.2 All learners will have access to quality and equitable, inclusive education with their peers in their communities and at all levels of education (Early Childhood, Primary,</p>

⁵ Adapted from the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994)

POLICY GOALS	STRATEGIC POLICY OBJECTIVES
<p>educational, welfare and social needs, may not be adequately met in a general education classroom.</p>	<p>Secondary, and Tertiary), with free and compulsory primary and secondary education.</p> <p>1.3 Early identification systems (EIS) shall be established, along with referral and assessment mechanisms to identify screening, placement, intervention, and support needs of learners at the earliest stage.</p> <p>1.4 The Department of Education will collaborate with ministries responsible for Youth, Equity, Health, and Gender Affairs, for example, and third sector organisations to establish a long-term multi-level policy framework for implementing quality, inclusive, and equitable education in schools.</p> <p>1.5 Schools at all levels (Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary) are equipped with the necessary human and material resources to implement inclusive education to support all learners</p>
<p>2. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES</p> <p>The Department of Education will establish organizational structures and systems to maintain, strengthen, and oversee the effective implementation and preservation of related legislation and policies for inclusion and equity in education</p>	<p>2.1 Inter-ministerial /cross sectoral collaboration is established between Department of Education, Ministries responsible for Health, Youth, Gender Affairs, and Equity to support the SEU to effectively implement inclusive education.</p> <p>2.2 The operational remit, roles, and function of the Special Education Unit clearly ensures that assessment and intervention reach <i>all</i> students requiring services at each level of the education system.</p> <p>2.3 The Department of Education provides long-term national-level financial support and resources linked to system-wide Inclusive Education strategies and establishes systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and quality of inclusive education provided.</p> <p>2.4 Monitoring procedures are established to ensure that inequalities in access to educational resources and services nationally and at the district level are addressed at the organisational level.</p>

POLICY GOALS	STRATEGIC POLICY OBJECTIVES
<p>3. INFRASTRUCTURAL PROVISIONS AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS</p> <p>The Government of St. Lucia through the Department of Education will establish structures and systems to provide reasonable accommodations in the form of adaptations, resources, and support to optimise learning opportunities and outcomes for learners with SEND in an inclusive environment.</p>	<p>3.1 The Department of Education will provide reasonable accommodation of the individual’s requirements to maximize potential.</p> <p>3.2 The capacity of all schools will be increased to meet a greater diversity of educational needs so that learners may be supported within their local communities.</p>
<p>4. HUMAN RESOURCES PROVISIONS</p> <p>The Government of Saint Lucia will undertake appropriate measures to improve the quantity and quality of teachers, educational leaders, teacher educators, and specialists who support school communities in implementing inclusive education.</p>	<p>4.1 The Department of Education will provide appropriately trained teachers who are qualified to teach learners with SEND in inclusive classrooms.</p> <p>4.2 The Department of Education will recruit teaching staff from diverse backgrounds, including teachers with disabilities.</p> <p>4.3 Principals and teaching staff will be trained to meet the diverse educational needs of learners.</p> <p>4.4 Training pathways will be outlined to prepare specialists who support school communities to implement inclusive education, thereby ensuring that members of the Multi-Disciplinary/Inter-Disciplinary Teams are qualified.</p> <p>4.5 The Department of Teacher Education and Educational Leadership (DTEEL) Sir Arthur Lewis Community College will offer compulsory SEND courses for all pre-service teachers to prepare them to teach all learners. As well as integrate SEND in the teacher education programmes.</p> <p>4.6 The Special Education Unit (SEU) in the Department of Education will be staffed with Education Officers qualified in SEND.</p>
<p>5. PROGRAMMES</p> <p>The Chief Education Officer will institute programmes promoting equity and quality</p>	<p>5.1 The Department of Education will facilitate the learning of braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication</p>

POLICY GOALS	STRATEGIC POLICY OBJECTIVES
<p>inclusive education that will ensure that the varying needs of learners will be facilitated through curricular accommodations, modifications and adaptations, and adaptive and assistive technology which will allow all children to optimise their potential.</p>	<p>(sign language) orientation and mobility skills and facilitating peer support and mentoring in schools.</p> <p>5.2 The Department of Education will provide curricula that are adapted and modified for use with learners with SEND who are in inclusive and special education classrooms.</p> <p>5.3 A range of placement options will be provided in the Least Restrictive Environment/Most suitable educational arrangement.</p> <p>5.4 A mechanism will be developed to guide the transition across phases and levels of education.</p> <p>5.5 Career counsellors and transition officers will be Provided alongside school personnel to support learners and employers regarding school-to-work transition, training, and employment possibilities.</p> <p>5.6 Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approaches will be outlined in School Strategic Plans to show how UDL will be used to provide a variety of teaching methods that give all learners equal opportunities to succeed.</p>
<p>6. STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT The Department of Education will establish a framework that will identify stakeholders and the role they will play and outline strategies to engage them to support the implementation of special and inclusive education.</p>	<p>6.1 Outline the full involvement of families in all educational processes and actions for inclusive education.</p> <p>6.2 Outline the strategies for awareness-raising with all stakeholders in inclusive education.</p> <p>6.3 Outline strategies for the involvement of the third sector and international organisations.</p>

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of the policy and strategy rests with the Department of Education and the Special Education Unit, which have a statutory obligation to provide resources, support, and services to children with SEND. Implementation is expected to be coordinated through the creation of an Inter-Ministerial Committee on SEND, which will incorporate the role and functions of the Ministries of the Health and Wellness, and Elderly Affairs; Youth and Sports; Equity, Social Justice and Empowerment, non-government organisations and the private sector as key partners.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Inter-Ministerial committee comprising the Department of Education, SEU, and the Ministries of the Health and Wellness, and Elderly Affairs; Youth and Sports; Equity, Social Justice and Empowerment, non-government organisations, and the private sector will regularly review the policy using the targets and outcomes set out in the section titled: Strategies for Implementation.

Consequently, reviews should lead to modifications of the policies and strategies to ensure quality service delivery.