



Theoretical article

MAINTREAMING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE GREEK EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: PROGRAMS OF "INCLUSION CLASSES" AND "PARALLEL SUPPORT"

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Abstract

The article presents two types of integration of students with special educational needs in the Greek educational system. More specifically, it sheds light into two special programs running in Greece, the "inclusion classes" and the "parallel support". It analyses issues concerning the law implemented, the selection of the students and their attendance at these programs.

Keywords: *Special educational needs; integration; inclusion classes; parallel support; Postoperative special education.*

Bearing in mind that a society is being judged upon the way it treats the "weak", the education of people with special educational needs is deemed to be a very important issue for every country in need to be considered civilized. Access to education is an inalienable right of individuals with any kind of disability so as to achieve the fullest possible social integration and personal development in general. Therefore, the main aim of the education of the above population should be targeting at inclusive education with students of the typical population. In the Greek educational reality, efforts are being made towards an inclusive education by integrating these students.

Such an effort was encouraged by the recent law on special education and training of people with disabilities or special educational needs in Greece (Law 3699/2008). In accordance with the above law, one of the objectives of special education and training is to improve, exploit and bring under cultivation the potentials and skills of disabled pupils with special educational needs in order to enable them to be integrated or reintegrated into the general school, in every situation such a potential is possible. One of the possible ways to fulfill this goal is for students with disabilities and special educational needs to attend "integration classes" or be provided with "parallel support" (article 6).

To begin with, the Law 3699 is consisted of 37 articles. Some of them will be extensively analyzed below, whereas others will only be mentioned by topic. Chapter A entails general provisions and includes articles 1 to 7. Article 1 concerns the description of general concepts and purposes. Article 2 is entitled "Organization and objectives of Special Education – Participation of the disability movement". Article 3 refers to the students with disabilities and special educational needs, while article 4 to the diagnostic, evaluative and supportive institutions. The diagnostic procedure is the main issue on article 5. As for article 6, which will be the one to be more thoroughly examined, deals with the attendance of students with special educational needs. Article 7 specializes in the subject of deaf, blind and autistic students.

Chapter B is about organizational matters and is comprised of articles 8 to 15. Article 8 talks about school units, article 9 about the supervision of the school units, article 10 about school management and article 11 about converting school units. As for the rest articles up to 15, they regard the establishment and organization of KEDDY (diagnostic center), the selection of special educators' and special educational staff's (EEP) school counselors, the special education Department of the Pedagogical institute and issues of organizing the central office of the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, respectively.

Chapter C encompasses articles 16 to 27 which in turn are consisted of regulations of the law, as it concerns the special education stuff (hiring issues, formal qualifications, substitute stuff, retraining matters, payments, allowances etc.). Chapter D (articles 28-37), deals with other provisions about special education.

As for the selection of students with special educational needs, article 3 categorizes the students entitled to receive special education. Students with disabilities and special educational needs are considered to be the ones having significant learning difficulties due to sensory, cognitive, developmental, mental, psychological and neuropsychiatric disorders, which, according to the interdisciplinary assessment, influence the process of school adaptation and learning, for the entire or a certain period of their school life (article 3, paragraph 1).

The group of disabled pupils and special educational needs students, includes those with intellectual disabilities, sensory impairments concerning vision (blind, partially sighted with low vision), sensory hearing impairments (deaf, hearing impaired), motor disabilities, chronic irreversible illnesses, speech disorders, special learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dysanagnosia, dysorthography, attention deficit syndrome with or without hyperactivity, pervasive developmental disorders (autism spectrum), mental disorders and multiple disabilities. In the category of pupils with disabilities and special educational needs, students with low school performance that are causally linked with external factors such as linguistic or cultural specificities are not included (article 3, paragraph 1). Students with complex cognitive, emotional and social difficulties, delinquent behavior caused by abuse, parental neglect and abandonment or domestic violence also belong to people with special educational needs (article 3, paragraph 2), along with students who have one or more mental capacities and talents developed to a degree that far exceeds those expected for their age group (article 3, paragraph 3).

The diagnostic process and diagnostic institutions are being analyzed in article 4. As far as the diagnosis is concerned, the special educational needs of pupils with disabilities and special educational needs are investigated and identified by the KEDDY, the Special Diagnostic Assessment Committee (EDEA) and the, certified by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, Medical - Education Centers (IPD) of other Ministries (article 4, paragraph 1).

Among many, some of the authorities of the KEDDY include: Detecting and identifying the type and degree of difficulties of people with special educational needs in all preschool and school age children, the suggestion for tailored customized or group programs of psycho-pedagogical and didactic support and creative employment, the suggestion for classification, enrollment and attendance at the appropriate school unit or other special educational framework or program, and many more (article 4, paragraphs a- j).

Below, extracts from the Law 3699/2008, article 6, are cited in relation to the attendance of these pupils in these specific special educational structures:

“Students with disabilities and special educational needs can attend the general school's classroom with “parallel support” in the context of inclusive education, by special educators, when this is required by the type and the degree of the special educational needs. “Parallel support” is provided to students who can, with appropriate individual support, attend the curriculum of the general classroom, to students with more severe educational needs, where there is no other special education structure in their region (special school, “inclusive class”) or when “parallel support” becomes necessary – given the KEDDY’ s report – because of their special educational needs. In the latter case, the support by a specialized teacher can be given on a permanent and planned basis. “Parallel support” is exclusively suggested by the KEDDY, authorized to act in such a manner, which in its written report determines how man hours of “parallel support” each student needs on a case-by-case basis (Article 6, paragraph 1b).

“Students with disabilities and special educational needs can attend specially organized and suitably staffed “inclusive classes” working in general and vocational education schools with two different curriculums: a) a common and a specialized curriculum for students with milder forms of special educational needs, which will not exceed 15 teaching hours per week for each student; and b) a specialized group or personalized extended hours curriculum, defined by a proposal of the relevant KEDDY, for students with more severe special educational needs, which are not covered by independent school units corresponding to the kind and degree of the disabilities. The specialized

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program may be independent of the common curriculum, according to the needs of the students” (Article 6, paragraph 1c).

Students who cannot service themselves may attend either independent special education schools or general education schools or “inclusive classes” with the appropriate support and the presence of “Special Assistant Staff” (EBP) depending on the type of their disability and the special educational needs arising from their specific disability (Article 6, paragraph 2).

When the attendance of pupils with disabilities and special educational needs becomes particularly difficult in schools of common educational program or in the “inclusion classes” due to their special educational needs (for instance, students with severe intellectual disability and comorbid disabilities), the education of these pupils is provided: a) in special education schools; b) in schools or departments that function as either independent or as annexes of other schools in hospitals, rehabilitation centers, juvenile care institutions, chronically ill establishments, or Mental Health Education and Rehabilitation Services, provided that they live in them school-age individuals with disabilities and special educational needs. These educational structures are considered as special education schools, under the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, fall within the scope of special education for school-aged children and implement educational programs supervised by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs; c) teaching at home, when deemed necessary, for serious short or long-term health problems, which do not allow the pupils to move and attend school. The approval of home teaching is made by decision of the Regional Director of Education of the respective grade attended by the student, following a reasoned recent medical opinion stating the duration of the required stay at home. In the home teaching program, the tele-education system can also be used (Article 6, paragraph 4a,4b,4c).

Moreover, analyzing the issue in greater depth, as concerns issues of the deaf, blind and autistic students, article 7 refer to the attendance of these populations. The first language of the deaf and hard of hearing students is Greek Sign Language and the second language is Modern Greek. Greek Sign Language and Modern Greek are recognized as equal, so the suitable linguistic pedagogical approach is bilingual education. A prerequisite for placing teachers and Special Educational Staff (EEP) in the special Deaf School Units, besides the other qualifications, is the certified knowledge of Greek Sign Language (article 7, paragraph 1).

Braille is recognized as the official writing of blind students. A prerequisite for the placement of teachers and Special Educational Staff (EEP) in special blind school units is, in addition to other qualifications, the certified knowledge of Braille writing. Desirable requirement for placement of special teachers and ΠΕ31, belonging to Special Educational Staff (EEP), in “parallel support” programs for blind students is defined in addition to other qualifications the certified knowledge of Braille writing.

Blind and visually impaired students with no mental retardation or other special educational needs, can attend, based on the KEDDY diagnosis, in General School classrooms supported by their classroom teacher and, where appropriate, with the support of ΠΕ31 or “Special Assistant Personnel” (EBP) (article 7, paragraph 2).

Besides hearing impaired and visually impaired students, there is also a provision for students with autism. Based on the particular social constraints imposed to autistic students by their disability, their attendance in educational structures can be as follows:

High-functioning autistic students (Asperger Syndrome) may attend the classrooms of the General School with the support of their class teacher and, where appropriate, based on the KEDDY’ s diagnosis, with the support of a Special Education teacher who preferably specializes in autism.

Average-functioning autistic and low-functioning autistic students can attend “inclusion classes” of the General Schools and attend a common but also a specialized curriculum with the support of “parallel support” by a special education teacher, while in the most serious of cases they may attend Special Education Schools.

The program of “Parallel support” for autistic students can only be interrupted after if the KEDDY issue an opinion against it and the parents' opinion. “Parallel support” for autistic students can also be implemented by a special assistant suggested and disposed by the student's family, with the consent of the Director of the school unit and the teachers' Association of the school.

In case of autism accompanied by severe mental retardation, pupils' attendance shall be served by the structures described in subparagraph b of article 6 of this law (thus, in schools or departments operating either independently or as annexes of other schools in hospitals, rehabilitation centers, minors 'institutions, chronically ill institutions or education and rehabilitation services of Mental Health Units', provided that in these disabled and disabled school-aged persons resident in them. These educational structures are considered to be Special Education Schools under the “Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs”, fall under the scope of Special Education for school-age children and implement educational programs overseen by the “Ministry of National Education and Religions”. These Special Education Schools can provide equivalent education, training, and counseling support services to those of the “Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs” for persons over fifteen years with severe mental retardation and related disabilities) (article 7, paragraph 4) (<https://www.minedu.gov.gr/eidiki-agwgi-2/nomothesia-eidiki-ekpaideusi-3/16756-02-10-08-3699-2008>).

References

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