

# CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS: THE POSITION IN SPAIN

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*The situation of children with special educational needs in Navarra (Spain) is introduced by document analysis, focusing on the possibilities of integrated education. The great age of the establishment of special educational centres was in the '60s. The general Educational Act of 1970 was the first one to consider special education as general mainstream education. It has become obvious after the proclamation of the Constitution (1978) that every citizen is entitled to education and authorities are obliged to promote the integration of the disabled in every field of the society, especially in education. The Royal Decree of special education orders a series of educational drafts of new laws in order to optimally meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs. As a consequence the well prepared Integration Programme started in 1985 which brought significant changes in the provisions for pupils with special educational needs and, in 1990, the Parliament adopted the Act of Educational Organisation, which brought basic changes into the Spanish educational system. From that date on the emphasis was put not on the child's deficiencies but on the educational system and its adaptation to the pupils' needs and its features adjustable to the solutions.*

**Keywords:** special education, The Integration Programme, integrated education, the concept of special educational needs, Special Education Resource Centre

At the 1994 UNESCO World Conference in Salamanca, Spain, there was a call for programmes to be set up by the turn of the millennium in as many places as possible - with effective financial support from international organisations - to enable children with special educational needs to be taught in mainstream schools.

Statistics published after UNESCO's Paris conference in 1995 show that Spain is one of the leading European countries in terms of integrated education. Over the last two decades, since the topic is of current interest, numerous articles and reports have appeared in the literature, yet I have been unable to find any written information on Spain.

My work is linked to the training of Spanish-Hungarian conductor-teachers, so I will draw on my own experiences, interviews, and the Spanish literature to illustrate some of Spain's aspirations in this area.

## A historical perspective and the current position

The first measures in the area of special education were taken by the Spanish government in the 19th century. The Public Education Law of 1857 (*Ley de Instrucción Pública*) stipulated that education would be compulsory and free of charge for Spanish citizens, and provided for the setting up in each university administrative area of a school for the blind and one for the deaf. This was not achieved in practice until 1910, when the National PATRONAGE of the Blind, the Deaf and the Mentally Handicapped was set up. The basic aims of this organisation included various tasks: compiling statistics on the relevant populations, hygiene, organising and regulating education, social care, providing information, and educating the public.

This organisation took the initiative in setting up National Institutes for the Blind, for Deaf-Mutes, and for the Mentally Handicapped to provide for the education of people with these disabilities. These were joined in 1933 by the National Institute for the Re-education of the Handicapped, which now became an educational centre; as the Refuge of the Handicapped it had already been in existence for almost fifty years. The Association for Blind People "ONCE" (*Organización Nacional de Ciegos Espanoles*) formally took over the direction of the National Institute for the Blind in 1941, having effectively been performing this function since 1928. The basic characteristics of these institutes were that they covered the whole country, they directed particular attention to pupils with the relevant disability, and they centralised the provision of health, education and social services. Another common feature of these centres was that their educational aims included preparing their pupils for work, and setting up sections within which specialists in the relevant disabilities (teachers and doctors) could be trained.

Some of these institutions still exist today, though under different names and with different aims: they provide for a particular geographical area, and with forms of provision based on the main characteristics of the pupils they serve, they seek increasingly to meet these pupils' educational needs.

In Spain, the golden era for Special Education Centres may be regarded as the 1960s, when numerous centres were set up around the country, some by the government but most through private initiatives (parents' associations). Since these institutions did not in all respects meet the extremely strict plans and requirements of the education system, they formed a kind of irregular network which over-emphasised certain aspects whilst neglecting significant areas. The setting up of centres by parents' associations also allowed centres to appear which dealt with the treatment of particular disabilities, often those linked to their own children's main disorder. Thus numerous centres were set up for children with injuries to the central nervous system, autism, Down's syndrome, etc. The centres set up by other administrative organisations such as representative bodies, city councils and social care centres contributed to the care aspect of some of these centres being more important than the educational aspect. In addition, the inadequacy of standards - typical at the time - relating to the conditions and operation of the Special Education Centres had a negative effect not only on the centres' equipment and the system of financial support but also on the regulation of their internal organisation, structure and operation, for which they had no guiding principles.

In this context, the 1970 General Education Law (*Ley General De Educación*) was the first piece of legislation which regarded special education in the same way as general mainstream education, and which laid down that the following individuals are entitled to special education:

"disabled individuals and those unsuited to mainstream education, for whom special education is absolutely necessary due to the severity of their disability... giving priority where possible, for those with less severe disabilities, to those Special Education Centres which follow the normal curriculum." Nevertheless, the same law specified that the Education Ministry would determine the aims, structure and duration of special education, which must be adjusted to pupils' developmental level, not to their age. In other words, the starting point for the concept of special education which arose from this law is the pupil's disability, to which the aims, structure and duration of the education must be adjusted, and which is the reason why these differ from what applies in mainstream education.

Despite the important initiative postulated by this law, it can be stated that subsequent education administrations all failed to plan for the necessary services, carry out applied research and study, and train effective specialists.

In 1975, the Education Ministry set up the National Institute for Special Education (INEE: Instituto Nacional de Educación Especial) as an autonomous organisation with the following aims:

- to bring order to the administrative and technical labyrinth which had arisen as the increasing numbers of centres carried out their tasks;
- to ensure that the funding provided by the legislation allowed services to be free of charge even at private centres; and
- to take a lead role in the organisation and future development of this sector.

However, it was only the Constitution (27.12.1978) which declared unequivocally that all residents are entitled to education (article 27) and that administrative bodies have a duty to promote a policy of integration for disabled people in all spheres of social life, with particular regard to education (article 49).

In the same year, at the request of the Patronage for the Education and Care of Disabled People, the INEE developed a National Plan for Special Education. The primary function of this plan was to become part of a set of programmes and activities covering a range of areas (health, work, social care and education) which was finalised in the subsequent Law on the Social Integration of Disabled People (LISMI: Ley de Integración Social de los Minusválidos). This law was the first to lay down principles on the standardisation of services, integrated education, personal care, and division into sectors.

LISMI was passed in April 1982 and contained provisions which draw together the most advanced trends in the social care of disabled people. It also included general principles on education which regard integration at school as a fundamental step towards the social integration of disabled people.

The educational principles of LISMI were further developed in Royal Decree 334/1985 (Real Decreto) on Special Education Plans. This provides for a series of Special Education Plans which are able to meet the requirements of pupils with special educational needs as appropriately as possible. The integration programme started its work as a result of this decree. Children with chronic and severe educational problems, many of whom had previously been unable to receive education, could now attend Special Education Centres.

## Reform of the education system

The Integration Programme started up in 1985 as planned; it assumed important changes in the care of pupils with special educational needs and so had a significant influence on the aims and outlook of Special Education Centres. In 1990, Parliament approved the Law on the General Organisation of the Education System (LOGSE: Ley Orgánica de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo), which made fundamental changes to the Spanish education system. It set new aims, and included the new ideas on special education which had emerged through the experiences of the preceding years. The educational ideas contained in LOGSE are echoed in special education and can modify the aims and structure of the special centres. We would like to highlight the following particularly important changes:

- the aims of education;
- the concept of special educational needs;
- the extension of compulsory schooling;
- the new division between types of school;
- the reform of vocational training;
- the improvement in the quality of teaching.

Over the last decade, since the publication of the Warnock Report in 1978 (the report was commissioned by the United Kingdom Secretary of State for Education from a committee of experts chaired by Mary Warnock), there have been significant changes in people's understanding of special education. Previously, pupils who needed special education were those who had some kind of disability or deficiency. The cause of the children's difficulties was to be found in the children themselves, in their impaired abilities, and their education generally required centres, organisation and special educational models.

The concept of special educational needs opened up new outlooks both in theory and in practice. Pupils' learning difficulties were no longer approached through generally rigid and immutable categories based on the various disabilities but through the educational needs thrown up by individual children and through teaching methods focused on these. The main emphasis was no longer on children's impaired abilities but on those characteristics of the education system which enabled it to adapt to pupils' needs and to methods of meeting these needs. The enrolment at schools of children with special educational needs is no longer something rigid and immovable but depends mainly on the severity and character of the pupils' educational needs and on the Centre's resources and the teaching methods it recommends. For these reasons the new vision emphasises the responsibility of the education system and the administration to provide opportunities for these pupils with special educational needs.

LOGSE is the first piece of legislation in Spain to include the concept of special educational needs. It changes the consideration of pupils with special educational needs and commits itself to modifying the education system as a whole and the necessary resources. This vision is accompanied in the law by three closely linked proposals: (1) the general educational aims for these pupils; (2) the possibility of making adjustments and changes to the curriculum; and (3) the involvement of parents in decisions regarding the enrolment of their children at educational institutions.

According to LOGSE, the educational aims set out for children with special educational needs generally correspond with those for children in mainstream education. There are no different educational models and

consequently no parallel education systems. There is just one education system in which children are taught together, and this must be adjusted to meet the requirements of pupils with special educational needs. For this reason the aims and principles which make up the education system as a whole must also feature in the teaching of these pupils, regardless of whether they attend integrated schools or Special Education Centres.

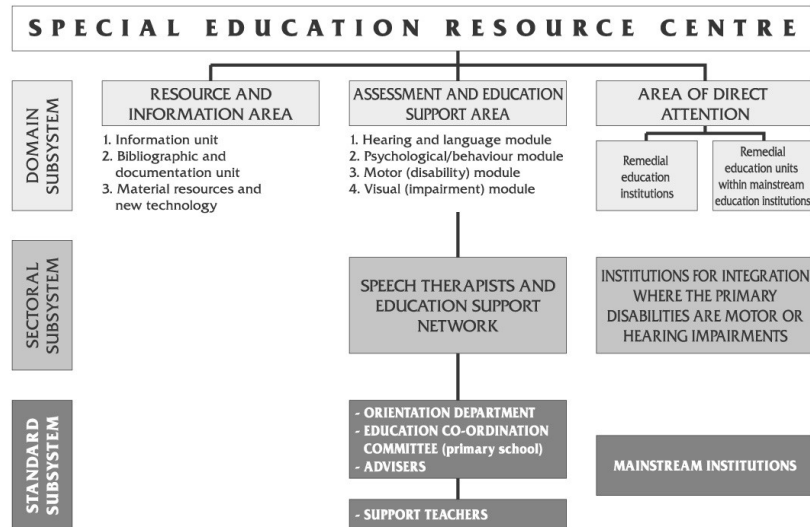
Of course this outlook does not mean that the differences which may exist between children are forgotten. Indeed, the various levels and teaching periods must adapt to the abilities of pupils with special needs, and Centres which provide teaching for these pupils must have the appropriate financial resources, teachers, didactic methods, school structure and modified curriculum in order to be able to ensure that pupils achieve the aims they have been set. Teaching methods for pupils with special educational needs must take as their starting point the common basic curriculum and the pupils' special needs, and then seek out the necessary modifications and resources. Only if the adaptations and resources required by a pupil cannot be provided in a mainstream school can that pupil be enrolled at a special Education Centre or unit.

LOGSE provides an important role for the parents of children with special educational needs. There is no doubt that the law clearly acknowledges the role parents play in the education of their children, particularly in the early years, and this co-operation promotes the children's more complex development. In the case of children with special educational needs, LOGSE lays down precisely what role parents play in the enrolment of their children at a school. It is not merely a case of guaranteeing them the right - as for all parents - to choose the appropriate centre according to the prevailing standards. In this case it has been enshrined in the legislation that the authorities should promote the participation of parents and tutors in decisions regarding the enrolment of children at an educational institution, specifically with regard to whether children should attend mainstream schools or Special Education Centres or units. Thus parents have the opportunity to find out what help and adaptations their children require and so are able to participate in making the most important decisions.

### The Autonomous Community of Navarra: a special case

Some autonomous communities of the Kingdom of Spain, whilst belonging to the central administration, also have many unique features: this includes Navarre in northern Spain. The population is partly Basque, and due to its highly developed agriculture it is regarded as a prosperous region. It has an independent Parliament which determines its budget, as a result of which significant sums are devoted to financing social care and education in the region.

In 1993 the government of Navarre ordered the setting up of the Special Education Resource Centre in Navarre (Centro de Recursos de Educación Especial de Navarra - CREENA), and in the Official Bulletin dated 15th March, it set out the structure, aims, main activities and direction of the centre.



CREENA's aim is to make better provision for pupils with special educational needs and for those who are exceptionally able. It helps develop psycho-pedagogical methods and provides assistance and resources to educational institutions, and answers their questions. The centre currently (2001) has 65 staff whose duties are:

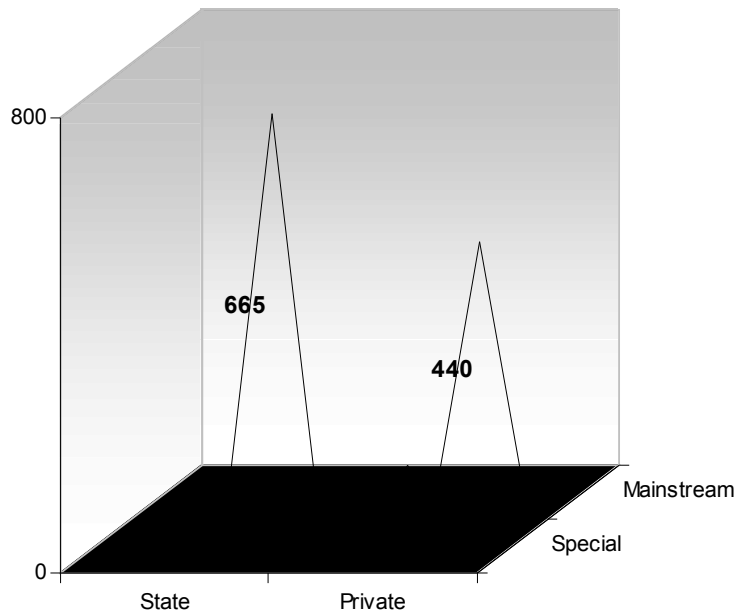
- ✓ to assess and guide disabled children before enrolment at an educational institution;
- ✓ to propose the appropriate educational institution for them;
- ✓ to identify and assess those who are already at school;
- ✓ to plan the action and assistance programme;
- ✓ to provide psycho-pedagogical assistance;
- ✓ to provide special material resources;
- ✓ to participate directly or indirectly in the work of educational institutions;
- ✓ to co-operate in the provision of aftercare and in the assessment of individual cases;
- ✓ to identify and work with pupils who are exceptionally able.

The specialist staff consists of teachers, psychologists, remedial teachers, social workers, physiotherapists, speech therapists, and administrative specialists. CREENA's experts participate in the work of educational institutions and work together with teachers, advisers, pupils and parents. They also produce didactic methods for the guidance of the whole education community.

The director general of CREENA (Pedro Olangua Baquedano) has said that Navarre is currently the only autonomous community in Spain where it is compulsory for all schools to accept and teach children with special educational needs; the Centre will then undertake to provide any special methods and resources which may be required.

Based on data from the 2002/2003 academic year, the total number of pupils in compulsory education is 1340, of whom 1105 (82.46%) attend mainstream schools and only 235 attend special schools. Here, as elsewhere, teaching is split between state and private schools, with 665 pupils (two thirds) attending state schools and 440 attending private schools.

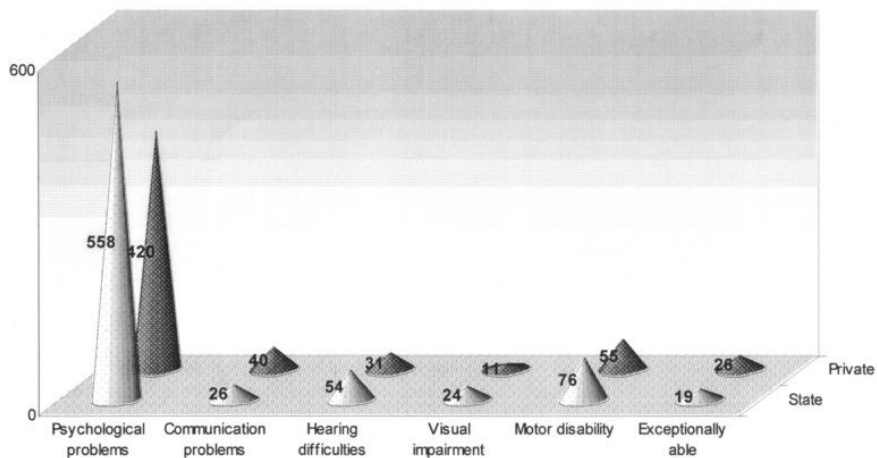
### DISTRIBUTION BY INSTITUTION



However, the position of private schools is unusual in that the government subsidises them so that education is universally free, but private schools are able to ask parents for financial support for additional services. It should also be noted that not only is education free, but parents are also not required to make any contribution towards the cost of school meals or transport.

In an interview, the General Director of CREENA gave exact data of the numbers of the different types of injuries integrated into mainstream education and public schools.

### DISTRIBUTION BY DIAGNOSIS



These figures clearly reveal that integrated education mostly involves children with psychic disturbances (mental retardation, autism, disturbed personality, attention problems) and motor disabilities.

The analysis of the questionnaires investigating the quality care of children living with motor disability are under process and the conclusions will be published in another paper.

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