**SUPPORTING THE IMPROVEMENT OF QUALITY IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN POLAND**

**Final Recommendations**

**and**

**Priority Actions**

Introduction

The Ministry of National Education (MEN) in the Republic of Poland has undertaken work to improve the quality of inclusive education across Poland. Since 2010, changes have been made to clarify the legislative and organisational framework for inclusive education, but this has not resulted in system change. At present, various initiatives are in place to support the preparation of new legislation on inclusive education planned for 2020 onwards.

To address the policy-practice gap in Poland, the MEN asked the European Commission’s Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) for support. The SRSS contracted the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (Agency) to assist the MEN in analysing the strengths and areas for development of the current policy framework for special needs and inclusive education. The ultimate goal of the various activities linked to this analysis has been to provide evidence-based recommendations that can be used to improve the quality of inclusive education in Poland and inform the proposed 2020 legislation.

To address the policy-practice gap in Poland, MEN asked the European Commission’s Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) for support. The SRSS agreed to fund the project through the Structural Reform Support Programme 2018 (SRSP) and implement it jointly with a specialised partner, specifically the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (Agency). The aim of the action was to assist MEN in analysing the strengths and areas for development of the current policy framework for inclusive education.

This short document presents the final recommendations that have been developed to specifically inform the country priorities indicated by the MEN for improving the quality of inclusive education in Poland. The preparation of these final recommendations has systematically taken into account all sources of information collected during a consultation and feedback process involving stakeholders from across the education system. More details on this process are available in the Final Report from the project.

There are 16 final recommendations to support the development of future legislation and policy frameworks in Poland. They identify *current* policy priorities and should be seen as crucial issues for promoting improvements in the quality of inclusive education in the short to mid-term.

The final recommendations are proposed as possible strategies that build on strengths and address challenges. They are linked to:

* *Legislation* and *policy* for inclusive education systems;
* Six key *operational structures* *and processes* within an inclusive education system:
	+ System capacity-building
	+ Governance and funding
	+ Monitoring, quality assurance and accountability
	+ Initial and continuing professional development
	+ Learning and teaching environments
	+ Continua of support.

All of these recommendations are inter-connected and support/complement each other. The complementarity of the recommendations must be specifically highlighted as it is not possible to consider addressing one recommendation without considering the impact and effect upon others.

In addition to the 16 final recommendations, four priority actions are also proposed. These are the *current* priorities for action to support the implementation of the recommendations for legislation and policy. These actions are considered as the critical levers likely to have the most impact in promoting longer term systemic change and development that MEN is aiming for in their reforms towards high quality inclusive education.

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Final Recommendations

Legislation and policy for inclusive education

Legislation and policy in Poland must be underpinned by a **fundamental commitment** to ensuring every learner’s right to inclusive education. Legislation and policy must be guided by **a vision for** and **understanding** **of** inclusive education that emphasises the shared responsibility of all educators, leaders and decision-makers in implementing legislation and policy.

Recommendation 1

Legislation and policy in Poland must provide **a clear definition of inclusive education** as a rights-based approach, ensuring every learner has access to high-quality inclusive education and social inclusion throughout their lives.

This means:

* All learners attend early childhood provision and then schools in their local community with their peers. All learners have access to the full range of curriculum entitlements and wider social opportunities. All learners have access to highly-qualified teachers and high-quality resources.
* Schools recognise and address any barriers to learning (e.g. due to disability, language, social or health issues) as early as possible. Learning is personalised and support is provided in the classroom/school environment. Differences are regarded as a resource for teaching and learning. Barriers to learning are reduced by strong preventative measures and effective intervention, when necessary.

Recommendation 2

Legislation and policy in Poland **must ensure that all schools are supported** and provided with resources and professional development opportunities to make adjustments that **enable learners with disabilities to enjoy their right to education on an equal basis** with others, in line with Poland’s commitments to European and international guiding policy statements.

This means:

* Learners with disabilities are educated together in mainstream schools so that they have access to a full curriculum with their peer group. They are taught by well-qualified staff and have access to the resources needed to enable them to meaningfully participate in learning and wider extra-curricular activities.
* Ensuring that monitoring focuses on equity to identify discrimination (failure to make adjustments), as well as any ‘gaps’ in opportunity and achievement for learners with disabilities or other groups of learners at risk of exclusion.

Operational structures and processes for inclusive education

The inclusive education system in Poland must be guided by the **principles of equity, effectiveness, efficiency and raising achievement for all system stakeholders**. The six operational structures and processes, which have been identified through the Agency’s wider work, have through this project’s analysis been confirmed as applicable across Poland’s whole education system, from pre-school through to the end of upper-secondary education.

System capacity-building

Recommendation 3

Policy in Poland must ensure that **the vision and goals for inclusive education are clearly communicated and understood** by national, regional, local and school-level stakeholders, as well as by wider society.

This means:

* Engaging in widespread collaborative work to clarify and develop shared understandings of the principles and values underpinning inclusive education.

Recommendation 4

Policy in Poland must set out **a new role for special schools and other specialist provision** that makes the professional expertise and specialist resources available to all mainstream schools and services and helps to increase the capacity of school leaders and all school staff to understand and support diverse learners.

This means:

* Developing special schools as resource centres to support the mainstream sector. Such resource centres will act as a base for multi-disciplinary support teams at local level and ensure equal access to specialised services for all learners across all geographical areas.
* Developing the role of counselling and guidance centres with an emphasis on increasing capability in all schools. This will involve centre staff undertaking assessments in the school itself, advising teachers and school teams, as well as providing support for learners and their families.

Governance and funding

Recommendation 5

Policy in Poland must set out the roles and responsibilities of decision-makers and educators at all system levels and across all sectors involved in the education system to ensure that **everyone takes responsibility/is accountable for the achievement of ALL learners.**

This means:

* Agreeing the roles and responsibilities of personnel in ministries/departments at national, regional and local level in ways that ensure shared responsibility for vulnerable/at-risk learners, as well as synergy of effort through co-operative working.
* Increasing school leaders’ autonomy to allow them to: appoint staff, manage resources, organise educational provision in school more flexibly, develop staff training and access to external support from health, social services, NGOs, etc., as needed.
* Setting out legal obligations regarding provision and allocation of resources, monitoring and data collection and collective use of information to ensure accountability and inform improvement.

Recommendation 6

Policy in Poland must beunderpinned by **funding mechanisms that support the development of early intervention and prevention**, rather than rely on compensatory funding strategies/approaches in mainstream schools.

This means:

* Introducing a model of funding that ensures the provision of high-quality learning support opportunities for all learners who require it. This model should ensure a move away from the use of formal needs identification procedures that involve labelling of learners as the main means of accessing support. It should ensure that appropriate funding and resourcing can be provided at school level to support all learners to overcome barriers to learning and participation.
* Providing funding that can be used flexibly at the discretion of school leadership teams, to implement strategies that prevent problems occurring and allow teachers to intervene as soon as issues are recognised/identified.
* Setting out funding mechanisms for learners with more complex and long-term support needs.

Recommendation 7

Policy in Poland must ensure **transparency regarding the allocation and effective use of funds** (at all system levels) to provide additional support to enable all learners to enjoy equitable rights to and within education.

This means:

* Implementing monitoring strategies that ensure funds are used to reduce barriers to learning and participation, increase capacity through staff development and support learners with more complex needs.
* Actively involving personnel from national, regional, local and school levels to ensure the effective use of resources.

Monitoring, quality assurance and accountability

Recommendation 8

Policy in Poland must outline a quality assurance and accountability framework that is **fully aligned with the vision and goals for inclusive education.**

This means:

* Reviewing the existing framework for quality assurance and accountability with a view to increasing coherence with the vision and goals of inclusive education.
* Working with all stakeholders to reduce the reliance of quality assurance and accountability processes on external inspection and formal exam results and increase the value placed on schools’ work with diverse learners.

Recommendation 9

Policy in Poland must support the development of a self-review framework based on indicators and standards that set out a vision for high-quality inclusive education for all learners.

This means:

* Agreeing with stakeholders a framework for reviewing policy and practice and identifying strengths and challenges in structures/processes in schools and classrooms.

Initial and continuing professional development

Recommendation 10

Policy in Poland must **ensure the appropriate status of teachers and school leaders** and provide incentives to ensure that high quality, appropriately trained candidates are attracted to and remain in the profession.

Recommendation 11

Policy in Poland must **align all initial teacher education and continuing professional development with the vision** of high-quality inclusive education in practice.

This means:

* Co-ordinating the work of key stakeholders to develop a framework outlining the necessary values, attitudes and competences from initial teacher education through to continuing professional development opportunities, that are fully aligned with the vision for inclusive education.
* Working with all key stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of the agreed framework of values, attitudes and competences for inclusive education in all initial teacher education and continuing professional development opportunities across the country.
* Ensuring pathways for the training of specialists for learners with low-incidence disabilities (e.g. learners with very complex learning disabilities; visual, hearing, multi-sensory impairments, etc.).

Learning and teaching environments

Recommendation 12

Policy in Poland must support **collaboration and teamwork** (professional learning communities) in school **to develop evidence-based, innovative approaches** to learning, teaching and assessment to raise the achievement of all learners

This means:

* Providing guidance and supporting teachers to develop competences in formative assessment (assessment for learning) and summative assessment. This will involve clarifying their different purposes and functions and showing how both can be used to personalise learning and raise achievement.
* Using research evidence to develop innovative approaches to learning and teaching to support the participation and engagement of all learners.

Recommendation 13

Policy in Poland should support the **development of an inclusive assessment framework** that can record the progress of ALL learners.

This means:

* Setting out appropriate measures/benchmarks (teacher assessment/tests) to be used at each stage of education that inform teaching and learning in core curriculum areas.
* Developing in collaboration with stakeholders an assessment framework that values wider learning and measures learner progress, including for learners with disabilities who cannot access formal examinations.
* Developing procedures for initial needs identification that link into the wider learning and assessment framework and directly support the work of teachers.

Recommendation 14

Policy in Poland must outline strategies to **increase the voices of learners** (in line with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) and their families.

This means:

* Identifying ways to increase consultation with learners/families in school and in the wider system of decision making about proposed changes that affects them.

Continua of support

Recommendation 15

Policy in Poland must ensure **curriculum flexibility to allow development of personalised programmes** in schools to meet the holistic needs of every learner.

This means:

* Developing a single core curriculum that provides a framework for teachers to plan appropriate experiences and outcomes that enable all learners to progress in a range of subjects and areas of learning.
* Developing possibilities for additional time for schools to use, without bureaucratic processes, to challenge and support all learners and address local community priorities.
* Ensuring possibilities for delivering preventative programmes for learners, e.g. for mental health and well-being, personal and social learning, etc.

Recommendation 16

Policy in Poland must **support all school stakeholders to develop competences** in i**dentifying barriers** to learning and participation and p**roviding support and early intervention** strategies to overcome barriers.

This means:

* Increasing in-school and cross-school collaboration to share evidence-based practices.
* Supporting multi-agency expertise and experience (e.g. from psychologists, counselling and guidance centres, special schools and resource centres) to support staff and learners in school, sharing strategies for capturing and promoting inclusive practice.

Priority Actions

On the basis of the 16 final recommendations for legislation and policy, four priority actions are considered necessary to support the *initial steps* for implementing a more inclusive education system in Poland.

These inter-connected and mutually supporting priority actions are considered to be possible first steps to be taken. This is because they represent *critical levers* likely to have the most impact in promoting longer-term change and development to legislation and policy for supporting the improvement of quality in inclusive education in Poland.

Priority action 1

Develop and implement a campaign to increase all stakeholders’ awareness of the need for a change in thinking about learners’ educational needs. This change represents a shift from a medical model to a rights-based model that focuses on learning needs and teaching strategies, rather than deficits.

MEN should develop and implement a campaign to increase all stakeholders’ awareness of the need for a change in thinking about all learners’ educational needs. This change represents a shift from a medical, deficit model focussed upon some learners, to a rights-based model that focuses on high quality teaching and learning for all learners.

Priority action 2

MEN must agree with stakeholders what high-quality education looks like in practice. This work should include:

* the development of shared understandings of key terms such as inclusion, equity, individualisation vs. personalisation, etc.;
* the identification of examples and information resources that can be used to develop standards and indicators for identifying and developing inclusive practice.

Priority action 3

MEN should build an evidence base around inclusive practice that identifies:

* effective forms of support/adjustments for learners with disabilities, as well as other learners at risk of under-achievement;
* pedagogical strategies that can raise the achievement of all learners;
* evidence-based resources for school teams to use to support their work;
* effective forms of professional development for teaching staff.

Priority action 4

MEN must systematically plan and implement a series of pilot projects that can be evaluated to provide information for longer-term up-scaling and system roll-out. The identified priorities for pilot projects include:

* joint working between ministries and regional and local-level authorities to develop new models for funding/providing flexible resources for inclusive education;
* developing the role of special schools as resource centres for mainstream support;
* developing the role of integration classes as in-school support bases for inclusion;
* supporting mainstream schools with innovative inclusive practice to act as models or ‘beacons’ of inclusive practice for other schools.

These priority actions will be important for the work to be undertaken within the second Phase of the Supporting the Improvement of Quality in Inclusive Education in Poland. The priority actions are essential precursors for the process of preparing new legislation on inclusive education in 2019, which will fully take into account the recommendations presented in this report.